

Challenges Faced by Sultan Moulay Slimane University Students: A Gender Perspective

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Introduction

- **Universities** as the highest educational and research institutions have been serving humanity at universal scale as centers where every kind of material and spiritual problems are examined and investigated at the highest level and obtained findings are transferred again through teaching and publication (Ortas, 2002).
- The main functions which universities are supposed to carry out have been listed as follows: 1. Carrying out scientific research studies, 2. Producing solutions to the problems of humanity and a country, 3. Training the human force which a country needs, 4. Teaching information, skills, emotions and intuitions which they obtain to other people, making publications, 5. Setting examples in every area (Sonmez, 2003).



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The aim of the study

- The present study is conducted to identify and explore the major challenges in higher education in the perspective of students. For the purpose of the study, the data were collected through a questionnaire that was designed and distributed to a sample of randomly selected 200 Moroccan first, second and third year university students from different departments of humanities and social sciences of Sultan Moulay Slimane University during 2017/ 2018 educational year.
- The students' attitudes about the problems are investigated according to the variable of gender. In this context, of the selected students, 50% were female, and 50% were male students.



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- The answers provided by the respondents indicated that there are five main common categories of challenges faced by students at the university; namely, **educational, academic, social, personal and financial.**



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I. Social Issues

Accommodation

- Accommodation is the first problem encountered by students leaving their villages and moving to the city to get higher education. A great majority of university youth are left no choice but to leave their families to get education.
- Since Sultan Moulay Slimane University does not have adequate accommodation facilities for all its student intakes, 57% male students and 25% female students have to find private accommodation closer to their university. However, a large number of students are unable to find suitable accommodation due to economic problems and other reasons.



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Time management

- 29% of male and 14% students pointed out that lack of time management is one of their problems. Even though this problem was raised by not working students, however, it is more critical among part-time or full-time working students. The latter stated the biggest challenge they encounter was to strike a balance between coursework and their work.
- Male students were found to be the most affected category.



Orientation

- In the early days of the university period when students leave their homes and lives which they have been leading and start a different life, they undergo a process of “adjustment”.
- 78% of female and 47% of male students complain about adjustment to university life and vague uneasiness about the program. And female students represent the majority of those who are affected by the lack of orientation.



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- Students from disadvantaged backgrounds typically lack the social and cultural capital required to 'talk the talk' and 'walk the walk' at university ... They lack the social networks which provide avenues for participating in casual out-of-class conversations. (Krause, 2005: 9)



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Sexual Harassment

- Female respondents reported that they have been victims to sexual abuse or attempted sexual assault by male classmates or administrative staff. Of the 100 Female respondents, 64 reported having experienced one or more sexual harassment behaviors during their university life.
- And the most frequent type of harassment reported was student-to-student harassment. Female respondents identified "made sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks" as the most frequent type of sexual harassment experienced.



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- There are many consequences of sexual harassment in universities. When harassment occurs, the large proportion of victims are affected emotionally and often lose their academic self-confidence, experience difficulty concentrating on academic work or suffer lowered self-esteem (Bank and Bank, 1997).
- Another result of sexual harassment within social institutions may point to a serious social problem of sustained gender stratification (Hoffman, 1986).



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Educational Issues

- **Crowded Classrooms**
- 43% of female students and 27% of male students revealed their non-satisfaction about the lack of physical facilities including seating, density, noise, privacy, air quality, etc.
- over-crowdedness diminishes the quality and quantity of teaching and learning with serious implication for attainment of education goals. This leads to not paying attention, not participating in activities, unmotivated and indolent learners, and no time for proper lesson presentation and classroom assessment due to unmanageable learners.



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- According to Earthman (2004), School building in which students pass considerable time has great influence upon students' academic performance. However, the learning environment ought to support learners' motivation to participate in group or individual learning activities.
- The researchers stress that in overcrowded classrooms less attention can be given to individual learners and it is difficult to motivate them. Overcrowded classrooms tend to be teacher-centered.



- University environment affects students academic performance: if the university climate is not comfortable the academic achievement of students will be significantly affected
- Thus, the university needs to provide more and better classrooms with adequate heating, air conditioning and seating to cater for the numbers of students; more up-to-date computer technology and other equipment are deemed necessary for the students' achievement.



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Library Facilities

- The Library is seen to be an integral part of the academic process, and not a mere appendage or free bookshop. The findings of the study, however, revealed that the majority of university students do not use the library.
- 39% of male students and 42% of female students express their annoyance at the lack of resources that they have to use at the Library.
- There are some problems in the use of library such as
 - the large number of books available in the main library are old, missing some pages, important maps, and information etc. in books and periodicals.
 - Only a few copies of resources are available compared to the huge numbers of students who have to share them.
 - Many latest and important books are only for reference. But students have lack of opportunities to use them being in the library.
 - Students cannot get a place in the main library during the examination period.



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- University libraries have a role much more important than that of other units on research activities. University libraries should have every kind of update printed or electronic resources to meet all information needs of academic units (Odabas and Polat, 2011).
- The prime function of the university library is to ensure that the students learn how to find out (Victoria Institute of Colleges, 1971).



