



## Towards gender equality in Moroccan universities: Female university teachers from a gender perspective



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Morocco  
Women  
University  
Equal opportunity

### ABSTRACT

Given its multiplying effect via students, Moroccan universities are a strategic space for eradicating or at least reducing the traditional gender inequity present in current Moroccan society. This study aims to improve the status of Moroccan female university teachers by informing on the opinion of the university teaching staff themselves. A mixed methodology was used, with interviews and a questionnaire distributed among 143 male and female teachers. Variables associated with a greater perception of this problem were detected: marital status, holding a post in the administration and age. Despite the undoubted advances in Moroccan universities in terms of gender equity, we identify two groups of teachers with opposing views. Some reported blatant gender inequity, among which we highlight a greater awareness of the youngest teachers, while others were not aware of the problem and did not admit its existence. This problem should not be overlooked.

### Introduction

While gender inequity is indubitably a highly important issue, its repercussion and effects among university teaching staff will be even more among students who are the future leaders of their country (Díez Gutiérrez, Terrón Bañuelos & Anguita, 2009). For this reason, women in universities are a crucial tool for social change (Malik & Courtney, 2011).

Many different studies on gender equity between women and men in universities conclude that there is still considerable inequity (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014; Pingleton, Jones, Rosolowski, & Zimmerman, 2016; Ramírez & Matarranz, 2015; Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard, & Newman, 2016) although the majority of the university personnel are women (Wright, Cooper, & Luff, 2017). This problem is heightened in certain academic fields, particularly science and technology (Caprile et al., 2012; Comisión Europea, 2012; Fox, 2008).

These data are worrying, especially when taking into consideration that new generations in university learn not only from the knowledge transmitted in the classroom but also from their observation of teachers' behavioural models (Díez Gutiérrez, Valle Flórez, Terrón Bañuelos & Centeno Suárez, 2003). This means that women in positions of responsibility become essential to eradicating gender inequity (Stainback, Kleiner, & Skaggs, 2016).

Women occupy proportionally fewer positions of responsibility in the university in relation to the number of women qualified for the job (Sánchez de Madariaga, 2014) despite the high presence of the women

in the university (Saeeda, 2017). This makes it necessary to use a series of strategies to increase the number of women in positions of leadership (Vongalis-Macrow, 2016). In this regard, highly prestigious international organisations call for a greater presence of women in higher education and in positions of responsibility, both in the field of academia, administration and economic (Karoïu & Feki, 2017; ONU, 2016). This should be supported in national and international policy, with governments clearly advocating women's right to education (Burrige, Maree Payne, & Rahmari, 2015).

As regards the scant and insufficient female presence in decision-making posts in universities, research frequently highlights the barriers or obstacles hindering the advancement of women, known as the 'glass ceiling' (Almansoura & Kempnerb, 2016; Chávez & Ríos, 2014; Folke & Rickne, 2016; Pingleton et al., 2016).

Among the wide range of difficulties which could be listed, there is some consensus seeing childcare and family obligations (Saeeda, 2017) as major obstacles to important aspects of women's research careers, including international trips (Almansoura & Kempnerb, 2016) or less scientific output (Alonso, Bolaños, González, Villamón & Benavent, 2010; Teixeira, Betsaida, Freitas & De Almeida, 2015).

Although with recent improvements it has been observed that younger members of teaching staff do not perceive the problem of gender inequity within universities as keenly (Matus-López & Gallego-Morón, 2014), the dominant androcentric culture still leaves little room for transparency in appointments and a lack of support systems for women (NcNae & Vali, 2015). In fact, so much so that some blame

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women themselves for this inequity, brandishing arguments such as their lack of ambition (Díez Gutiérrez et al., 2009) or stating that women themselves refuse to occupy positions of leadership (Done, Murphy, & Knowler, 2016).

For the last thirty years the female question in Morocco has been an important issue for debate (Malika Benradi, 2006), frequently met with opposing positions. It is still a country with high illiteracy rates and major disparity between rural and urban locations and between men and women (Bouoiyour, Miftah & Mouhoud, 2016). Although women have traditionally had a lower educational level than men (Feeney, 2014), their literacy levels have increased progressively, and the gender gap has been gradually reduced in the country since 1990. This information is particularly relevant given the influence of the education received by Moroccan women on their attitude towards gender equity (Cobano-Delgado, 2010).

Access of women to education is edging closer to that of men, with 48% of girls in primary education in the 2012/13 academic year. The progression in the percentage of girls in secondary education in rural areas is the most notable, as it has risen from 37% in 2005 to 57% (OCEMO, 2014).

Although there is a clear gender bias in universities depending on the type of studies, with 78.35% of girls in Education Sciences and 46.07% in Sciences in the 2013/14 academic year, in the last ten years the percentage of female students enrolled in university has been edging closer to that of male students (46.95% in 2004/5 and 48.01% in 2009/10), but they are yet to reach equal percentages (Statistiques Universitaires, 2013/14).

