

## **The Internationalization of Higher Education: The contribution of the new Moroccan strategy Pact ESRI/ HERI 2030 to enhance mobility.**

### **L'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur : La contribution de la nouvelle stratégie marocaine Pacte ESRI 2030 pour renforcer la mobilité.**

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## Abstract

Nowadays, the need for international cooperation and knowledge exchange is increasingly crucial in a world characterized by constant change and progress. To enhance education, develop suitable study programs, and enable students, professors, and researchers to improve their profiles, the concept of internationalizing the higher education system has evolved. In Morocco, the Pact ESRI/HERI 2030 focuses on various projects aimed at promoting the internationalization of higher education. This research seeks to understand the significance of internationalization and its impact on the Moroccan higher education system, particularly regarding the international mobility of students. It aims to evaluate how the Pact ESRI/HERI 2030 can serve as a lever for this internationalization. The empirical aspect of the study examines the motivations, constraints, and effects of international student mobility on individuals and the multicultural values it fosters. Utilizing qualitative and quantitative research methods, including an exploratory interview and a questionnaire with a 70% response rate, the study shows that the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation (MHESRI) prioritizes internationalization, offering students more mobility opportunities. The study concludes with recommendations for the Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership to better implement the strategic objectives of the Pact ESRI/HERI 2030, while suggesting further research on identifying Moroccan students in international mobility and exploring South-South cooperation in higher education.

**Keywords :** Internationalization of higher education; Pact HERI 2030; International student mobility; MHESRI; international cooperation.

## Résumé

Aujourd'hui, la nécessité d'une coopération internationale et de l'échange des connaissances s'accroît dans un monde en perpétuelle mutation. Pour développer le domaine de l'éducation et créer des programmes d'études adaptés, l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur est devenue essentielle. Au Maroc, le Pacte ESRI 2030 repose sur plusieurs projets visant à promouvoir l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur. Ce travail de recherche entend comprendre l'importance de cette internationalisation et ses impacts sur le système éducatif marocain, en se concentrant particulièrement sur la mobilité internationale des étudiants. L'objectif est d'analyser si le Pacte ESRI 2030 constitue un levier pour cette internationalisation. L'étude empirique examine les motivations, les contraintes et l'impact de la mobilité internationale sur les étudiants, ainsi que les valeurs multiculturelles qu'elle engendre. Basée sur une approche qualitative et quantitative, avec un entretien exploratoire et un questionnaire dont 70% de l'échantillon a répondu, l'étude révèle que le Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation (MESRSI) fait de l'internationalisation un axe prioritaire, offrant plus de possibilités de mobilité. L'étude se conclut par des recommandations pour la Direction de la Coopération et du Partenariat du MESRSI, tout en ouvrant des perspectives de recherche sur la création d'un mécanisme de recensement des étudiants marocains en mobilité internationale.

**Mots clés :** Internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur ; Pacte ESRI 2030 ; Mobilité internationale des étudiants; MESRSI ; coopération internationale.

## Introduction

The internationalization of higher education is a concept that is increasingly building important paths in an era that requires educational systems to be innovative and current. The internationalization of higher education is “a process of incorporating a global, multicultural, or international component into post-secondary education's goals, duties, or delivery” (Knight, 2008). In fact, the internationalization of higher education is a huge priority to nations worldwide. In the Moroccan case, the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation, through its Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership, working on the openness of the country's education has become a main priority. Indeed, the country is working on many dimensions of the internationalization of higher education in order to guarantee knowledge transfer and increase Morocco's higher education attractiveness.

Along these lines, the present study humbly attempts to explore the role of internationalization in the Moroccan Higher Education, Research and Innovation (HERI) system. The new HERI strategy for 2030 (Pact ESRI/HERI) is to support the internationalization of universities through several actions including international student mobility.

The question that arises in this regard is the extent to which the Pact HERI 2030 can be a lever for the internationalization of Moroccan higher education. So, the following research questions, at this level, seem legitimate.

How can the internationalization of higher education improve training and scientific research in Morocco?

What is the role of international mobility in improving Moroccan students' training and research?

How can the Pact HERI 2030 influence higher education and scientific research?

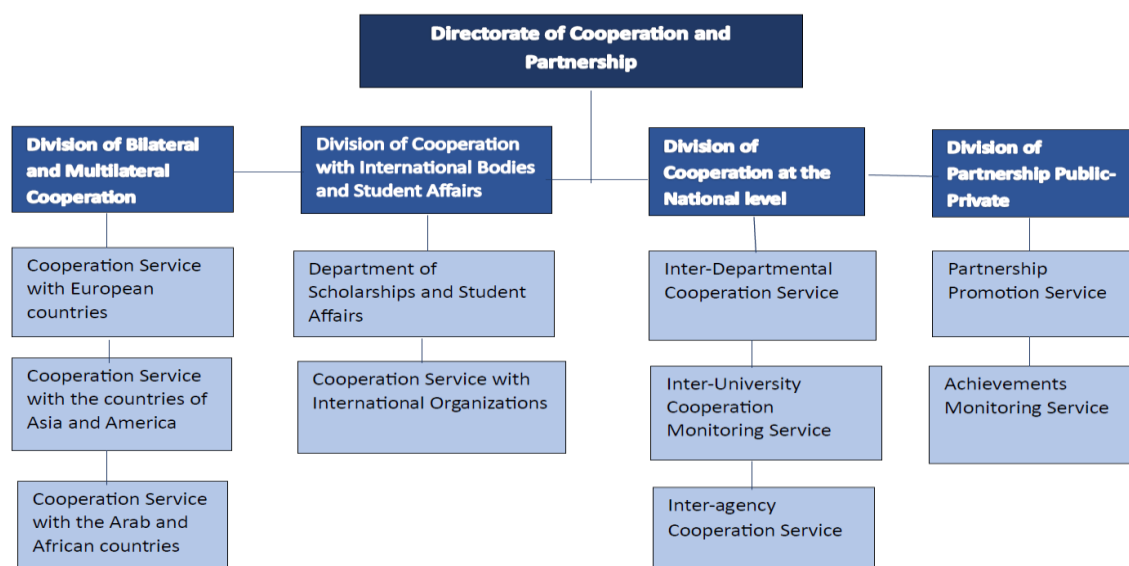
How does the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation handle the internationalization of higher education in terms of cooperation and partnership?

### **1. The promotion of the internationalization of higher education: the state of international cooperation of Moroccan higher education**

Before tackling the state of the internationalization of higher education in Morocco, according to the Ministry, it is important to review the organization chart of the Cooperation and Partnership Directorate and its various divisions and services. The Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership, which represents the empirical working ground, was established inside the

Ministry on April 22nd, 2013, by Decree. In concert with ministry organizations and institutions, it is in charge of promoting, strengthening, monitoring, and evaluating programs for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in all areas related to the ministry's duties.