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Information and Communication Technology Skills

- 38% of female students and 31% of male students revealed that the university does not have sufficient physical structures, especially with respect to foreign language education. In order to develop four basic skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) in language education and to get them acquired effectively, using visual and auditory elements is important. However, the technological possibilities of the faculty are very limited in this respect.
- Thus, lack of ICT skills creates many problems not only for students' current academic activities but also for their future in various ways.
- Therefore, The University as a higher education institution has to face problems in improving quality and the relevance of the degree programs.



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Personal Issues

Emotional Conflicts

- The most influential issue is found to be emotional conflicts with a percentage of 70% for female students and 66% of male students. These emotional issues include:
 - Missing family
 - Living with new roommate while living in dorms presents a new challenging environment
 - Eventually, these changes in students' life bring about a depressed psychology and raise the stress level of a student.



- Woodlands, Makaev and Braham report that 'anxiety' about not having a support network in the city and on campus is a key barrier, among other factors, for rural high school students considering university study (2006: 25-6).
- So, emotional conflicts and stress are the most influential issues leading to a decrease in overall performance. However, there were significantly more problems in female students compared to their male counterparts. Gender differences in psychological distress, however, are evident with females reporting more psychological distress than males.



Recreation

- The study found around that 39% of male students and 15% of female students do not engage in any entertainment activity. Students claim that football and basketball are the only sporting activities available.
- Sports and social facilities also need upgrading and the university should offer a wider choice of sporting activities. Students would also like to see more student union-organized events.



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Academic Issues

Teacher and Student Relationship

- The findings of this study show that the majority of students 52% of female students and 45% of male students have less or no relationship with their teachers. According to the students' point of view, the main barrier to build closer relationship with teachers is correlated with some characteristics of teachers' personality, and the image of the lecturer established among the past students, teachers' kindness, eagerness to help, teaching skills, subject knowledge, politeness, etc.



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- The study revealed that the students in the Department of English do not have confidence in themselves regarding English language. The reason behind this is lack of proficiency in English language which is considered as the basic barrier in students' academic adjustment process.
- Interacting with the professors in the department is a challenge for most of them. Also, the educational system in higher institutions is different from students' expectations about the student-teacher relationship, the classroom behavior, and different styles of teaching-learning process.



University Counseling Service

- 81% students complain about the lack of counselors and advisors at the university.
- The main objective of establishing a counseling center at the university is to deal with students' grievances, to identify their problems and help them to solve such problems in their primary stage. However, that objective does not seem to be fulfilled due to several reasons.
- Therefore, the university can consider providing counseling services so that the student can benefit from this opportunity. The student council should give students incentives to join clubs and organizations to allow better socializing among students as this will avoid these problems to occur in the first place.



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- These factors fostered the problems relating to stress and strain, emotional imbalance, lack of confidence, examination fear, misunderstandings among peers, absence of healthy academic sharing, jealousy and self-centeredness.
- Most of the students fail to cope up with these problems in the absence of sufficient support from the families and counselors.



Financial Problems

- Students indicated that financial worries affect their academic performance. The money problems of most students are pressing. Lack of financial support is an important issue itself, while part-time work is almost nonexistent in the city of Beni Mellal.
- Low family income, large family size with more siblings, personal health issues, and bad parental relationships, death of a parent, peer pressure, new fashion trends, unhealthy coping behaviors and demands of university education pose a high risk regarding whether the student will continue his/her education or drop-out at a certain level.
- Yet, accommodation, transportation, food, and leisure add up to the life expenses of university. This is likely to jeopardize students' academic pursuits and tends to dissuade them. In the same context, the students who have scholarship reveal that the latter is still unable to prevent them from facing financial stress.



- Based on gender, males and females have different spending patterns. Differences in their financial behavior may be attributed to specific family and individual characteristics. It was indicated that females purchased clothing and make up while males purchased electronics, cigarettes, entertainment, and food away from home. Female students are expected to be less involved in these financial problems of smoking and other activities generally done by men.
- Male students on the average have higher financial problems compared to female students. A big difference in percentage of respondents occurred for certain financial problems. There are three financial problems that have large differences between male and female students, spending on cigarette, internet addiction and food.
- Most of the students agree that financial stress affect negatively on their academic achievement. And consequently, some female students, in their worst cases, resort to prostitution to afford the expenses of education.



Conclusion

- The most important conclusion that emerged from the analysis of data was that students of Sultan Moulay Slimane University encounter myriads of problems. Yet, the problems encountered by female students are significantly different from those experienced by male students. Some female students reported having experienced sexual harassment by both teaching and non-teaching staff, and from male students. The finding supports the claim by Massanja and colleagues (2001) that the problem of sexual harassment of female students in African universities is yet to be addressed.



- The study revealed that of students face education institutional related problems particularly accommodation, library facilities, financial issues and teacher- student relationship. As a whole it seems that though the university has been taking considerable efforts to maintain a favorable environment for higher education, there are certain obstacles to be overcome by students as well as the university authority.
- Moreover, the university should pay attention to improve these areas, which is basically neglected by the management that is responsible for providing academic support facilities that assist the students in learning and teaching process. The negligence in providing educational support material hinders the quality of education lower the overall learning outcome rate.



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