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Student participation in university governance: The case of Mohamed V University in Rabat, Morocco

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Keywords:

University democracy; University governance; Democratization of higher education; Student representation; Participatory management; Mohamed V University in Rabat.

Summary:

This article highlights the importance of student participation in university governance to ensure the effective functioning of universities. The decisions made by university governance bodies have a direct impact on students, and their participation is therefore essential to ensure democratic decision-making and better quality of teaching and research. The article examines the challenges and limitations of student participation in university governance and focuses on analyzing student participation in governance and operations at a Moroccan university. The study's results underline the main perceived difficulties and propose solutions to improve and increase student participation in university governance processes.



ملخص

يسلط هذا المقال الضوء على أهمية مشاركة الطلاب في حكمة الجامعات لضمان عمل فعال لهذه الأخيرة. فالقرارات التي تتخذها هيئات حكمة الجامعات تؤثر بشكل مباشر على الطلاب، وبالتالي فإن مشاركتهم أمر حيوي لضمان اتخاذ القرارات الديمقراطية وتحسين جودة التعليم والبحث. يحلل هذا المقال التحديات والحدود التي تواجه مشاركة الطلاب في حكمة الجامعات ويتركز على تحليل مشاركة الطلاب في الحوكمة والعمل في الجامعة المغربية. وتشير نتائج الدراسة إلى الصعوبات الرئيسية وتقدم حلولاً لتحسين وزيادة مشاركة الطلاب في عمليات حوكمة الجامعات.

Introduction :

In recent years, several studies have emphasized the importance and relevance of youth and citizen participation in maintaining and developing any democratic system (Weiss J (2020); Subba, D. (2014); Geissel, B., Kneuer, M., & Lauth, H-J. (2016)). All of these studies considered participation as an important dimension of people's quality of life since it is closely linked to social inclusion and identity processes. Participation is therefore an educational and social process and must necessarily be taken into account throughout all stages of the educational and teaching system.

Although participation in university governance can be considered a challenge that concerns all actors in the university community (leaders, managers, teachers, administrative and technical staff, students, etc.), in this article, we will focus only on student participation in university governance. However, it should be noted that the participation of other stakeholders in the higher education system (academic and administrative staff) is also fundamental to ensuring the participation of students themselves in an effective governance model.



In the field of university governance, different authors emphasize the paramount importance of student involvement in the decision-making process and in the governance and functioning of universities. These authors consider this as the most manifest form of recognition of the effective significance of these participatory processes (Acharya, S. L. (2015); Gornall, L., & Cook, J. 2019; Huisman, J., Stensaker, B., & Vossensteyn, H. 2018).

Indeed, most of the decisions taken by the governance body of universities directly affect students, which explains the need for their participation to be taken into account (Biddix, J. P. 2010; Whitchurch, C. 2013; Ogunyemi, O. O., Adebayo, A. R., & Babalola, M. T. 2020; Doherty, S. J., Biddix, J. P., & Liddell, D. L. 2019; Kuk, L., Moules, N. J., & Astorino, D. 2020). Student participation in university governance is therefore an important issue for university democracy. Students have an important role to play in decision-making related to teaching, research, student life, and resource management. Student participation can contribute to improving the quality of teaching and research, as well as strengthening the civic education of students.

Universities are complex organizations that require the participation of different actors to ensure their effective functioning. One of the most important actors is the student body, which can provide valuable viewpoints and perspectives to improve university governance. Therefore, there has been a growing interest in involving students in university governance. However, the extent and effectiveness of their participation have been the subject of debates among researchers. This article discusses the issue of student participation in university governance, focusing on the challenges and limitations of such involvement.



For all the reasons mentioned above, we consider student participation to be an important topic of discussion in the academic community. University governance bodies could obviously serve as participatory spaces where students are involved in the decision-making process.

This article focuses on analyzing student participation in governance and operations in the Moroccan university, with the aim of identifying the main perceived difficulties and proposals that could promote the increase and improvement of student involvement in these processes.

Models of student participation in university governance

There are several models of student participation in university governance, such as the advisory model, the co-governance model, the representation model, and the direct participation model. Each model has its advantages and challenges, and the choice of model depends on institutional and cultural contexts.

1. Shared governance models: Shared governance models involve close collaboration between students, staff, and university leaders in decision-making. The advantages of this model are that it allows for active and equal student participation and a fair distribution of decision-making power. Disadvantages may include additional costs to set up such a governance structure (Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. 2014).
2. Consensus governance models: Consensus governance models involve collective decision-making without any party imposing its will. The advantages of this model are that it allows for equitable student participation and balanced decision-making. Disadvantages may include increased complexity in decision-making and difficulty in reaching a consensus (Freeman, R. M. (2014)).



