# Promoting Inclusivity And Diversity In Moroccan Higher Education: An Evaluation Of Internationalization Policies And Practices At Mohammed 1st University

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**Abstract**
*Recently, the internationalization of Higher Education has gained a momentum as higher education institutions strive to prepare students for a globalized world. Nonetheless, this process is not without challenges, especially when it comes to the effective implementation of the internationalization policies and practices. This effective implementation lies in the promotion of inclusivity and diversity within higher education institutions. The present study highlights the case of a Moroccan Higher Education Institution, that of Mohammed 1st University, to meticulously examine how the policies and practices of this institution are attuned to the diverse needs of students in culturally and linguistically diverse environments. The aim of this paper is, on the one hand, to discuss the strategic state of the internationalization of Moroccan Higher Education and, on the other hand, to evaluate whether or not the existing policies and practices of Mohammed 1st University align with the principles and strategies of inclusion and intercultural communication. Further is to assess the extent to which these strategies are being effectively implemented. In fact, these strategies are required to meet the diverse needs of students from different cultures and backgrounds. Based on ministerial policies with regard to Mohammed 1st University's websites- brochures and social media posts, the current study examines these policies and communicative practices using qualitative content analysis. The results highlight the internationalization practices and the effective implementation of the internationalization policies by Mohammed 1st University, and they identified the areas of improvement, especially in the areas related to students' inclusion, intercultural competence, and global engagement.*
*Keywords: Internationalization, Moroccan Higher Education, Inclusion, Intercultural Communication Strategies, Ministerial Policies, Communicative Practices.*

## I.     Introduction

In the contemporary era, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have undergone several changes due to the increasing demands of the external environment (governments, society, organizations) and the needs of global knowledge society (Bess and Dee, 2007). In this regard, internationalization of higher education is crystalised as an innovative response to these needs and demands. Thus, it moves from being a marginal activity in higher education institutions to a key point in reform agenda in higher education (de Wit and Albatch,2020).

All these reasons lay the groundwork for internationalization to emerge and be understood as a strategic plan to be followed by HEIs. This strategic plan becomes a necessity to face the complexities of the marketization and the global economic competition, as there is a huge emphasis given to world university ranking, and the international mobility of academics around the globe (Kim,2009). In the same regard, HEIs strive to improve their performance in several areas related to education, research and services in order to achieve higher ranking globally.

Internationalization of higher education involves various activities and practices such as fostering exchange and mobility programmes, encouraging international collaborations as well as integrating a global driven curriculum. These practices are believed to enhance students' experiences and expertise and prepare them for a globalized job market.

Bearing the aforementioned insights in mind, internationalization process has several challenges especially when it comes to the effective implementation of internationalization policies and practices. It is of paramount importance to evaluate the effectiveness of these policies and practices in terms of promoting

inclusivity and diversity in higher education. The intercultural dimension of internationalization should be addressed carefully. It involves reducing uncertainty and raising cultural awareness especially in academic cross-cultural encounters.

Morocco, as an African country with its undeniable interest in internationalization, provides a suitable context to examine the implementation of the internationalization policies and practices in Moroccan higher education. By looking into the internationalization experience of the Moroccan university under study, we can highlight the strategies and challenges of implementing the policies and practices in tandem with inclusivity and intercultural communication requirements. The current study will contribute to the existing scholarship of higher education internationalization by providing insights to policymakers, stakeholders and academics to reconstruct a more inclusive and diversified environment with HEIs.

This study aims to address the following research questions:
- What are the key initiatives and practices implemented by Mohammed 1st University to promote internationalization?
- How do internationalization policies and practices of Mohammed 1st University impact inclusivity and intercultural communication within the university?

By addressing these research questions, this study aims to assess and examine the extent to which inclusivity and intercultural communication strategies are being effectively implemented throughout the process of internationalization.

## II.    Literature Review
### A Brief Background of Internationalization of Higher Education

Internationalization is not a new concept, but it has its roots in the Medieval age. Historically speaking, universities were perceived as "universitas" in the early medieval Europe as it emphasised the universals of lingua franca and the mobility of academics and ideas. The word "university" constitutes of the word "universe" which refers to the universal knowledge that students and scholars can obtain in an international space like university (Strielkowski,2021). Thus, the university has the mission of creating and adding to the global knowledge society from the very beginning.  This conception still lies in the idea of internationalization. Nonetheless, the reasons that lead to its emergence in the post-medieval HEIs as well as the discourses that reconstruct it are new. (Strielkoswski,2021)

The reasons that lead the way to the reconstruction of internationalization in higher education recently are as follows. First of all, the academic market place which has become more cross-cultural and more international thanks to the influence of the economic globalization.  Here, internationalization is both a result of globalization and a factor that facilitates it (Strielkowski,2021).  In the same vein, this marketization of higher education is closely connected to the emphasis that are put on academic mobility. Nowadays, governments and policymakers construct several measures to ease the mobility of students and academics through the implementation of several programmes including Erasmus, Tempting and Fulbright programs.

The second issue related to the emergence of online and E-learning approaches, which has led to the need for internationalizing of higher education in order to keep up with the unescapable digitalization trend. Thanks to the web-based learning, students and teachers around the globe are able to participate in several courses, which obviously increases their opportunities to interact and exchange thoughts and insights at the international level. Online and E-learning forms eliminates the traditional requirement for face-to-face meetings and physical academic mobility (Amirault, Visser,2010). It also reaches a large pool of diversified learners and scholars from different parts of the world, and creates a global virtual-based space for learning, research and insightful interactions. The successful of this digitalized version of learning pivots around the use of a common language, namely English since it is considered an international language or academic lingua franca (Bennett,2013).