As for university teachers, only 21.18% in the 2010/11 academic year were female, increasing to 26.15% in the 2014/15 academic year (Statistiques Universitaires, 2014/15). In the specific case of the object of this study, Moulay Ismail University in Meknes, a conservative city in Morocco, only 17.27% were female teachers in the 2010/11 academic year, increasing to 21.20% in 2014/15 (Statistiques Universitaires, 2014/15). This is especially relevant if we take into account that education is considered one of the most important factors in social and economic growth of a country (Karoju & Feki, 2017), in particular the university system, to achieve a higher equity (Keeffe, 2017).

Although it has certain limitations considered inadmissible in Western Europe, the new Moroccan Family Code (2004), Moudawana, constitutes the basic pillar on which the principles of equality between men and women should be based (Llorent Bedmar & Cobano-Delgado, 2014). It improved the conditions of equity within the family (Scott Prettitore, 2015) and strengthened the rights of women (N'Diaye, 2016), who started to appear in the media in contexts other than domestic ones (Gunner, 2016). However, wives continue to be associated with the care and protection of the family, and traditional patriarchal values are reaffirmed under a deceptively liberal image (Katja, 2014).

Despite the fact that young Moroccan women enjoy increasing “flexibility” within the family nucleus, they are constantly negotiating against internal pressure (Bertrán, Poferrada & Pàmies, 2016).

As the attitudes to gender equity are still not prevalent in Morocco (Prettitore, 2015), it is essential to encourage women's access to better paid positions with greater social recognition (Ajaouani, 2012).

As regards the empowerment of Moroccan women in university it can be stated that despite undeniable advances (Benlabbah, 2008) women in administration posts are still in the minority, and this is worrying in terms of equality (Griffiths, 2012).

Given the obstacles often faced by women in their professional promotion and the importance of their greater representation in positions of high responsibility in higher education, it was considered important to establish how Moroccan university teachers perceive the possibility of gender inequity in this context. This should make it possible to establish the necessary actions to move towards greater empowerment and social recognition for Moroccan women in universities. The term equity is used according to the definition of Baily and Holmarsdottir (2015), who view it as the equal distribution of

responsibilities, resources and power between both sexes, taking into account that men and women have different needs.

## Methodology

For this research, which aims to strengthen and empower Moroccan female university teachers, a mixed methodology was used, with quantitative and qualitative techniques. The main data collection tools were questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Firstly, a specially designed questionnaire was drawn up to record the opinions of female and male teachers from Moulay Ismail University on gender inequity in the university. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were used to further explore the responses of teachers to the questionnaire in order to obtain more interesting and depth responses on the situation of female teachers, possibly affected by gender inequity.

Statistical software SPSS v, 23 was used to analyse the quantitative data, using descriptive and inferential statistics of some variables. The Atlas.ti v. 6.2.program was used for qualitative data.

The study sample was made up of 143 teachers (85 men and 58 women) from Moulay Ismail University in Meknes (Morocco). This sample size ( $n = 143$ ) meant that it was possible to work with a sample error below  $\pm 7.5\%$ , for a level of trust of 95% (standard distance 1.96), for a population variation of 0.25 and with maximum proportional variation  $p = q = 50\%$ , with a known finite population ( $N = 828$  cases). A random stratified sampling technique was used for the sample selection, establishing gender as a main condition for distinction.

Characteristics of study sample:

- Most of those surveyed (81.9%) are over 40.
- In terms of marital status, most (81%) are married, while 8.8% are single and 5.1% are separated or divorced.
- When asked about aspirations to be a professor, 67.3% of teachers aspire to this post compared to 32.7% who do not contemplate this option.
- 70.9% of those surveyed have never held a post in administration or management, compared to 29.1% who have.
- 51.5% usually work in teams made up of men and women, while 48.5% work solely with people of their same sex.

The questionnaire is split into four scales (teaching, research, management and sociocultural aspects) and consists of a series of initial questions to identify the participants in the study and 46 items in a Likert scale. Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient (Table 1) was chosen to ensure the reliability of these four scales and for the overall scale.

High reliability is obtained, with values above 0.81 (Palella Stracuzzi & Martins Pestana, 2010), highlighting the internal consistency of the tool.

To ensure the validity of its content, a table was drawn up with specifications based on a solid review of related studies by specialists, with the help of the Équipe Pluridisciplinaire de Recherche sur la Femme (TANIT)<sup>1</sup> from Moulay Ismael University in Meknes, as specialists in the field of Moroccan women.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO) and Bartlett's test for sphericity were used to obtain the validity of the construct before going on to use the Method of Principal Components. Table 2 below shows the results of the validity of the construct.

The results of these tests confirmed it was possible to subsequently use an Exploratory Factorial Analysis, having obtained all the suitable measured scales for sample adaptation and ruled out the datamatrix of

<sup>1</sup> Established in 1992 as a research group formed by academic teachers with the main aim of promoting multidisciplinary research on the feminine issue in Morocco.

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