3. Mandate imperatives governance models: Mandate imperatives governance models involve student representatives being required to vote specifically on each issue based on instructions given by the students. The advantages of this model are that it ensures student representatives vote according to their preferences. Disadvantages may include a limitation on student representative decision-making and difficulty in taking into account individual student representative opinions (Freeman, R. M. (2014)).
4. Student councils: Student councils are student-led organizations, often elected by their peers, that advise university leaders on student-related issues. The advantages of this model are that it allows for active student participation, giving students a voice and a platform to voice their concerns. However, disadvantages may include representativeness issues if elected students do not represent all students, as well as a lack of real decision-making power (Cohen, A. M., & Kisker, C. B. 2010).
5. Boards of trustees: Boards of trustees are higher-level decision-making bodies that set policy and priorities for the university. Some boards of trustees include student representatives, who can help bring a student perspective to important decisions. The advantages of this model are that it allows for student participation at a high level of university governance, which can result in more balanced decision-making. However, disadvantages may include limited representativeness if elected students do not represent all students, as well as a lack of real decision-making power (Cohen, A. M., & Kisker, C. B. 2010).
6. Joint committees: Joint committees are working groups composed of student representatives and university staff members who work together



on specific issues. The advantages of this model are that it allows for active student participation and close collaboration between students and university staff members. Disadvantages may include a lack of real decision-making power, as joint committees are often advisory bodies rather than decision-making bodies (Kezar, A. 2014).

7. Co-governance models: Co-governance models involve active and equal student participation in university governance decisions. The advantages of this model are that it allows for significant student participation and a fair distribution of decision-making power. Disadvantages may include additional costs and logistical challenges in maintaining equal student and university staff participation (Sánchez, R. A. 2017).
8. Rotation governance models: Rotation governance models involve regular rotation of students participating in governance bodies. The advantages of this model are that it allows for equal student participation and a fair distribution of decision-making power, as well as greater diversity of perspectives. Disadvantages may include a loss of continuity and stability in decision-making (Trowler, V. 2010).

How far has student participation in university governance in Morocco progressed?

Student participation in university governance is often difficult to find and quantify, as governance practices and structures vary significantly from one university to another. However, according to the expertise report of the Higher Council of Education, Training, and Scientific Research, student participation in university governance is considered one of the main ways to improve the student experience. The report also emphasizes the need to strengthen student



participation in decision-making and develop mechanisms to ensure that student opinions are taken into account.

Under Moroccan law, universities are equipped with governance bodies such as the Board of Institutions and the University Council. These bodies are composed of members elected from among teachers, administrative staff, and students. Students can participate in university governance as elected members of the Board of Institutions and the University Council. They can also participate in advisory committees and working groups on specific issues related to teaching, research, and student life.

In addition, students in Moroccan universities have also formed student organizations such as the National Union of Moroccan Students, which represent student interests and act as intermediaries with university and government authorities. It is important to note that this information is not precise statistics on student participation in university governance but rather general information on governance bodies and participation opportunities for students in Morocco.

In Morocco, the governance of universities is governed by Law No. 01-00 on higher education and its implementing texts. This law establishes a legal framework for the management and governance of universities, as well as for the participation of various stakeholders, including students.

According to the law, each university has several governance bodies, including:

- The Establishment Council: This is the supreme body of the university, responsible for defining the general policy of the institution and approving



the budget and financial statements. The Establishment Council is composed of the institution's leaders, as well as members elected from among teachers, researchers, administrative staff, and students.

- The University Council: It is responsible for defining the pedagogical orientations of the university, approving teaching programs and diplomas, and supervising scientific research. The University Council is composed of members appointed by the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, as well as members elected from among teachers, researchers, administrative staff, and students.
- The Scientific Council: It is responsible for evaluating the quality of scientific research conducted within the university and proposing orientations and means for its development. The Scientific Council is composed of members appointed by the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, as well as members elected from among teachers, researchers, administrative staff, and students.

The law also establishes the participation of students in university governance. Students elect representatives to sit on the University Council and the Establishment Council. In summary, the law on the organization of higher education in Morocco provides for the participation of students in university governance, particularly by involving them in decision-making bodies such as the Establishment and University Councils.

In addition to this, there are other laws and regulations that regulate student participation in university governance, namely:

1. Decree No. 2-11-263, published in 2011, which sets the rules for the functioning and organization of university councils. This decree specifies,



among other things, that university councils must include representatives of student associations.