Last not least, the urgent need to align the internationalization of HEIs with the third mission of higher education, which is related to the contribution of HEIs to the development of the economic, social and cultural aspects of society (Jones, et al.,2021). Therefore, internationalization is considered as a major policy agenda in the global knowledge society (Tsuruta, 2013). The internationalized HEIs enable its cadre of researchers and scholars to access to and produce knowledge as a contribution to the global knowledge society.  This can be observed in the HEIs' pursuit of competition and reputation as reflected in global university rankings.

After contextualizing the emergence of internationalization at higher education, it is of paramount importance to define it thoroughly. Internationalization at higher education is referred to as "an intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all the students and staff to make a meaningful contribution to society" (de Wit, et al.,2015:29). In other words, internationalization is embedded in the three missions of higher education as a strategic process, it is not a goal itself but a means to an end (de Wit, Albatch,2020).

HEIs can be seen as international if a few internationalization factors are present (Caruana, 2011), these factors are as follows: HEIs are internationalized through the presence of international students, international collaborations and partnerships, internationally accredited programs and courses, international academics and teachers, together with the opportunity to learn foreign languages (Zelenkova&Hanesova,2021).

There are two facets of internationalization, one is defined as "internationalization abroad" as it highlights cross-border systems of education, including international projects, partnerships and academics mobility. While the second facet is called "internationalization at home", which is more curriculum-based since it focuses on practices and activities that promote cross-cultural understanding and global engagement (Suguku, 2022).

The scope of internationalization at higher education has extended to go beyond the first facet of internationalization that mainly focuses on academic mobility, to underline the practices related to fostering interculturality and cross-cultural understanding (Zelenkova&Hanesova,2021). These activities are of paramount significance as they create a multicultural environment in the realm of HEIs, and they prepare learners for a more globalized job market in which intercultural competence and skills are a must.

The degree of integrating internationalization in HEIs is not only reflected in top-down policies that stipulate academic mobility, promoting international collaboration and internationalized curriculum, but also in practices that integrate a multicultural, multilingual and a global dimension with HEIs in order to promote a sense of global citizenship among learners (Yemini,2014, in Zelenkova&Hanesova,2021). In the same vein, the bottom-up practices of professors and researchers 'teams should be emphasized so as to create an intercultural and transnational learning environment, and to meet the different needs of culturally diverse learners and communities (Zelenkova, Hanesova, 2021). Little attention is devoted to the aforementioned practices. For this reason, the current study attempts to bridge the gap.

## Internationalization at Moroccan Higher Education

The Moroccan higher education system has undergone several reforms and changes over the course of its history, these reforms are closely aligned with the changes in economic and socio-cultural environments. Prior to the 20th century, the HEIs, mainly universities, focused on meeting the national and regional socio-economic needs. During the first decade of the 21st century, Moroccan higher education has witnessed a turning point thanks to the enactment of the National Education and Training Charter. The latter aimed to initiate the educational, administrative, and financial autonomy of higher education (UNIMED,2021).

Higher education in Morocco is regulated by law 01.00 under the responsibility of the state. Furthermore, the aforementioned law established committees to evaluate the Moroccan higher education system, with the aim to foster quality, competitiveness, and diversity of training programmes and research in order to meet the job market demands (UNIMED,2021).

The policies strongly emphasize internationalization as it is considered as a pillar in the strategic vision of the Ministry of the Higher Education. At the level of the ministry, a directorate of cooperation and partnership was created to promote, strengthen, and monitor as well as evaluate bilateral and multilateral cooperation programmes (Moroccan Decree 2-14-208, 2014).

The Ministry is currently working on establishing strategies so as to strengthen the current international collaborations and partnerships as well as academic mobility in the fields of higher education and research, and to consolidate the South-South cooperation (UNIMED,2021). These strategies depict the shift towards regionalization and South-South cooperation. Here, this shift shows the transition from the "copying and pasting" of the western paradigm of internationalization to the tendency of vertical internationalization (Jones, Wit,2014).

At the level of HEIs, all organizational charts constitute a vice-vector or deputy director for external relations and cooperation. Thus, "even when there is no structure dedicated to internationalization within the institutions, there is still a person who takes care of these aspects (UNIMED,2021:85). The Moroccan HEIs emphasis the necessity of an international strategy including increasing the number of courses delivered in English and Spanish with the intention to attract foreign students, facilitating inbound and outbound mobility, and fostering international partnerships and collaborations (UNIMED,2021).

The significance of internationalization strategy lies in its inclusion as a key element in the development plan that a dean or the head of the university should prepare. This development plan includes the university activities such as internationalization strategies, cooperation and partnerships initiatives (UNIMED,2021).

In terms of scientific research, National policies promote international bilateral and multilateral cooperations. These cooperations open the door for Moroccan researchers and academics to share their experiences with researchers from around the globe. Moreover, they help them to have access to international scientific centres and laboratories, and benefit from international funding of research (ENSUUP, 2023). Bearing this in mind, Morocco co-signed nearly 50% of its indexed publications with foreign scholars in comparison with the early 90s (Chroqui et al.,2017).

Concerning the language of instruction, the ministry enacts the 51/17 Law that authorises the use of foreign languages in training programmes. This attempt is essential to internationalize Moroccan higher education, it attracts foreign learners to pursuit their studies in Morocco and it enables Moroccan students to benefit from a plurilingualism education (UNIMED, 2021).

Another important characteristic of internationalization in HEIs is the E-learning forms. Moroccan HEIs have made remarkable strides in E-learning thanks to their participation in some CBHE projects and the launch of key MOOCs. In addition, greater importance is being given to ICT as Moroccan HEIs policies that promote innovative teaching technologies and methodologies including E-learning (ICMED,2023).