**Figure 1 Organization chart of the Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership**

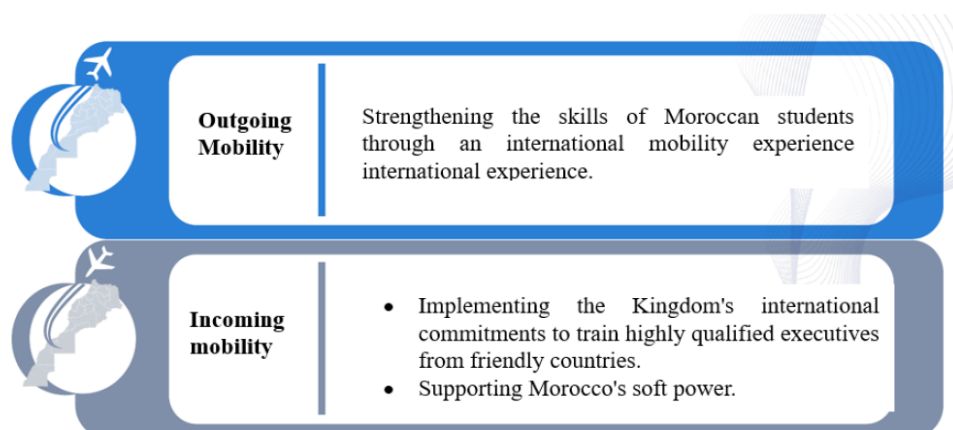


*Source : The Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership.*

Considering the present research that intermingles between the theoretical framework and the practical ground for deeper understanding of the issue in question and better contextualization of the internationalization of higher education in the Moroccan system, the focus, so far, is mainly on the Division of Cooperation with International Bodies and Student Affairs and the Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation Division which align with the topic of this paper.

Within this study, the focus will be on mobility in order to see how it impacts the internationalization of higher education in Morocco, this component is a part of the strategic objectives of the Pact HERI 2030 (Strategic Objective 5: Development of national and international mobility). When talking about student mobility, it is important to mention the added value of these mobilities but also the way in which the Pact HERI 2030 intends to reinforce and develop incoming and outgoing student mobility.

**Figure 2 Objectives of incoming and outgoing mobility**



*Source: Direction of Cooperation and Partnership*

Indeed, the objective of the Pact HERI 2030 is to strengthen the skills of Moroccans benefiting from an international mobility program without forgetting the incoming mobility that constitutes an added value to the country in terms of strengthening Morocco's attractiveness. In this sense, the Pact HERI 2030 seeks to further develop its international commitments in order to properly train anyone from a partner country.

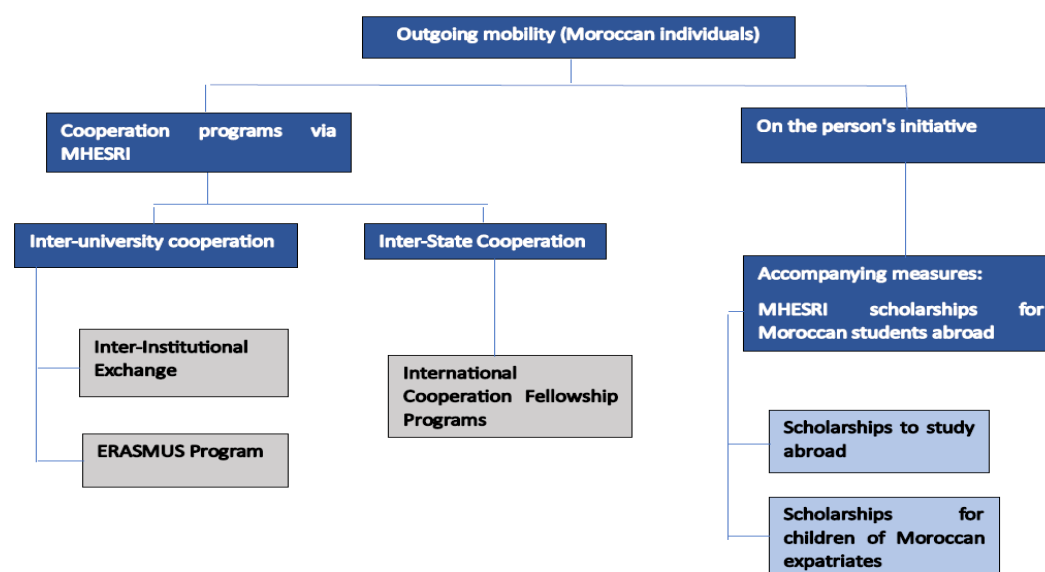
### 1.1 Outgoing mobility

Outgoing mobility comes in different forms. On the one hand, it can be in the form of an inter-governmental program within a ministerial framework, within the MHESRI and more precisely in the Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership. Secondly, an outgoing mobility can be in the framework of an inter-university program that links universities only, without the involvement of the Ministry. Outgoing mobility can also be found in Erasmus+ programs and scholarships and mobilities can also be "hidden" in research programs. However, it should not be forgotten that personal studies abroad are also part of outgoing mobility.

Mobility consists of two types: that which is done in the context of an exchange in a joint program or diploma or simply a mobility towards internationality to complete the university curriculum. The target audience for these mobilities is mainly students and faculty-researchers, then officials and administrators.

The following figure shows the different types of outgoing mobility that any individual could benefit from.

Figure 3 Types of outgoing mobility



Source: The Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership

The issuing country that offers outgoing mobility in Morocco does so through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates. Then, after moving to MHESRI, the organization responsible for the dissemination and processing of these offers is my field of concern: the Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership, who manages and disseminates these offers through the MHESRI website or [www.mabourse.enssup.gov.ma/bourse](http://www.mabourse.enssup.gov.ma/bourse).

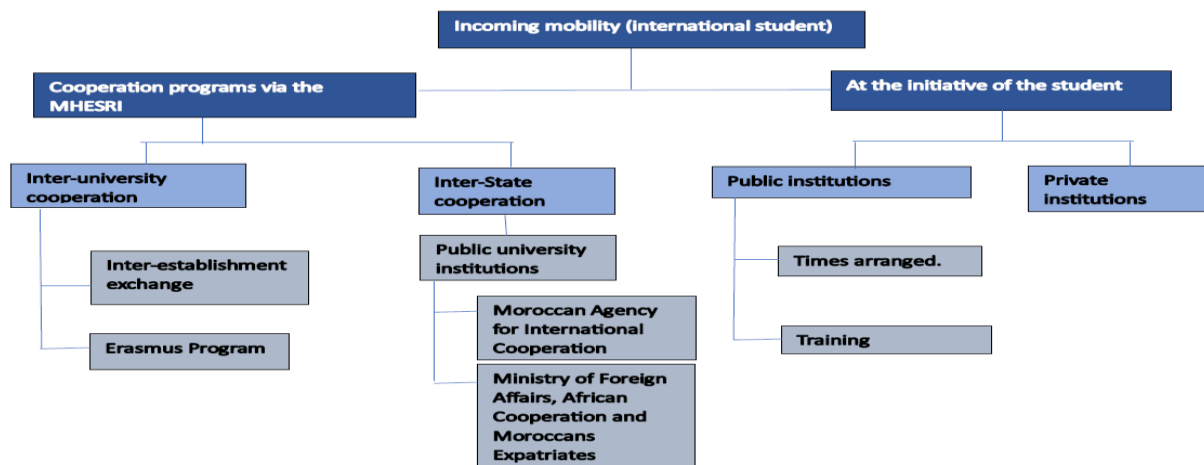
## 1.2 Incoming mobility

First of all, it is imperative to mention that the incoming mobility can be at the initiative of the person concerned to come to study or do training in Morocco, or it can be the result of an inter-university program (through inter-institutional exchange or an Erasmus program) or be inter-governmental. The origin of applications for incoming mobility is diverse; they can come from the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation, Moroccan Expatriates, or through an interuniversity exchange. These offers are shared via the platform <https://e-cooperation.enssup.gov.ma/home>.

All incoming mobility benefits from several advantages that differ from country to country, but all incoming mobility benefits from monthly grants ranging from 750 MAD to 1400 MAD in order to cover their needs, as well as housing and health insurance.