2. Decree No. 2-09-441, published in 2009, which establishes the procedures for creating and operating student associations. This decree defines the rules regarding the creation, management, and representation of student associations.
3. Decree No. 2-13-258, published in 2013, which sets out the procedures for organizing elections for student representatives in higher education institution councils.
4. Decree No. 2-16-585, published in 2016, which defines the rules for the functioning and organization of regional councils for universities and higher education institutions. This decree specifies, among other things, that regional councils must include representatives of student associations.
5. Ministerial Circular No. 706/99, published in 1999, which outlines the rules for organizing elections to designate student representatives to university councils and other decision-making bodies.
6. Ministerial Circular No. 427/00, published in 2000, which defines the rules regarding the creation and operation of student association offices.
7. Law No. 12-00 on associations, published in 2002, which defines the rules regarding the creation and operation of associations, including student associations.
8. Ministerial Circular No. 5/2017, published in 2017, which outlines the rules for organizing elections to designate student representatives to regional university councils and other decision-making bodies.
9. Ministerial Circular No. 2/2018, published in 2018, which defines the rules regarding the participation of student associations in activities of



higher education institutions and decisions made by university councils and other decision-making bodies.

In summary, these Moroccan legal texts state the rights and obligations of student associations and students regarding participation in university governance and decision-making, and establish the operating and organizational rules of student associations, elections for the appointment of student representatives, and university councils and other decision-making bodies.

Problematic

The participation of students in university governance is a key issue for universities worldwide. Students are an important component of the university community, and their involvement in decision-making can have a significant impact on the quality of teaching, research, and institutional policies.

However, according to a survey conducted by the European Science Foundation in 2019, only 24% of European universities have students represented on the board of directors, while 27% have students on the governing council (ESF, 2019). This raises the question of why universities do not sufficiently value student participation in governance, despite its potentially beneficial impact on the institution and the university community.

Furthermore, students are often the primary beneficiaries of university policies and can bring a unique perspective to decision-making. According to a survey conducted by the University Student Federation of Quebec (FEUQ) in 2016, student participation in university governance can contribute to better communication between students and administration, a better understanding of



student issues and needs, and can improve the quality of teaching and services offered (FEUQ, 2016).

Thus, the central problem of this article will be to understand why student participation in university governance is so low despite its potential advantages, and how this situation could be improved. This question is important for universities, students, researchers, and policymakers as it affects the quality of teaching, research, and institutional management of universities.

Moreover, the importance of student participation in university governance is recognized at the international level. In 2015, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published a recommendation on higher education for cooperation and collaboration among higher education actors, including students. This recommendation emphasizes the importance of student participation in governance and decision-making, as well as the importance of a supportive environment for their participation (UNESCO, 2015).

Despite these recommendations and the potential benefits of student participation in university governance, the reality shows that student participation in institutional decision-making is often limited. This situation raises questions about the factors that hinder student participation, such as institutional culture, the reluctance of university administration to share decision-making power, weak student participation structures, and lack of institutional support for student participation (Chambers, R. (2006)).

In summary, student participation in university governance is a complex issue that raises many questions about the factors that hinder student participation and ways to strengthen it. By analyzing the challenges and opportunities related to



student participation in university governance, this scientific article will seek to provide recommendations for more meaningful student participation in decision-making.

Study hypotheses:

1. Students who are more involved in university governance are more satisfied with their university experience.
2. The hypothesis that students who have opportunities to participate in university governance develop leadership and communication skills that can help them in their future professional lives.
3. The hypothesis that student participation in university governance can help improve the quality of education by providing feedback directly from students themselves.
4. The hypothesis that student participation in university governance can help reduce the number of conflicts between students and university authorities by creating a space for discussion and problem-solving.
5. The hypothesis that students who are involved in university governance have a better understanding of the issues and challenges that their university must address and can thus contribute to finding creative solutions to problems.

Research questions:

1. How is student participation in university governance related to student satisfaction with their university experience?
2. How does student participation in university governance influence the development of leadership and communication skills among students?



3. To what extent can student participation in university governance contribute to improving the quality of education in Moroccan universities?
4. How can student participation in university governance help resolve conflicts between students and university authorities?
5. How can student participation in university governance help students better understand the issues and challenges that their university must face, and find creative solutions to solve them?