Regarding cooperations and bilateral partnerships, Institutions are historically linked to Europe, especially France. More than half of Moroccan bilateral cooperations have been signed with France. Nonetheless, there is a gradual networking with other countries such as Asia, Latin America, Scandinavia, and United Kingdom (UNIMED,2021).

For Academic mobility, Moroccan HEIs has hosted around 20,000 students from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Moroccan ministry has established scholarships for these foreign students. 70% of foreign students came from Africa, 21% from the Middle East, and only 3% from Europe. As for outbound, around 70,000 Moroccan students are studying abroad (UNIMED,2021).

Significantly, Morocco is considered as the first partner of the ICM Mobility programme in Africa, the 2nd in the South Mediterranean region and the 8th worldwide, out of a total of 135 partner countries from around the globe (Erasmus Plus, 2023). These numbers signify the efforts of the Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education and the Moroccan HEIs to implement and promote internationalization, Moreover, HEIs reforms underline the importance of the intercultural dimension and the linguistic diversity in the post-secondary education curricula (ICMED,2023). Admittedly, more studies are needed to be conducted in this area to examine the intercultural dimension of the Moroccan higher education curricula.

**Internationalization in Higher Education, Interculturality and Inclusion, Any Interplay?**

Certainly, diversity is a key aspect in internationalization because it is closely linked to inclusion and cross-cultural understanding. At higher education domain, Inclusion "should be a tassel of regional cooperation resulting in cultural dialogue, mutual understanding and a reduction of social tensions (UNIMED,2021:137). In a diverse environment, inclusion is needed in order to reach the missions and goals of higher education and meet the diverse needs of students from various cultural backgrounds.

As it is examined earlier, the policy framework of HEIs has intended to provide a roadmap for the internationalization and has positioned it as a transformational driver at higher education. However, inclusion and intercultural competence are overshadowed in internationalization scholarship despite their significance.

The major driving force behind internationalization policies and practices is the economic position within the global knowledge and the global job market (de Wit and Dea,2020). Therefore, the main aim is purely neo-liberal. The focus on global ranking, branding and academic mobility is shaped by the sway of globalization (Guimaras, et al., 2019). Although the premises and characteristics of internationalization at higher education are undeniably connected to inclusion and interculturality, more practices and actions are required to promote inclusion and diversity in the realm of HEIs.

The pillars of internationalization contribute to the interculturality of individuals involved in the internationalization practices. Intercultural interactions occur in daily basis with international students and academics, who interact with local ones in international HEIs. These interactions necessitate cultural awareness and intercultural competence to create a healthy learning environment.

Inclusion practices in HEIs are of paramount significance since they address the inclusion and exclusion boundaries and the barriers experienced by marginalized and under-representative groups (Claeys-Kulik, et al.,2019). It is necessary to transform the institutional systems to more responsive ones so as to meet the demands and needs of diverse plural population (Johnstone& Edward, 2019). As noted above, the current internationalization policies and practices are perceived inadequate to include and engage all the players across the university in the internationalization process (Janebova and Johnstone,2020, in Guillén Yparrea & Ramirez-Montaya,2023). As a matter of fact, higher education leaders should highlight universal and plural inclusion (Johnston,2022)

It should be stated until now, the pillars of internationalization have been realized and implemented by both Global North and Global South countries. However, there is still a way to go in raising awareness for shared responsibility and the need to create a sense of global citizenship (Guillén Yparrea&Ramirez-Montaya,2023). For this reason, developing intercultural competency is needed to be aware of a variety of different worldviews and to develop a behavioural flexibility to face these intercultural differences (Schwarzenthal et al., 2019).

According to Yparrea and Ramirez-Montaya (2023), three intercultural competencies are essential for preparing students and academics for intercultural collaborations. The first competence is intercultural communication, which refers to engaging in a meaningful and effective communication with others despite the

cultural differences (Leedz-Huriaitz,2017). The second competence is about intercultural sensitivity, which highlights the strategies of understanding and empathy concerning differences and difficulties in cross-cultural encounters (Swartz et al.,2020). Last but not least, intercultural responsibility includes a shared commitment to solidarity, critical cooperation, and respectful dialogues among individuals with numerous languages, cultures, epistemologies, and ethical principles (Guilherme, 2020).

So far this area appears to be underdeveloped, the current study attempts to explore the reflection of the inclusion and interculturality practices while implementing the internationalization strategies in the realm of the University under study.

## III. Methodology

The current study aims to provide an exploration or an insight into the internationalization policies and practices of the university under study, and the extent to which these policies and practices promote inclusion and intercultural communication strategies. To pave the way for this analysis, it would be useful to explore this research area across a range of interpretive paradigm, conceptualizing the data gathered at a qualitative level.

Qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because a more-in-depth understanding of the internationalization policies and practices in Mohammed 1st University is required, in relation to inclusion and intercultural communication strategies.

**Research Design**
**Case Study as a Research Design**

The current study employs case study as a research design. It can be regarded as an exploratory single case study, and an appropriate research design in the case of asking "how" and "what" questions (Yin,2009), which is the case of the current study. Moreover, it explores a "real life" bounded system (Cresswell,2013). In this study, Mohammed 1st University is the defined system to be put under scrutiny.