The following figure shows the different types of incoming mobility:

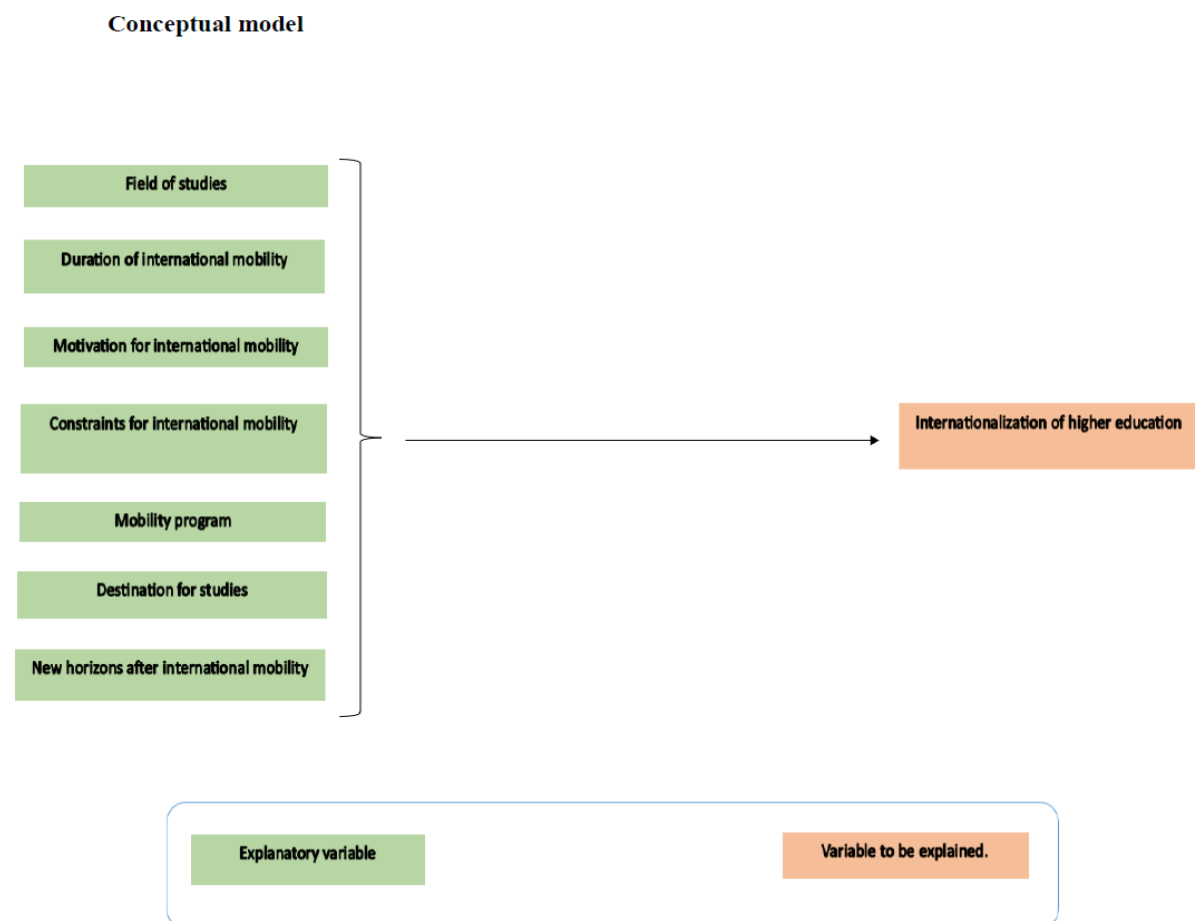
Figure 4 Types of incoming mobility



Source: The Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership

## Conceptual model:

Figure 5 Conceptual model



Source : Authors



After having raised the question of the theoretical and empirical foundations, as well as the analysis of the preceding research in the literature, the above conceptual model is proposed, which presents the internationalization of higher education as a dependent variable and the field of studies, the duration of international mobility, the motivation for international mobility, the constraints for international mobility, the mobility program, the destination for studies and the new horizons after international mobility as independent variables that will be analyzed in the operationalization of variables. These variables are considered to be the main ones that influence the internationalization of higher education as was suggested by Tahira M. Hassan and Arif Hassan in their article (Hassan & Hassan, 2020).

This conceptual model includes only direct links, which will be tested later in the qualitative and quantitative research, as the literature and theories presented before in the study do not include mediating and moderating variables.

The research hypotheses are therefore established on the basis of the direct link between the explanatory variables and the variable to be explained in the conceptual model presented.

### **1.3 Research hypotheses**

H1: Any field of studies can be a target for the internationalization of higher education.

H2: The internationalization of higher education depends on the duration of international mobility.

H3: The motivation for international mobility can increase and develop the internationalization of higher education.

H4: Constraints for international mobility have a direct impact on the internationalization of higher education.

H5: The internationalization of higher education depends on a mobility program and is influenced by it.

H6: The destination for studies encourages the internationalization of higher education.

H7: Internationalization of higher education is impacted by the new horizons that the students undertake after international mobility.

## **2. Research methodology**

### **2.1 Research method**

The empirical study will begin, first, by exploring and trying to understand the purpose of the internationalization of Moroccan higher education, know more about its current development and the perspectives that the Pact HERI 2030 is implementing as a lever of the



internationalization of higher education. The study will then focus on the international mobility as one of the main dimensions of the internationalization of higher education and how the MHESRI can do a strategic plan to increase this mobility among students. This empirical study will start off with qualitative research, used to explore the current state of the internationalization of Moroccan higher education but also know more about the strategic plans that the MHESRI is preparing for the next years (2021-2030) through the Pact HERI 2030.

Eleven research questions were proposed to Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh, Director of Cooperation and Partnership at the MHESRI, who has kindly shown willingness to share a great deal of knowledge and explain the important aspects of the internationalization of higher education in Morocco, the Director also clarified and helped us to better understand the role of the Pact HERI 2030.

On another hand, the study will also proceed with quantitative research that aims to give suggestions to the MHESRI: Among all the dimensions of the internationalization of higher education, the focus will be on student mobility because a specific Strategic Objective in the Pact HERI 2030 (Strategic Objective 5) is dedicated to it.

To arrive at a broader theory, the study backed itself on grounded theory and empirical data from the Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership. This quantitative research, in this case, will basically provide more information and data about the motivations and constraints that students find when they try to do an international mobility. Through the answers of this questionnaire and the qualitative research and through a modified, pragmatic positivist paradigm and a deductive reasoning, the Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership and the MHESRI can better operationalize its strategic objective.

The modified, pragmatic positivist paradigm is predicated on the notion that scientific knowledge is the most trustworthy type of information and that knowledge may be acquired via observation and experimentation. The modified, pragmatic positivist paradigm in management research methodology emphasizes the use of quantitative data gathering methods, such as surveys and experiments, to evaluate theories and hypotheses. It is a logical method of conducting research that involves using actual data to examine particular assumptions. This paradigm is based on the idea that management research should be objective, empirical, and based on rigorous scientific methods.

Positivist management researchers take a deductive approach, where they first formulate theoretical hypotheses and models, then collect and analyze data to confirm or refute them.

Positivist management researchers aim to develop objective and verifiable knowledge about organizations using rigorous and reproducible methods. This allows them to identify cause-and-effect relationships, formulate evidence-based recommendations, and contribute to the development of management theories and practices (Sekaran et al., 2016).

Deductive reasoning is a way of thinking and a research approach that begins with a theory or hypothesis (see conceptual model) and tests it via data collecting, in this instance using qualitative and quantitative research. Conclusions will be made regarding the theory or hypothesis' viability based on the study and provide suggestions to the MHESRI.

## **2.2 The purpose of qualitative and quantitative research**

Combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods is intended to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the study phenomenon.