Research Methodology For our study,

we have chosen the hypothetico-deductive methodology which involves the formulation of explicit hypotheses in order to test them on our field of investigation which is the Mohamed V University in Rabat, with approximately 88,000 registered students in 18 institutions. To achieve this, we designed a questionnaire consisting of 22 questions. To determine the sample size representative of our population, we used Cochran's sampling formula: $n = (Z^2 * p * (1-p)) / (E^2)$ where: n is the required sample size; Z is the z-score corresponding to the desired level of confidence (for a 95% confidence level, $Z = 1.96$); p is the estimated proportion of the population with a given characteristic; E is the tolerated margin of error (as a proportion). Thus, for a 95% confidence level, a margin of error of 5%, and a population of 88,000 students, we would have: $n = (1.96^2 * 0.5 * (1-0.5)) / (0.05^2)$ $n = 384.16$ Therefore, the size of our sample is approximately 385 students.

Results and Discussions

The questionnaire was distributed according to the number of students in each institution, in order to ensure fairness in the representation of each institution.



No significant difference between the two genders was detected for the different representative organs.

The results showed that only 51% of students are informed about the governance bodies of the university, with the majority of them coming from institutions with limited student numbers (regulated access institutions). In addition, the vast majority of students (81%) have never attended a meeting of the institution's council or any other university governance body, and those who report having participated in a governance body do not feel at all involved in the discussions and decisions made.

This may be concerning because university governance should be an area of interest for students, given that the decisions made have a direct impact on their university life. However, these results could be explained by a lack of information and communication from the university to students about governance issues.

Regarding the question of whether students should have more decision-making power within university governance bodies, the majority of students surveyed answered affirmatively, with 70% believing that students should have more decision-making power. This may reflect a demand for more active student participation in university governance.

Regarding students' confidence in university governance bodies, the results show that 57% of students surveyed have some confidence in the ability of these bodies to make decisions that benefit students. However, this leaves a significant percentage of students (43%) who do not trust these bodies, highlighting the need to improve trust and transparency in university governance.



Regarding student participation in campaigns for student elections for university governance bodies, the results show that 27% of students surveyed were involved to some extent or actively in a campaign. While this is not a majority, it may reflect a demand for more active student participation in university governance.

These results suggest that student engagement in university governance may vary across universities, but that the problem of low student participation and engagement remains a significant challenge to be addressed. This may require greater communication and awareness-raising efforts to inform students about governance bodies and opportunities for participation, as well as measures to improve accessibility and inclusivity of governance bodies for all students.

Regarding the question of which communication channels students prefer to be informed about events and student elections for university governance bodies, the results indicate that students have varied preferences, but email is the most popular communication method, followed by social media and the university website.

The survey results highlight low student participation in university governance, as only 12% of respondents reported meeting with an administrator to discuss governance or university policies. Among those who participated, the majority did so at university-organized meetings rather than individual or student association meetings. This low participation may be related to various obstacles, including lack of information or transparency from the administration, lack of time or availability, as well as the complexity of participation processes.

Thus, to facilitate student participation in university governance, several measures can be put in place. First, it is necessary to establish greater clarity and



transparency about participation processes, so that students can better understand the issues and objectives of these meetings. Second, flexible participation schedules can be implemented to allow students to balance their academic obligations and engagement in university governance. In addition, training on participation processes can be offered to students to enable them to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to be active and effective participants. Finally, incentives such as university credits for participation can be proposed to encourage students to engage more in university governance.

In summary, it is important to find ways to encourage student participation in university governance, as this will lead to better consideration of their needs and concerns. Students are a key actor in the university, and their engagement can contribute to improving the quality of teaching, research, and services offered.

The results also showed that the majority of students surveyed have never met with members of their university administration to discuss governance issues or university policies. However, some have had the opportunity to do so at meetings organized by the university or student associations. The main challenges or obstacles that prevent students from participating in university governance are the lack of information or transparency on the part of the administration and the lack of time or availability. To facilitate their participation, students suggested having more clarity and transparency on participation processes, more flexibility for participation schedules, and training on participation processes.

Regarding the question of whether students have ever encountered difficulties in making their voices heard in university governance bodies, the answers were mixed. Some have stated that they have encountered difficulties repeatedly,



while others have never had such difficulties. The reasons for these difficulties were mainly related to a lack of speaking time or representativeness, a lack of listening or consideration on the part of other members of governance bodies, or a lack of preparation or skills to argue their point of view.