**The Case Study**

As mentioned earlier, Mohammed 1st University is considered as the case of this study. The reasons behind choosing this HEI are numerous. The first reason is connected to the portrait of the Moroccan Higher Education institution. As for the second reason, it has to do with both accessibility and familiarity; the researchers belong to this institution, and they are familiar with the institution which influenced the data gathering, analysis and interpretation processes positively. The last reason is that it enables the researcher to gain a holistic picture of the implementation of internationalization strategies in alliance with inclusion and interculturality.

Mohammed 1st University was founded in 1978 in Oujda, Morocco. It is constituted of nine institutions, which are: Higher School of Technology (ESTO), National School of Applied Sciences of Oujda (ENSAO), National School of Business and Management (ENCGO), Higher School of Education and Training (ENS), Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Legal, Economic and Social Sciences, and Multidisciplinary Faculty of Nador. There are about 77886 students, 1000 Professors, and 459 administrative and technical staff.

Mohammed 1st University aims to meet the students' needs in terms of education, training and research. Its goal is to contribute to the development of the Orient Region in particular and the whole country in general. It collaborates with its socio-economic environment through projects with local businesses.

The University also emphasizes internationalization as it is mentioned in its official website. It promotes international collaborations and agreements with higher education institutions, agencies and organizations. The Research department is in charge of these international partnerships such as scientific collaboration, development project, academic mobility. Furthermore, out of all the students enrolled in this University, only 0,7% are international according to the statistics of Moroccan public higher education in the academic year 2021-2022.

**Methods**

The present study uses official policy documents related to internationalization of Moroccan higher education. Mohammed 1st university is a Moroccan public University and it is under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education. For this reason, the policies and official documents that regulate internationalization process are enacted by the Ministry. They are top-down official documents. These documents are: the Strategic Vision (2015-2030) and the Ministry Action Plan (2017-2021).

The current study uses publicly available data. The data sources are Ministerial official documents, e-brochures and posts shared on University's official website and Facebook's page. The researchers use a manual approach for collecting and analysing the data, and they generate a codebook to select the appropriate data. The code book constitutes of the following keywords: *international, partnership, collaboration, foreign students, intercultural, international students, universities ranking, global, African, E-learning, internationalization.*

The policy documents are analysed using content analysis. The latter is" a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use" (Krippendorf, 2004:18). In the same line, Downe-Wamboldt (1992) states that content analysis is more than a counting process, but it is a method that aims to connect the results with its context. It is significant to analyse the policy documents of internationalization of Moroccan higher education using three aspects, which are: context, text and consequence. Policy context is related to the driving forces that lead a policy to come into being (the context was examined in the literature review section). Policy text is the content of the policy and the subject of analytical activity. Last but not least, policy consequence which is related to the way in which a policy implemented. In this phase, the researchers explores and evaluate the effectiveness of internationalization policies and how they were implemented by the University under study (Cardno,2018).

Put it differently, the e-brochures and posts that depict internationalization practices are collected and analysed in accordance with inclusion and intercultural communication premises. Here, the researchers examine whether the University's internationalization efforts and practices adequately include all students into the process, and address intercultural strategies and competences needed to encounter the intercultural conflicts and difficulties.

Moreover, social media data and visual media are used in this study. Facebook posts and E-brochures related to the internationalization activities are collected via Mohammed 1st University's official Facebook page and official website. Social media platforms can be regarded as textual corpora (Andreotta et al.,2019). Through them, qualitative researchers gain access to a massive array of content. The researchers focus on a subsample of data, specifically posts that were posted and shared between the years 2022-2023. The content of these posts is translated because most of it was written in Arabic and French.

After gathering the data, the researchers familiarize themselves with the data through reading the transcribed texts and the content of policies and the University's official website, Facebook posts, e-brochures and announcements to obtain a sense of a whole, before fragmenting them into smaller meaning units. These smaller meaning units constitute of insights to answer the research questions (Graneheim and Lundman,2004). They are labeled with a coding system to reduce any cognitive change during the analysis process, and to maximize reliability (Morse and Richards,2002). After that, the researchers categorize the codes into themes.

# IV. Results

### R1: What are the Key Initiatives and Practices Implemented by Mohammed 1st University to Promote Internationalization?

The key initiatives and practices implemented by Mohammed 1st University to promote internationalization are guided by the recommendations and objectives of the Strategic Vision (2015-2030) and the Ministerial Action Plan (2017-2021) which are building bridges of cooperation and exchange of expertise regionally and internationally, highlighting the position of Morocco as a regional pole of higher education, scientific research and innovation, attracting more international students especially from African and Arab countries, promoting E-learning, facilitating the mobility of students and researchers globally, familiarizing with good practices and international experiences as well as international standards, and integrating in the knowledge society and economy.

**International Conferences and Symposiums**

Mohammed 1st University organized countless international conferences and symposiums. They were held on an international scale in order to bring together scholars, researchers and representatives from different parts of the globe. The following table represents the international conferences that were organized or co-organized by Mohammed 1st University between the years 2022 and 2023. An example is provided here: the practices that actively contribute to the internationalization process.