When combined, qualitative and quantitative research can complement each other. Qualitative research can help generate hypotheses and deepen understanding of a phenomenon, while quantitative research can provide objective data and allow generalizations. Together, these approaches can offer a richer, more nuanced, and more robust perspective on the topic under investigation (Creswell, 2014).

The main objective of the qualitative and quantitative research conducted at the same time is to take advantage of the strengths of each approach to obtain a more complete, thorough, and valid understanding of the phenomenon studied. This can help answer more complex research questions, explore multiple facets of the topic in question, and provide more informed recommendations to practitioners and decision-makers.

## **2.3 Sample**

The research study targeted a population composed from higher education students (undergraduates, graduates, and PhD students) from different Moroccan universities, faculties, and institutions, from different fields of studies and from different age ranges to see the correlation of their perceptions on student mobility. The questionnaire was sent to 170 students to which 118 responded.

The population of this empirical study is made up of 1,061,256 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students at public universities (Directorate of Strategies and Information Systems, The Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, statistics of the academic year 2021-2022).

## 2.4 Scale

The nominal scale was used for questions where it was necessary to categorize the respondents based on their attributes and their opinions.

The ordinal scale was used for a question where it was necessary to do a ranking or a hierarchy of the most to the least important type of mobility program in the student's opinion.

## 2.5 Choice of the data analysis tool

- **Google Sheets:**

The data analysis tool for the first part of this survey is Google Sheets as it is the most relevant and fastest tool to investigate this type of data.

Users with varied degrees of technical experience may use Google Sheets because of its distinguished design that is straightforward and intuitive. Simple formulae and functions are easily available, and more complex aspects can be investigated as necessary. Additionally, a variety of functions, formulas, and add-ons are available in the analysis tool to make data processing, cleaning, and analysis easier. Data may be filtered, sorted, and visualized using graphs and charts. Other Google products, such as Google Forms, used in the present thesis to create the survey, are smoothly integrated with Google Sheets. Additionally, Google Sheets allows for the import and export of data in a variety of formats, facilitating interoperability with third-party applications and software. With a Google account, Google Sheets is free to use, making it an affordable option for data analysis with an easy access to it, especially for individual researchers as is my case.

- **SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)**

The use of this software will be done in the section dedicated to cross-tabulation analysis of the results of the questionnaire since SPSS offers options for visualizing custom data based on the specific results of the study in order to make a better analysis.

SPSS will therefore allow me to make a comparative analysis through cross-tabulations that facilitate the comparison of category distributions between variables.

## 3. Data analysis

This part of the article will present the interview done with Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh as well as the results of the questionnaire conducted with the sample; these will be illustrated in graphs later.

This is a sample of 118 students from several Moroccan universities. The findings will help to understand the reasons why students choose to travel abroad, their preferred choices, the goals they have in mind, the difficulties they encounter, and the plans they have for the future once abroad.

### **3.1 Diagnosis of the internationalization of higher education in Morocco from the perspective of Pact HERI 2030**

Working with the Division of Cooperation with International Bodies and Student Affairs and the Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation Division, along with the valuable help and guidance of the Director of Cooperation and Partnership, Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh, who has enabled us to have a better understanding of the current state of the internationalization of Moroccan higher education as well as the ministerial vision that is operationalized notably through the Pact HERI and via an interview conducted with her on March 10th, 2023. Indeed, it is apparent that the Pact HERI 2030 is principally based on four important pillars, one of which is excellence. When Mrs. Zebakh talks about the word “excellence” in this context, she means academic excellence in education; scientific excellence in relation to scientific research and excellence in innovation while linking innovation territories to research and innovation and while integrating into the needs and issues of each sector. On the other hand, the governance pillar aims to improve the governance of the system in its integrity.

“The Pact HERI ensures a change that will take place at the level of the pillar of excellence in the capacity building of young people, a better match between the training that will be given and the needs of the socioeconomic sector. It must be remembered in this sense that several regional conferences were held to place the university at the heart of the socio-economic development of the region. As a result, socio-economic stakeholders in each region have expressed a number of needs and each university is currently adapting its undergraduate, master’s and doctoral training offerings to the needs of stakeholders in that region.”

“We will ask students, before they graduate, to have a certificate in a foreign language other than the language of their learning or diplomas that attest to a knowledge of computer tools and digital skills.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh, Director of Cooperation and Partnership at the MHESRI).

This new certification system, which will be integrated into the studies, will also make it possible to train students who are not limited to their courses, but are, as the minister says so well, well-made heads who are made to reflect and restore what they are given, these students

will, not only be empowered in their abilities but also this will give them several opportunities both at national and international level. Speaking of the international levels, mobility is also a very important component to achieve this excellence. Mobility will be in all cycles and more particularly in the doctoral cycle.

“We encourage the establishment of a new type of doctoral student, called the «next generation doctorate» where there will be a contract with the student who will be remunerated since he/she will be registered in his/her doctoral school and will work full time in his/her laboratory or in research unit to conduct research activities but the doctoral will also contribute to the teaching and it will also be encouraged to carry out at least one joint or international mobility which will enable him/her to learn how research is conducted in another foreign institution and learn from best practices.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh, Director of Cooperation and Partnership at the MHESRI)

In parallel with the excellence and innovation strand, the Pact HERI will give way to the creation of a number of mechanisms to encourage both research and innovation, the establishment of thematic institutes that are specific to priority areas for Morocco such as water management, biotechnology, renewable energies and so on and so forth.

“On the innovation side, we are trying to encourage and set up innovation cities in universities and since there are currently only six, they will therefore be generalized to other universities with an encouragement of the entrepreneurship component to allow students to think outside of the salary; how to have a creative mind, then, the entrepreneurship modules will be mandatory and included in the training.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh, Director of Cooperation and Partnership at the MHESRI)

Following the prospect of knowing more about the internationalization of higher education in Morocco, Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh was also asked about the importance of the internationalization of higher education and which countries Morocco should strengthen its cooperation activities with, to which she responded that Morocco is a country that is open by its constitution, by the guidelines of His Majesty King Mohammed VI first and foremost framing all documents that are either constitutional or strategic for higher education in Morocco, via the New Development Model.

“This openness is already at the heart of our system in the sense that our country is tolerant and stable, and this encourages other countries to come to us to seek this stability, it attracts a great deal and creates confidence in institutions outside our country.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh, Director of Cooperation and Partnership at the MHESRI)

She also mentioned that Morocco's main partners are the ones that are linked to the country through historical events, nonetheless, the Ministry is trying to enhance those partnerships and create other new ones with countries that didn't have partnership conventions with Morocco before.

“In terms of higher education, you find that some countries have a presence through historical facts such as France, Spain mainly but there is also Italy, the United States and Canada. Those are the main partners we work with. There are partners with whom student mobility is very important in the past such as Russia and Ukraine; these are countries with whom we do not have a lot of relations in terms of scientific research, but on the other hand in terms of higher education, there is a significant flow of Moroccan students moving to these countries mainly to study in medical fields. So, Morocco is not only developing very close relations with the countries I have just mentioned, but we are also opening up to international partners whom we were not used to working with.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh, Director of Cooperation and Partnership at the MHESRI)

Those countries are mainly the Asian countries which have a very high level of development, the countries of Latin America, the Nordic countries too; this being said, one should not forget to note the importance of the South-South partnership because Morocco makes it a strategic axis for its development in all sectors, not only at the level of higher education. The partnership with African countries is already strengthened enough but the Moroccan Ministry desire to go further towards English-speaking African countries. It is a vision that interests Morocco greatly in order to make the country a regional hub for higher education and research by 2030 as declared by the Pact HERI 2030.