" ... many debates that take place within the institution's council are sometimes excessively informative, very long, and do not allow people to make contributions; this discourages participation. Many councils spend two hours informing, informing, and informing again on things that could be written on a piece of paper (...). I also think that another element that discourages participation is that sometimes they talk about very specific aspects that are new to students, the first contact they have with these debates is the papers they receive when the debate is convened and then the subsequent debate at the council; if participation is required, the opinion must be generated in advance, information provided on how it affects them ... "

This explanation can help us understand why there is low student participation in certain governing bodies (institutional councils). We must keep this in mind if we want to generate the necessary changes in approach to facilitate student involvement and participation. However, this argument does not explain why it is difficult to find delegates and representatives for councils that deal with issues more directly related to teaching and therefore much closer to students' interests and fields of knowledge.

Finally, the question of whether university governance should be more inclusive in order to better represent the diversity of students and their needs has also elicited varied responses. The majority of respondents supported the idea that



university governance should be more inclusive, either entirely or to some extent. However, a minority stated that they did not believe this was necessary.

The results of this survey show that students are interested in university governance and want to participate more in decision-making processes. The barriers to participation are mainly related to a lack of information and time, as well as a lack of representativeness. Students also expressed a desire for university governance to be more inclusive in order to better represent the diversity of students and their needs. These results could be useful for university administrations to improve student participation and involvement in university governance.

During this study, we found that students believe that low participation at the university is due to a lack of information and ignorance about how the university works. This suggests that the university as a whole may lack strategies for understanding and connecting with its students. It is therefore essential to consider how the university can adapt to this evolution of society and the student body. In addition, greater student participation in decision-making and functional processes requires a change in behavior and perception on the part of academic staff and leadership teams. It is necessary to distribute power more fairly and promote participatory mechanisms to ensure the representation of all voices, for example, by increasing student representation quotas or decentralizing decision-making. Ultimately, this will contribute to creating a collaborative and intercultural culture that promotes alliances between the various stakeholders of the university.

How to encourage student participation in university governance?



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Universities could consider strengthening their efforts to ensure the quality of information provided to students. This involves clarifying the rules and regulations of the various councils and governing bodies involved in the functioning of the university, as well as providing more numerous and accurate information on student rights (Kezar, A., Chambers, T. C., & Burkhardt, J. C. (2019), ENQA (2018)). Teachers responsible for managing studies play a crucial role in encouraging student participation in various university programs, as well as in university life in general (Kahu, E. R. (2013)). It is also important to adopt a positive attitude at all organizational levels towards student proposals and to promote trust-based working relationships with their representatives. In addition, spaces and times should be provided for student representatives to inform and consult with students to improve communication and the quality of information provided.

According to Kuh et al. (2007), awareness is a key aspect of student participation. Universities can organize information sessions for students, awareness workshops, events and conferences to explain the importance of student participation in university governance.

Transparent and regular communication is also important to encourage student participation in university governance. Students should be informed of decisions made and ongoing decision-making processes. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2021), communication is a key factor in encouraging student participation in university governance. Universities can use different methods to communicate with students, such as newsletters, information meetings, websites, and social media.



Offering student leadership opportunities can also encourage student participation in university governance. Students who hold leadership positions often have more opportunities to participate in decision-making processes and influence policies.

According to Tinto (2017), student leadership opportunities are an important factor in encouraging student participation in university life. Universities can offer student leadership positions in clubs, organizations, and committees.

Establishing open and inclusive dialogue is also important for encouraging student participation in university governance. Students should feel comfortable expressing their opinions and concerns.

According to Cook-Sather (2017), establishing open and inclusive dialogue is a key factor in encouraging student participation. Universities can organize open discussions, focus groups, and forums to allow students to speak up.

By using these methods, universities can encourage active student participation in university governance and create an environment where student voices are heard and considered in decisions that affect them.

Conclusion

Firstly, it was highlighted that student participation is regulated by laws and decrees in Morocco, as well as specific bodies. Students have rights and responsibilities in the decision-making process. The modalities of participation include forms such as elections and consultation, as well as participatory governance practices. The successes and challenges of student participation in university governance at the University Mohamed V of Rabat were explored.



It was also noted that student participation in university governance has many benefits for democratizing higher education and developing society. It gives students a voice in decisions that directly concern them and involves them in the establishment of policies and projects. This can also help promote transparency, accountability, and democratic participation at all levels of the university.

However, it was also mentioned that student participation in university governance faces challenges and limitations, such as the lack of resources and student involvement. To continue improving student participation in university governance in the future, several proposals were put forward, including research into best practices for student participation, training students on university governance and participation, as well as advocating for greater recognition and support for student participation in university governance.

Ultimately, the article calls for reflection on the importance of student participation in university governance and how it can contribute to democratizing higher education and developing society. It also highlights the need to continue research, training, and advocacy to support and strengthen student participation in university governance at the University Mohamed V of Rabat and elsewhere.

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