| International Conferences | Year |
|---|---|
| International Conference on Materials& Environment Science &Exhibition for Science (20 countries participated in this conference). | 2023 |
| International Conference on E-learning and Smart Engineering Systems: Computing Technologies and Pedagogical Engineering. | 2023 |
| International Conference on the Book of Jacques Rodet, an Expert of Digital Learning, entitled as Point de Vue sur le Digital learning. | 2023 |
| International Conference on Literature in Sharing: Production and Reception of Text Across Cultural Borders. | 2023 |
| International Conference about Artificial Intelligence and Law. | 2023 |
| International Symposium about Scientific Research in Management: Applied research in Management: reality and perspectives. | 2023 |
| International Conference Organized by the University Center of Pedagogical Innovation and Digital Learning under the Theme" How to Motivate the Online Learner?" the key speaker is professor Bruno De Liévre, Mons University. | 2023 |
| International Conference on Intercultural Communication and Post/DE-colonial Critiques across Disciplines and Discourses. | 2022 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Lectures for PhD. Students about Energy, Environment and Smart Systems ( As a part of Erasmus Plus Program, Mohammed 1st University and Zaghreb University-Croatia co-organized these lectures). | 2022 |
| International Conference organized by the University Center of Pedagogical Innovation and Digital Learning under the theme "How to Motivate the Online Learner?" The key speaker is professor Bruno De Liévre, Mons University. | 2022 |
| International Seminar on Football (Soccer) and Politics. | 2022 |
| International Conference on Environmental Education. | 2022 |
| International Conference on Environmental Humanities: Ecofeminism, Environmental justice and Eco-health. | 2022 |
| International Conference on "Within the Realm of Law: The Question of Witchcraft. | 2022 |
| The 2nd Edition of the International Conference entitled as The Dictionary and Institutionalization: Theoretical and Practical Methodologies". | 2022 |
| International Congress on Educational Research Materials Science& Engineering. | 2022 |
| The First International Conference on Intercultural Communicative Competence in Higher Education: Prospects and Challenges. | 2022 |
| Conference entitled as From the Neolithic Revolution to the Anthropocene? the key speaker is Jean-Paul Demoule (University institute of France& Paris University). | 2022 |
| Conference on Migration and Ideology: Xenophobia: the Case of France, the key speaker is Pr. Yves Charbit ( Paris University in association with Oxford University). | 2022 |
| The International Conference on Usage of Digital Technology in Universities: Perceptions and Innovative Practices. | 2022 |
| The 5th International Conference on Materials &Environmental Science. | 2022 |

**Table 1: The International Conferences and Symposiums Organized by Mohammed 1st University.**

As it is examined in the table above, several international conferences are organized to collaborate and attract experts and researchers from different cultures. International conferences are considered as a significant opportunity for students to establish valuable connections with scholars and researchers from different cultures and countries, especially for students who cannot engage in academic mobility activities.

Another significant issue is related to the way announcements and e-brochures include the names of foreign scholars and the flags of the countries involved in these international conferences. It enhances the diversity and the global representation of the conferences. Additionally, displaying flags of the countries involved can serve as visual cues to represent the multinational nature of the conference and promote inclusivity. The following figure underlines this issue.



**Figure1: International Conferences and Study Days Announcements**

As a matter of fact, attending and participating in these international conferences by professors and students help them honing their intercultural communication skills and broadening their cross-cultural understanding and knowledge.

**International Partnerships and Collaborations:**

In accordance with the Ministerial Action Strategy (2017-2022) and the Strategic Vision (2015-2030), Mohammed 1st University consolidates its cooperation and collaboration with European Union countries, and highlights new geographical horizons such as South-South agreements and collaborations. The following quote

was written by the University president and shared by the Facebook page of the University, it highlights the significance of the international partnerships and collaborations in the leadership plan.

"It was a pleasure hosting the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) team from the departments of Clinical Informatics, School of Medicine, and Biomedical Engineering this week. Together, we organized the first ever workshop on the Introduction to Clinical Informatics for our medical students, residents, and faculty at the College of Medicine and Pharmacy in Oujda. Clinical informatics and biomedical informatics are at the intersection of medicine and technology. Clinical informatics has been adopted in advanced hospitals and universities throughout the United States of America to respond to the growing need of hospitals for doctor technologists. The University of Mohammed 1st in Oujda will be the first university in the region, Morocco and Africa to adopt the clinical informatics curriculum and promote research in this important field within our College of Medicine and Pharmacy.

I am also pleased to announce that during the UIC group's visit, we also signed multiple agreements between the two universities to collaborate on multiple levels, including but not limited to: student and professors exchange, curriculum development, internships, and research."

The following table indicates the countries and the universities with which Mohammed 1st University signed international cooperation agreements. Hence, the University also collaborated with several other countries.

| Academic Partner | Date of Signature | Country/ Region |
|---|---|---|
| Higher Education Institution of Liege Province. | 27/09/2019 | |
| Louvain Higher Education Institution in Hainaut (HELHa). | 19/07/2019 | Belgium |
| The Association of Researchers and Researcher-Teacher Laureates of Morocco in Cote-d'Ivoire (ASCECLMA-CI). | 19/11/2018 | Cote D'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) |
| African Muslim University of Cote D'Ivoire. | 19/10/2018 | |
| National Institute for Astronomical and Geophysical Research. | 27/06/2022 | Egypt |
| Senghor University. | 16/10/2018 | |
| Europia Institute. | 20/06/2022 | France |
| Global AI Ethic Institute (GAIEI). | 20/06/2022 | |
| University Agency of the Francophonie. | 28/05/2022 | |
| Grenoble Alpes University (UGA). | 01/03/2022 | |
| School of Advanced Studies in Motivational Psychology-Paris and the Human Sciences Academy in Samara (EHEPM) | 30/08/2021 | |
| Franche Comté University. | 05/08/2021 | |
| School of Advanced Studies in Psychology. | 21/02/2020 | |
| University Hospital Center of Bordeaux. | 04/03/2019 | |
| University of Connected Knowledge-USC and Al-MOULTAQA Foundation. | 24/11/2018 | |
| Littoral Cote d'Opale University (ULCO) | 16/10/2018 | |
| Paris 13 University. | 23/04/2018 | |
| Lille University. | 23/03/2018 | |
| Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University. | 2018 | |
| Helmhotz Zentrum Dredden-Rossendorf (Research Center). | 20/07/2022 | Germany |
| Association of Moroccan Students and Graduates in Germany. | 20/06/2022 | |
| Al Aqaba University of Technology. | 2018 | Jordan |
| Turin University. | 06/09/2019 | Italy |
| Ouest Africa Universities (Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, and Senegal). | 2018 | Ouest Africa (Region) |
| Evora University. | 26/05/2021 | Portugal |
| Aveiro University. | 11/10/2018 | |
| Kazan Islamic University. | 07/06/2018 | Russia |
| Cancer Preventive Material Development Center, College of Korean Medicine, Kyung Hee University. | 03/02/2022 | South Korea |
| Education Office of the Spain Embassy. | 07/04/2021 | Spain |
| Imedea Energia Foundation | 21/02/2021 | |
| Catalan Institute of Human Paleoecology and Social Evolution (IPHES). | 07/04/2020 | |
| International Polytechnic Group Tunisia | 17/01/2022 | Tunisia |
| Inonou University-Malatya | 10/10/2019 | Turkey |
| American Moroccan Alliance (AMA) | 20/03/2022 | USA |