The main areas of cooperation with these countries depends on the particularity of each country. In a given country, the MHESRI will have more interest in student mobility, in another country it will be more for scientific research and other countries that are at a much higher level of development where the Ministry will aim for innovation, so it all depends on the potential of these countries.

“What we are looking for is to make most of these relationships while maintaining a win-win spirit of cooperation to strengthen the skills of our country. The Moroccan diaspora in the countries I mentioned is an important aspect to raise. The orientations of His Majesty the King have prompted the Moroccan diaspora to contribute to the development of the country. In higher education, we are in the process of thinking about establishing mechanisms of links with this diaspora, a program called the “Fincome” has already been established and it allows

the mobility of the Moroccan diaspora (Moroccan researchers in foreign universities) in Morocco either for short or long-term stays to give courses or just to set up projects, this program will be revised in the light of the guidelines of the regional conferences that have involved the Moroccan diaspora abroad.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh, Director of Cooperation and Partnership at the MHESRI)

Adding to this, it is known that the Moroccan diaspora has expressed its willingness to welcome Moroccan doctoral students so the Ministry is also thinking about setting up mechanisms to welcome this offer of the Moroccan diaspora for Moroccan doctoral students so that they can get in contact; this is also very important in relation to the cooperation and the orientations that the MHESRI has with these countries of the world.

This stream of talk about cooperation between Morocco and other countries certainly leads to tackle the question of the mobility of teacher-researchers and students and the added value it brings to training and research programs in higher education. Mobility offers a wide range of benefits. When a professor-researcher goes abroad with his peers, his counterparts, first, this allows to reflect together on the cooperation that can be applied to the pedagogical field because there are several projects that arise from these mobilities in the sense that some researchers develop courses in joint degrees with their counterparts abroad through a mobility that has been carried out, and which can also be done in the context of a conference for example. So, in this way, the professor can share his research results. This can also allow him to learn what is being done in the world and generally in the context of these international conferences he can be exposed to several points of views which allow to give ideas for future collaborations within the framework of the scientific research. Another important aspect is that when a professor-researcher, for instance, attends a number of conferences and courses, it can also contribute to improving the quality of teaching, methodology and pedagogy. So, it all depends on the objective of that mobility, but what is certain is that whatever the type of mobility and its duration, it has a definite impact on the human resources:

“It allows them to be open to what is happening elsewhere in order to learn and make the most of it, also to build networks and partnerships and, subsequently, joint research projects or training. For students, it helps strengthen the student’s personality, abilities, resilience, problem-solving skills, adaptability to different cultures, open-mindedness. Certainly, he will be a student or doctoral student in academic or scientific matters.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh, Director of Cooperation and Partnership at the MHESRI)



When we talk about the term “mobility”, there must first be a distinction: there are mobility programs which are carried out within an intergovernmental framework, that is, two governments working together on a joint mobility program by defining exactly the number of scholarships to be awarded.

“Morocco has several agreements with countries where there are intergovernmental mobility programs, the most important of which are the program with Senegal, Tunisia, Hungary, Jordan, China and Canada.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh)

The second case is that of mobility programs between countries that are specific to the country: that sends people to the MHESRI. This is not within the framework of an agreement, but it is the host country that opens a call for applications to all the countries of the world, and in that case the Moroccan student is in competition with all the students of other countries of the world. The student submits directly the scholarship application, without going through the ministry and if it is accepted, the student is automatically retained.

A third point is that of inter-university mobility, within an institutional framework between universities that can sign agreements together and have student exchange programs among themselves.

“Within this framework also, the mobility of Erasmus+ which is a European program that is carried out by two universities: one that is European, and another Moroccan will certainly include undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students in academic or scientific matters.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh)

Another type of mobility is done within the framework of research programs, when two or more universities have research convention programs, doctoral students can carry out mobilities within the framework of these research projects. But it is important to note that still the numbers of mobility grants are not yet sufficient and do not satisfy the need:

“The number of grants currently available, whether in relation to intergovernmental programs or inter-university exchanges, in my opinion do not satisfy the need because, taking into account the number of teacher-researchers (more than 15,000 teachers and more than 1 million students), the number of grants is not enough and does not cover all needs.”

Concerning mobility (incoming and outgoing), it is important to note that the number of incoming mobility is much less important than outgoing mobility for several reasons.

“Morocco must be promoted as an important academic and research destination, and this can only be done when the visibility of our higher education institutions improves.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh)

In order to improve the situation, there are different mechanisms, such as promoting communication work around these institutions and also ensuring they are classified in international rankings. That is said, another point that could be a handicap for incoming mobility is the language of instruction. In Morocco, teaching is done in Arabic and French, in English only for the technical streams. The opening work is in the process of being started, for example the University Mohammed V of Rabat has already opened three field study in English. At the University of Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah of Fez, a medical field study is launched in English. This opening of English-language field studies will encourage non-French-speaking students to come to Morocco for mobility or for field studies.

Hence, internationalization, in this context, must overcome some obstacles. First and foremost, it is essential to create national guidelines and protocols that would enable institutions to support mobility efforts. Second, among the principal difficulties that must be overcome, special attention should be given to the language of instruction and research, the evaluation system and internationalization of the curricula. More focus should be put on the infrastructure and the management of financial resources.

International experience is acknowledged and appreciated at Moroccan higher education institutions, however neither academic nor administrative staff members' career achievements are directly impacted by it unfortunately.

These factors lead to enquire about the issue of attractiveness or internationalization strategy for international partners to collaborate with MHESRI, to which Mrs. Zebakh stated that the attractiveness strategy is implicit because there is no official document that presents a strategy for internationalizing Moroccan higher education.

“This is a vision that we would like to put forward. The benchmarking work has already been done in relation to the meetings that were held with international partners, but we also need to do a little more study to come up with a clear strategy for the internationalization of higher education and scientific research.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh)

Implicitly, this strategy concerns the attractiveness of students since Morocco welcomes the visibility it has vis-à-vis African students. In relation to scientific research, Morocco has an important visibility in relation to the European programs, whether it is Erasmus+ since in the MENA region and more specifically in the North African region, our country is the one which has the most Erasmus+ projects. The same goes for Horizon Europe, where Morocco is well positioned. These partnerships allow Morocco to have more visibility and attract more students and researchers.

Things as such, it is time to ask questions about the contribution or added value of Morocco's participation in international research projects because it appears that the Moroccan institutions are well positioned in relation to the research programs that exist at the world level, mainly in relation to the European programs. The involvement of the Moroccan partners in these research programs is very strong. Through bibliometric research, we find that during the last five years, Morocco has increased its number of co-publications (in partnership in research projects); several funders are cited in these co-publications, including the UK Research Center, the European Union, the US National Science Foundation, the US National Institute of Health, and the Qatar Foundation, etc.

Co-publications are a very important indicator through which we can get an idea of the research projects and collaborations that allow to see that there is a multitude and a diversity of research programs not only that of themes but also of donors of program funds.

We also wanted to know about the extent to which international research programs are a lever for improving scientific research in Morocco and it appeared that when entering an international project, it implies that the professor-researcher is in a consortium with several teams that meet and create a network, a transfer of knowledge and a transfer of technology too, by increasing the co-authorship and by making it possible to find places for mobility, internships for undergraduate, graduate student or doctoral students. It is also an opportunity to organize events and scientific conferences together. This is important not only to improve the visibility of research in Morocco but also its ranking in the world.