**Table 2: The International Partnerships and Cooperations of Mohammed 1st University**

As indicated in the table, the cooperation agreements that are signed by the University and France's ones have the largest share in comparison with collaborations with institutions from other continents such as Asia and Africa. This issue is related to the historical ties between Morocco and France.

**Academic Mobility**

Mohammed 1st University encourages academic mobility. It shared several e-brochures and posts related to academic mobility of students and researchers, and provides them with information about international scholarships and eligibility criteria (see figure2).



**Figure 2: An announcement about scholarships for Moroccan students willing to study in the United Kingdome.**

Along the same line, the University organized Erasmus Info Days. This event was facilitated by the national coordinator of ERASMUS in Morocco. A Facebook post was shared along with pictures to highlight the success of that event. The students were fully engaged in the ERASMUS Days as the sessions included informative and enriching discussions in relation to Academic Mobility. Those activities exemplify the university's commitment to Internationalization, and its efforts in providing international opportunities for students.

**International Projects**

According to the University website, there is an active participation in several international projects about scientific research and innovation together with demonstrating its efforts to implement internationalization strategies.

Its participation in these international projects establishes global connections and international networks. Significantly, these internationalization activities enhance the reputation and visibility of Mohammed 1st University at the international level.

The table below depicts the international programs and projects in which Mohammed 1st University participates.

| The International Programs | The International Projects |
|---|---|
| **Horizon Europe** is an EA research and innovation program for 2021-2027, it tackles climate change and the UN's Sustainable Development goals and the EU's competitiveness and growth. | **(REMEDIES)**:Co-creating Strong Uptake of REMEDIES for the Future of our Oceans through Deploying Plastic Litter Valorisation and Prevention Pathways. |
| **Project Prima (**Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area), it supports multilateral projects on water management, food systems and agri-food value chain themes in the Mediterranean region. The projects should include at least one partner from the EU countries and at least one partner from non-EU countries. | **DATI:** Digital Agriculture Technologies for Irrigation Efficiency.<br>**UToPIQ:** Use of Tomato Lines Tolerant to Proximity Shade to Increase Yield and Quality in Intercropping Agrosystems.<br>**SWITCHtoHEALTHY**: Switching Mediterranean Consumers to Mediterranean Sustainable Healthy Dietary Patterns.<br>**Quinoa4Med:** Quinoa as a Climate-smart Crop Diversification Option for Higher Income Generation from Marginal Lands in the Mediterranean.<br>**SUSTEMICROP** : Development of Eco-sustainable Systemic Technologies and Strategies in Key Mediterranean Crop Systems,Contributing to Small Farming Socio Economic Resilience.<br>**PURCICLES:** Maxmising Resource Use Efficiency within the Water-nutrient-energy Nexus for Sustainable Agriculture in Marginal Environments.<br>**OLI4FOOD**: Microbial Resources for a Sustainable Olive Oil System and a Healthier Mediterranean Food: from By-products to Functional Food. |
| **ERASMUS+ CBME (CAPACITY Building in Higher Education** | **FOSAMED** (Enhancing Food Safety in the Mediterranean). This project is coordinated by University of Evora in Portugal and Universities in Morocco, Spain and Italy.<br>**MEHMED** (Mediterranean Environmental Change Management). This project combines the efforts of 14 partners, 11 universities, and six countries of South-Mediterranean |