It is also important to planify steps to be taken to extend Morocco's participation in new international research or mobility programs; the first thing is to try to map these opportunities; some are recurring (the same call for projects that comes up year after year); these recurring programs allow the country to maintain its international openness on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is to make a diffusion online and also to sensitize professor-researchers, help them to mount projects and find partners. This has already been done within the framework of two European programs that have offices (Erasmus+ Morocco and PIN: Point d'Information Nationale Maroc; National Information Point) on European research programs. These two offices are present to facilitate research programs, inform researchers, train them in project design, find European partners, and assist them in managing their projects.

“We need to think about a process for evaluating these programs to see whether the efforts provided and deployed in these programs is sufficient or whether it should be directed to other programs.” (Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh)

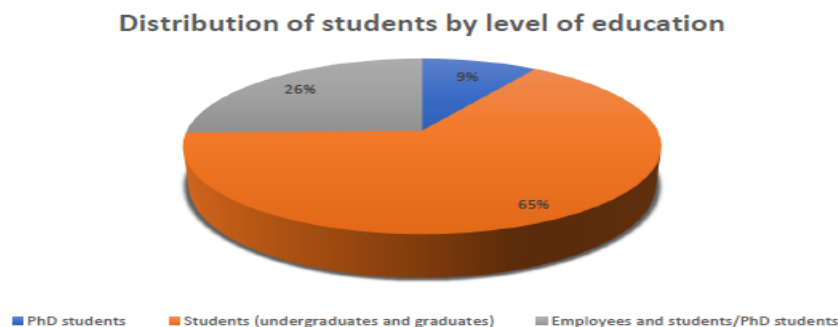
As is seen and asserted by Mrs. Zebakh, a great deal of work has to be done in favor of promoting Moroccan education to meet the requirements of internationalization.

### 3.2 International mobility motivations and constraints according to students

In order to analyze the obtained results from the survey, they will be depicted depending on five major criteria: basic information on students, information concerning the mobility they wish to undertake, their motivations for international mobility, constraints related to international mobility, and finally, their future prospects and plans after mobility. This article will be presenting some of the graphs from the survey questionnaire.

The first question concerns the level of studies of the respondents:

**Figure 6 Graph**



*Source : Survey questionnaire.*

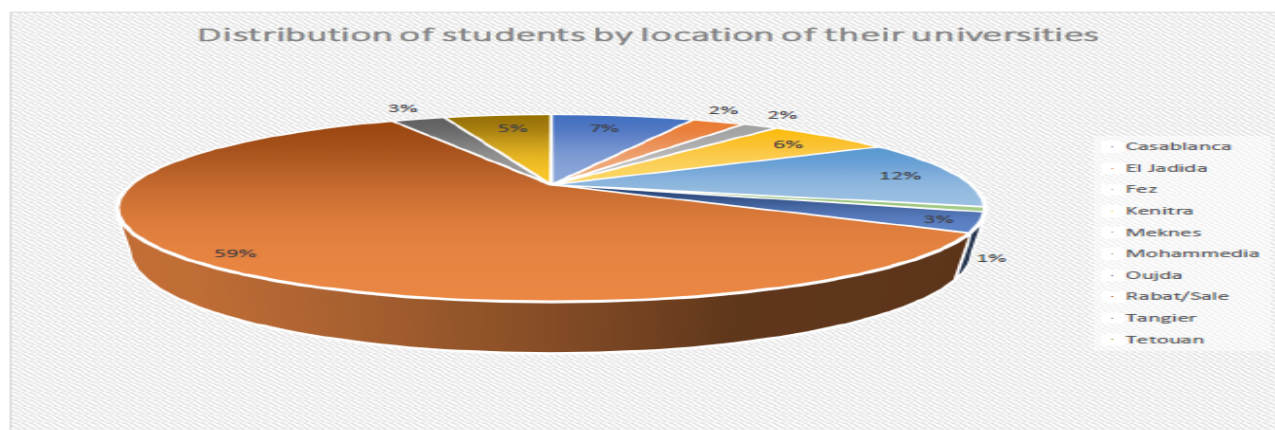
#### Comments:

It is apparent, from the graph, that three categories of students filled this questionnaire: undergraduate and graduate students, PhD students and employees who work and study at the same time.

65% of the respondents are undergraduate and graduate students, 26% are employees who study simultaneously, and 9% of the respondents are PhD students.

It was also interesting to range the participants by university in order to know more about their interest in international mobility. The graph and table below depict the repartition of the students by city and by university.

Figure 7 Graph



Source: Survey questionnaire.

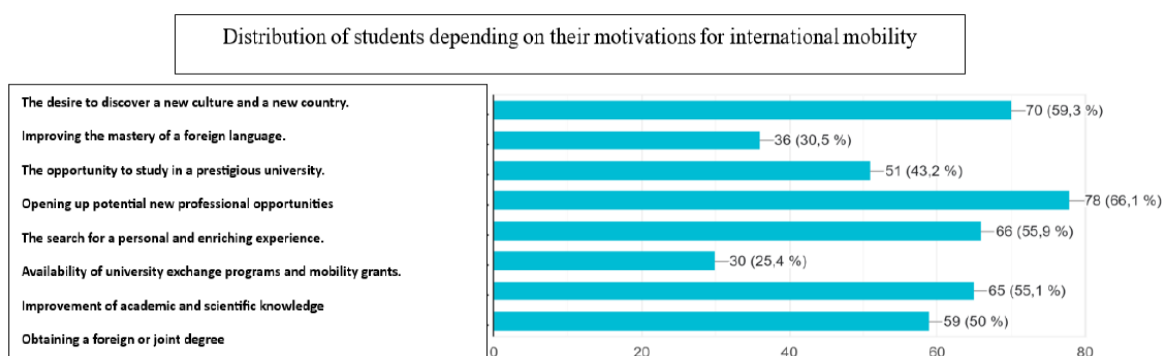
University	Respondents of the survey
University Mohammed V of Rabat	59%
University Moulay Ismail of Meknes	12%
University Hassan II of Casablanca	8%
Abdelmalek Essaâdi University of Tangier	8%
University Ibn Tofail of Kenitra	6%
University Mohammed I of Oujda	3%
Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University of Fez	2%
University Chouaib Doukkali of El Jadida	2%

Source: Survey questionnaire.

### Comments:

59% of the respondents of the survey study in the University Mohammed V of Rabat, whereas 12% study in the University Moulay Ismail of Meknes; the rest are from the University Hassan II of Casablanca (8%), the University Abdelmalek Essaâdi of Tangier (8%), the University Ibn Tofail of Kenitra (6%), the University Mohammed I of Oujda (3%), the University Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah of Fez (2%) and the University Chouaib Doukkali of El Jadida (2%).

Figure 8 Graph



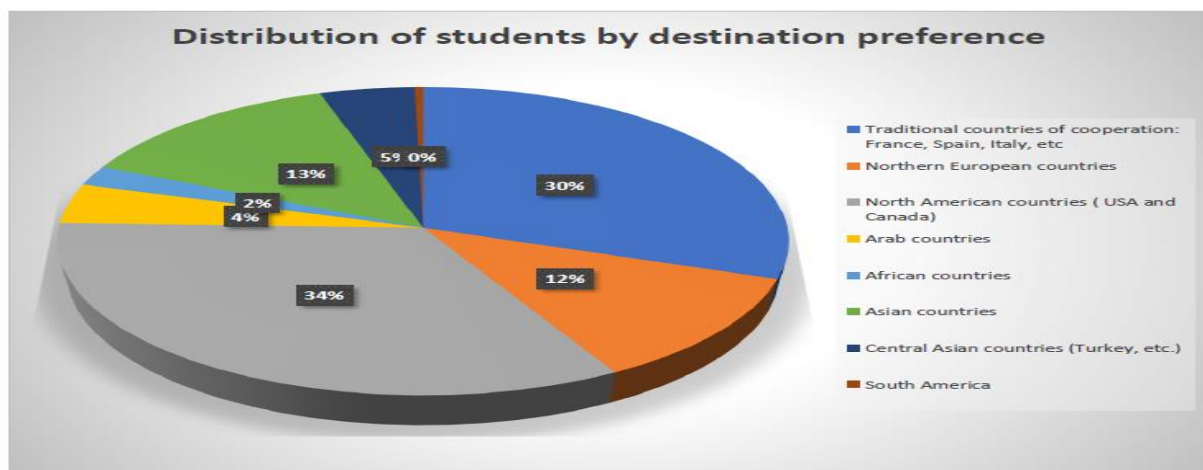
Source: Survey questionnaire.

### Comments:

Here, the reasons that motivate students to go for an international mobility vary a lot through this multiple-choice question, but the main reason that most students opt for is to open up potential new professional opportunities (66,1%). More than a half of the students (59,3%) are curious to discover a new country and learn about a new culture while 55,9% want to do a mobility in order to enrich their experiences and develop their personalities. 55,1% are also motivated to improve their scientific and academic knowledge and enlarge their capacities and know-how; 50% of the student also care about obtaining a foreign or joint degree. The rest have concerns about joining a prestigious university (43,2%), improving their foreign language mastery (30,5%) or caring about the availability of university exchange programs and mobility grants before deciding to do an international mobility.

Following this comes the question about the destinations that would interest students into pursuing their studies through an international mobility program:

Figure 9 Graph

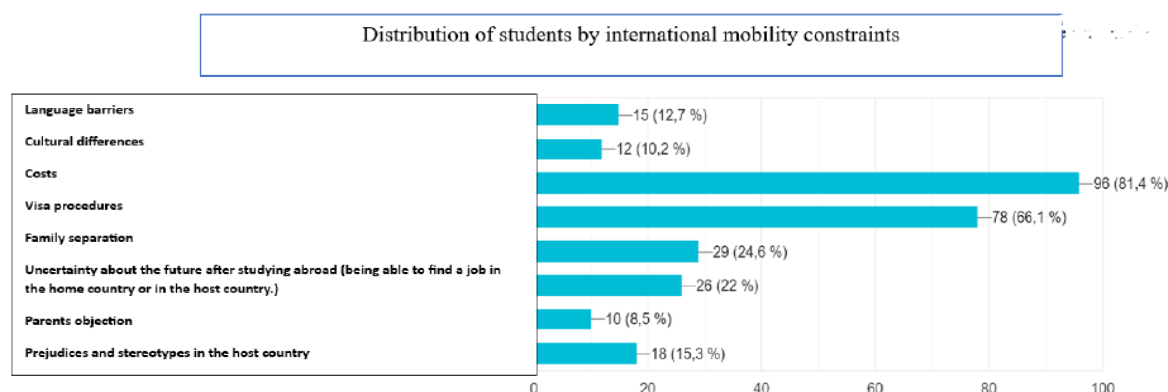


Source: Survey questionnaire.

### Comments:

34% of the students prefer to study in North American countries while 30% of the students prefer to study in European countries that are known to be traditional countries of cooperation such as France or Spain. 13% of the respondents prefer Asian countries to study in, 12% have an attraction for Northern European countries while the rest of the respondents prefer Central Asian countries (5%), Arab countries (4%), African countries (2%) and South American countries with only 1 respondent who chose it a preferred destination.

Figure 10 Graph



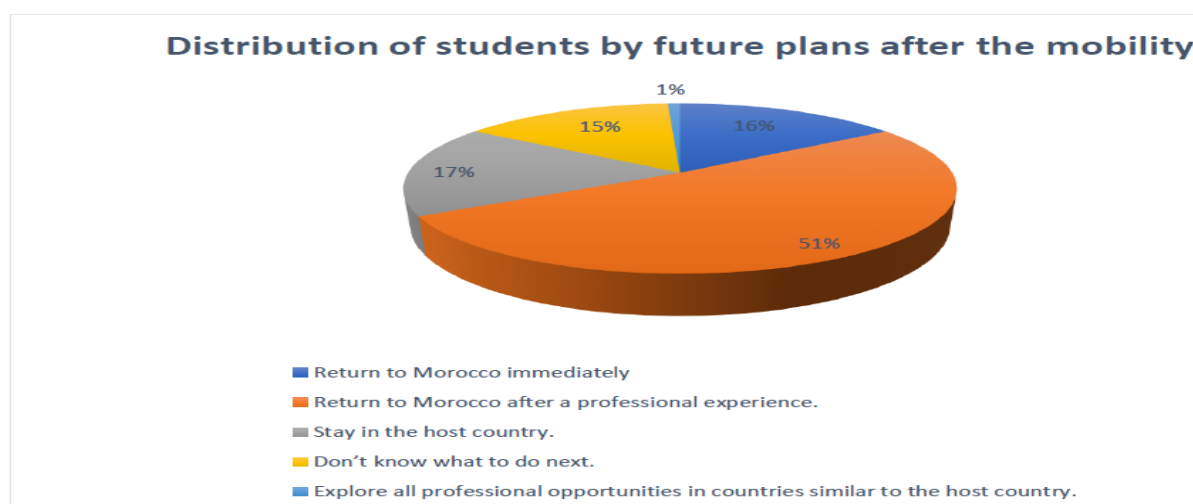
Source : Survey questionnaire.

### Comments:

Through this graph, it is apparent that 81,4% of the students surveyed consider the expensive costs as the main constraint of going into an international mobility followed by 66,1% who consider visa procedures as one of the main reasons that would stop them from studying abroad. 24,6% have a problem with family separation while 22% express their uncertainty about their future after studying abroad. 15,3% of the respondents are worried about the prejudices and stereotypes that they might face in the host country, 12,7% have the language barrier as a main constraint while 10,2% are scared of cultural differences and 8,5% can't go in an international mobility because of their families' objection.

Linked to the constraints of international mobility is the question of the decision that the students will make after achieving this mobility. Will they stay in the host country or go back to their own country?

Figure 11 Graph



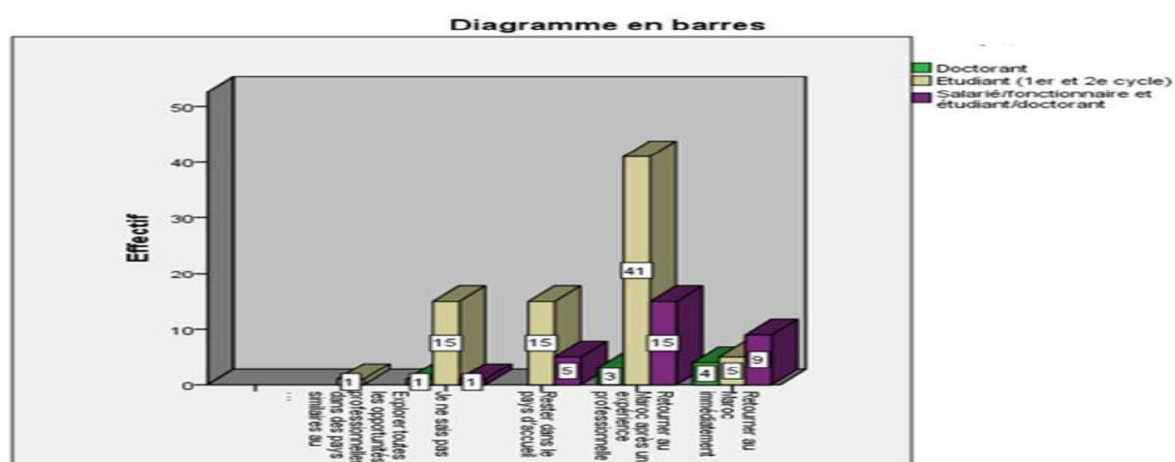
Source : Survey questionnaire.