| | region to offer an excellent professional training for university students. |
|---|---|
| **LEAP-RE (**the Long-term Europe Africa Partnership on Renewable Energy), it is a five-year program co-founded by the European Commission with the aim to foster a long-term partnership between Europe and Africa on research and Innovation in research energy. | **SoCoNexGen**: Solar Indoor Cooking Systems of the Next Generation. <br> **MG-FARM**: Smart Stand-alone Micro-grids as a Solution for Agriculture Farms Electrification. <br> **HYAFRICA:** Towards a Next Generation Renewable Energy Source - a Natural Hydrogen Solution for Power Supply in Africa. |
| **FOSC t**he European Research Area Network tackles Food Systems and Climate. It is an inter-continental collaboration with a consortium that constitutes of 28 partners from Europe, Africa, and Latin America. | **CropsForchange**, Tackling the Global Warming Effects in Crops. |
| **Fly4Future,** it aims to conduct research about and develop advanced autonomous drones and their application. | **Fly for the Future - Fondation Botnar** <br> **Training:** Map My School Program - MAVIC 2 PRO. |
| **AUF** (the "Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie in Ouest Europe), it supports the interdisciplinary and intersectional projects in order to develop international cooperation to meet the university missions such as teaching, research, and civic engagement. | The Creation of Consortia through Mobility and Networking: "Solar Air Conditioning in Buildings". |
| **VLIR-UOS** supports partnerships between Felmish universities and other universities from Asia and Africa in order to look for innovative responses to global and local challenges. | Changing Towards a Cultural-sensitive Multidisciplinary Lifestyle approach for women with Type 2 Diabetes in Oujda. <br> Adapting Figuig Oasis to Climate Change through Combined Management of Surface and Groundwater. |
| **PHC Maghreb,** it supports and foster the mobility of researchers within the framework of scientific cooperation between France and the countries of Maghreb region. | Modeling and Optimizing the Purification Process of Photovoltaic Silicon through Directional Solidification. <br> Biodiversity of Microorganisms with Biotechnological Potential, isolated from Extreme Biotopes, Enzymatic Processes and their Impact on the Environment. |
| **PHC Toubkal,** it finances and encourages the mobility of researchers who are enrolled in bilateral projects with French researchers. | Biodiversity of Microorganisms with Biotechnological Significance, isolated from Extreme Biotopes: Enzymatic Processes and their Impact on the Environment. <br> Utilization of Amendments for the Phytomanagemnt-based Rehabilitation of Mining Soils Polluted by Trace Metal Elements. <br> Origin of Fluorite Minealizations in Bou-Izourane (Tamazeght-Moroccan Central High Atlas). <br> Valorization of Olive Mill Wastewater and Macroalgae through Anaerobic Digestion: a Driving Force for the Circular Economy in Morocco and France. <br> Approximation and Optimization of Curves and Closed Surfaces: Applications to Medical Imagery. |
| **PMARS III**, it is German-Moroccan Cooperation about Scientific research, it supports young researchers and professors to participate in international Projects. | Water Quality Improvement with a Solar Desalination System. <br> Detecting and Understanding Hydroclimatic, Ecological Tipping Points: A Multi-scale Study at the Moroccan Desert Margin. |
| **Morocco-Italy Cooperation** | Application of Antifungal Lactic Acid Bacteria in the Control of Post-harvest Spoilage of Selected Fresh Fruits from Morocco and Italy: The Case of Rosaceae (Apples, Peaches, Nectarines) and Citrus Fruits. <br> Approximation of 2D and 3D Curves and Surfaces, and Application to Object Modeling. |
| **Morocco-Tunisia Cooperation** | n°17/TM06. <br> n°17/TM22. |
| **AAP Recherche** | Optimization of a Water Pumping System using a Variable-speed Wind Turbine. |

**Table 3: An Overview of the International Programs and Projects Mohammed 1st University involved in.**

Based on the table, several international activities take place in Mohammed 1st University are related to innovation and scientific research. These internationalization practices are of paramount importance as they foster global connections between the university's laboratories and research centers and international ones around the globe, with the aim to enhance global education and research, and to develop the Moroccan socio-economic sector.

**International Reputation**

Several posts on Facebook were dedicated to the University global ranking. The university shows its enthusiasm to reach a global reputation and visibility. This global reputation promotes the internationalization of the university and attracts international researchers and students for partnerships and collaborations.

The following quote is shared by the Facebook page of the university, it is written by the president of the university, he highlighted the significant progress and recognition that the university has gained in the field of Physics. Being ranked first in Morocco and Africa by the Shanghai Ranking is a remarkable accomplishment.

*Shanghai Ranking 2022, an exceptional year for our university in Physics... Shanghai Ranking: a ranking based on strict criteria, Mohammed 1st University, first in Morocco and Africa, 301 worldwide, this achievement would not have been possible without the collaboration of everyone: professors, students, and administrative staff... To all of you, the university is grateful for all the efforts you made towards a single objective: promoting and contributing to the development of science. (translated by the researchers)*

***R2: How Do Internationalization Policies and Practices of Mohammed 1st University Impact Inclusion and Intercultural Communication Within the University?***

The aforementioned practices and activities have shown the internationalization of Mohammed 1st university. These practices were highlighted in the reform documents and policies of the Moroccan Higher Education. They represent the attempts of the university to implement internationalization strategies and gain a global reputation and visibility as well as meeting the needs of students, society, governments and for-profit organizations. However, the internationalization process establishes an intercultural and global dimension of higher education. Therefore, all the players involved in this process including students and faculty members should have the needed skills to maximize quality and efficiency of higher education.

The internationalization policies and practices discussed earlier are connected to inclusivity and interculturality in higher education. In this section, we are going to explore the way the implementation of internationalization policies and practices of Mohammed 1st University influences inclusion and intercultural communication.

Academic mobility is one of the significant internationalization activities. It enables learners to have a fruitful international experience. Thereby, it is the University's role to include these international students and create a diversified and inclusive learning environment. As an attempt to do so, two remarkable events were organized by the University.

The first event is the Iftar ceremony held to break the fast in the month of Ramadan, specifically in honor of foreign Sub-Saharan students. Additionally, this event was an occasion to give awards to the international students who won in Mohammed 1st University's contests. As an evaluation of this event, it is an occasion for different cultural backgrounds to come together and experience the traditions and customs associated with Ramadan. It promotes intercultural understanding and fosters dialogue and engagement among students from various cultural backgrounds. The event was documented and shared on the University's Facebook page. The following figure is a picture of the head of the University and an international student in the event.