### Comments:

For this last question, the respondents were highly motivated by returning to Morocco after having a professional experience (51%); the rest was divided in different opinions: wanting to return to Morocco immediately after the international mobility (16%), wanting to permanently stay and live in the host country (17%), not exactly knowing what to do or where to go next (15%) and finally, wanting to explore all the professional opportunities in countries that are similar to the host country (1%).

Figure 12 Graph



Source: Survey questionnaire (SPSS).

### Comments:

Most of undergraduate and graduate students (41 students) prefer going back to Morocco after a professional experience while the rest either doesn't know what to do next or prefers to stay in the host country. 4 PhD students want to return to Morocco immediately after their international mobility while 3 want to have a professional experience before joining back the country. When it comes to PhD students who work and study at the same time, most of them prefer to work in the host country before coming back to Morocco while the rest of them either wants to return immediately after their studies abroad or stay in the host country.

## 4. Results' discussion

The interview with Mrs Sanaa Zebakh, the Director of Cooperation and Partnership underlines that the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation has made internationalization of higher education a major area of focus and with the help of the new certification program in foreign languages, students will gain confidence and access to possibilities on a national and worldwide scales.

For Moroccan higher education to be excellent, international mobility is essential. Mobility is encouraged by the MHESRI at all levels, but especially during the PhD cycle. The "next generation doctorate" is a new form of PhD program that emphasizes contracting, paying, and having students work full-time on research projects while simultaneously contributing to instruction. Students are encouraged to engage in joint or international mobility programs to gain knowledge about research methodologies used in other universities.

Morocco wants to enhance its relationships with long-standing and historical allies in terms of international collaboration. Additionally, initiatives are being undertaken to form new alliances with nations who have never done so. The MHESRI is interested in working with countries in Asia, Latin America, and the Northern European regions. Morocco also prioritizes South-South cooperation and aspires to establish itself by 2030 as a regional center for research and higher education.

On another hand, through the survey, it is apparent that students in both Humanities and Social sciences, Economics and Law and exact Sciences are interested in international mobility. The fact that women respondents were more numerous didn't really change many variables or affect their choices since they are also motivated by student mobility. Another element that came to our attention is how most PhD students are more likely to study and work at the same time rather than just be full-time students. The fact that these PhD students work didn't stop them from preferring to do international mobilities that last longer than a week. On another note, the fact that many students either chose to study a semester or more abroad, be a part of a joint degree program, do an internship or be a part of a cotutelle doctorate program is an indicator that Moroccan students are definitely imbued with international mobility and are interested by having an experience abroad added to their study course. So, the students' views on international mobility align perfectly with the perspectives of the Pact HERI 2030.

In addition, the students prefer to go on a mobility programmed by the MHESRI (scholarships) compared to other mobility programs. This might be explained by their desire to be assured by the government contrary to being a part of an extra-ministerial mobility program. This might be related to the Moroccan cultural-thinking that consists of wanting to have some sort of insurance and security being in a public program because in the Moroccan culture most people tend to find security, seek refuge and comfort by being linked to a public institution rather than being a part of a non-governmental program or relying on their own expenses to cover their international mobility. When it comes to the means of mobility,

students ranked scholarships offered by their institutions or by the host institution as their most preferred option followed by tuition grants, living expenses and international cooperation grants.

Students are also highly interested in pursuing their studies in American countries and European ones, but there's also an important percentage of students that are interested by Asian countries and Northern European ones, which aren't targeted a lot in partnerships by the MHESRI.

Moroccan students are highly motivated to do an international mobility. In fact, the added value that Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh talked about during the interview is the same goal or target that the students consider when asked about their motivations. Being a tolerant human being and gathering intercultural knowledge and soft-skills are one of the main motivations for students, along with opening up to new academic and professional opportunities and enriching their experiences which will, surely, contribute to the elevation and development of the Moroccan higher education in terms of research or academic performance since more than 60% of the respondents to our questionnaire are willing to return to Morocco after their international mobility (immediately or after a professional experience abroad). The question that remains open is that of finding ways to overcome the constraints that students have when trying to do an international mobility, such as the study and living costs or the visa procedures; perhaps the MHESRI might find solutions for these obstacles in the future.

Based on the qualitative and quantitative research, it appeared that the variables proposed and discussed by Tahira Hassan and Arif Hassan (2020) that are also the explanatory variables of the conceptual model of this thesis and subject of the research hypotheses are indeed validated and explain and have an impact on the internationalization of higher education.

## **Conclusion**

Thus far, the present work has depicted and highlighted the value of the internationalization of higher education and its implications as far as the student, the professor-researcher and the Moroccan educational system are concerned. It has also underlined the due and legitimate existence of the internationalization of higher education in the schedule of the Moroccan educational system. This is indeed the perspective that the Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation has involved within the new Pact ESRI/HERI 2030. Bearing these elements in mind, the study has proceeded by presenting and giving

proper definitions to the various concepts evolving around the internationalization of higher education, its applications, and its different implications in what concerns the training, research and innovation. This research has also presented the international mobility of students (both incoming and outgoing mobilities) to come down to a general overview of the agreements and partnerships that were drawn between the Moroccan government and other countries. For this reason, throughout this humble work, it proceeded with an empirical study including both qualitative and quantitative research that aimed to carry on a diagnosis of the internationalization of higher education in Morocco based on the perspectives indicated in the Pact ESRI/HERI 2030. This has been done thanks to the valuable ideas that Mrs. Sanaa Zebakh, Director of Cooperation and Partnership in the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation has kindly shared which led to proceed with quantitative research to shed light on diverse students' motivations and constraints of international mobility. The present research as such, has yielded some important results. In fact, lots of students have shown great motivation to involve in international mobility programs which is going, indeed, hand in hand with the objectives of the Pact HERI 2030. Meanwhile, some apparent constraints from the part of the students created an obligation to propose some recommendations to the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation to better operationalize its strategic orientations and make the international mobility of students easier.

Through this research paper, it has been made clear that the internationalization of higher education can improve training and scientific research in Morocco; it has been shown by depicting the role of international mobility in improving Moroccan students' training and research, through the way the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation handles the internationalization of higher education process in terms of cooperation and partnership. It is clear then, that the Pact ESRI/HERI 2030 can be a lever for the internationalization of Moroccan higher education as is accounted for by this humble work which could be deeply highlighted, investigated and hopefully handled by other researchers to open up further perspectives to benefit the future of students and professor-researchers and broaden the angle of Moroccan internationalization of higher education process. The knowledge of the internationalization of higher education is advanced by this work in a number of theoretical ways. It first clarifies the effects of internationalization on learners, teacher-researchers, and the Moroccan educational system. It stresses the significance of introducing a global, multicultural, or international component into post-

secondary education by stressing the worth and legal presence of internationalization within the Moroccan educational calendar. This study provides insightful information for practitioners and policymakers working on the internationalization of higher education in terms of management contributions. The study emphasizes Morocco's internationalization reforms and legal framework, giving a clear picture of the scope and nature of the country's internationalization initiatives. The study also highlights the reasons for and barriers to students' worldwide mobility, which results in useful suggestions for the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation. These suggestions are meant to ease international student mobility and enhance the management facets of internationalization efforts by better operationalizing the strategic orientations of the Pact ESRI/HERI 2030.

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