**Figure 3: A Picture of Mohammed 1st University's President and an International Student in the Iftar Ceremony.**



The picture represents that the presence of the University president and professors is an indicator that the university supports inclusivity and intercultural communication. It highlights the importance of creating a welcoming and diverse learning environment for students, especially the international ones. Another remark is that the university leader and some of the international students wore traditional clothes in this event, which shows the representation of their cultures. Moreover, it is considered as a way to celebrate the cultural diversity in the University.

The second event is related to an initiative to provide aid to international students during Ramadan. This initiative shows the University's commitment to support international students and foster inclusion and cultural sensitivity. It is an act that has a cultural connotation because it is related to Moroccan Ramadan practices, which is providing" Ramadan Food packages" to people in need.

Although the practices related to inclusive internationalization and intercultural communication are mainly related to international students and academic mobility, Internationalization at home requires the

integration of international, intercultural and global dimension to the learning environment in higher education. An inclusive curriculum is needed to prepare post-secondary students for an international global market and increase their employability chances on the international scale.

In the process of examining Mohammed 1st University's practices that were documented virtually, the researchers came across several activities related to intercultural communication. The university organized several conferences and seminars about intercultural communication. The following Conferences announcements show the interest towards discovering issues related to interculturality and intercultural communication.



**Figure 4: The Announcements of Conferences about Intercultural Communication Issues.**

In order to reach inclusion and meet the intercultural communication premises, Mohammed 1st University should create equal opportunities for its students through internationalization at home. According to the findings, the University took significant measures to increase international engagement among its members. It actively promotes internationalization through a wide range of activities such as international collaboration and partnerships, organizing international conferences and seminars, engaging in international projects and programs. Accordingly, these practices promote internationalization at home and inclusive education, and they enable students to gain international experiences even without participating in formal academic mobility programs. Yet, other inclusive internationalization pathways should be addressed and implemented such as the internationalization of the curriculum, more collaborative online international learning (COIL) programmes, developing and assessing intercultural communication competence among students and university members.

## V.     Discussion and Conclusion

Internationalization of higher education in the last decades is high on the higher education agendas and reforms worldwide. Remarkably, internationalization is pivotal in higher education system as it includes international, intercultural and global elements. As a matter of fact, the intercultural element should be fully addressed.

The current study provides nuanced and finely grained insights on the effective implementation of internationalization policies and practices, by highlighting the internationalization activities that took place at the university. This study attempted to highlight the alignment between the internationalization practices and inclusion and intercultural communication strategies.

The findings have shown that the intercultural encounters are embedded in internationalization practices. These practices are occasions for students, researchers, staffs and professors to meet and work with international partners and students around the globe. There interactions and meetings are purely intercultural. These intercultural encounters lead to several challenges for the higher education systems such as language barriers, cultural differences and misunderstanding, intercultural barriers, and different learning styles and experiences.

There are key gaps in Internationalization of Higher Education body of work, to our knowledge, especially in the Moroccan context. Ones regarding the practices and the experiences of HEIs' members who are engaged in internationalization at home process. There is a little research on the impact of internationalization

practices on inclusion and intercultural communication within the realm of HEIs. The present study highlighted the need for inclusion curricula and intercultural competence in HEIs in order to enable their members to benefit fully from the internationalization experience.

Several studies are dedicated to examine international students' cross-cultural experiences in relation to intercultural communication and intercultural competence (Hotta&Ting-Toomey,2013; King&Bailey,2021; Samovar et al.,2019). One of the most common and visible internationalization activities in higher education to develop intercultural competence in students is academic mobility (Teicher,2007; Watcher, Ferenez,2012). However, this activity is far from reaching the fully internationalization process of HEIs as there is limited number of post-secondary students and faculty members that can be reached through academic mobility (Gregerson-Hermans,2015). For this reason, the focus for internationalization in higher education and developing intercultural competence has shifted from academic mobility to addressing non-mobile students and staffs.

In the same vein, Bennett (2012) argues that intercultural learning is not a guaranteed outcome of studying abroad. Merely being exposed to different cultures and engaging in cross cultural interactions does not automatically lead to intercultural learning. Therefore, achieving intercultural learning through internationalization requires an intentional and guided development of intercultural competence and inclusion practices (Gregerson-Hermans,2015). These intentional and guided strategies are closely related to practices such as internationalization at home including engaging in international projects and partnerships and organizing international conferences, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) (Guimaraes, et al.,2019), and engaging in and organizing conferences and study days addressing intercultural learning and intercultural communication issues.

There is a need for proven effectiveness of the internationalization activities in terms of its impact on inclusion and intercultural competence (de Wit,2011; Deardorff et al.,2012). The current study highlights the internationalization strategic status of the university under study, it depicts the internationalization activities and strategies that were first enacted in the policy documents (the Strategic Vision 2015-2030 and the Action Plan 2017-2023). All these activities and efforts of the university leadership and individuals increase the internationalization of the university and its global visibility and reputation.

As we accentuated, these activities go beyond the impact on students' skills and careers as well as global job market, they emphasize the inclusion of students with the aim of developing intercultural competence, among students and staff. This competence is needed to face the challenges of the global world and to meet the requirements of being global citizens.

However, the present study is not without limitations. The limitations lie in its limited generalizability; the results may not be representative of other Moroccan universities and HEIs. The practices and experience of the university under study cannot adequately reflect all the Moroccan public universities. Hence, this study is only an evaluation of the effective implementation of the internationalization activities and policies in Mohammed 1st University. Another limitation is related to the study's emphasis on university's website, Facebook page and policy documents which may overlook other important channels or sources of information such as university's students and staffs 'internationalization experiences and practices.

As a conclusion, the current shifts in internationalization of HE discourses have moved from internationalization activities outputs to their outcomes such as inclusion and intercultural competence. These shifts urge the need for studies that clarify the relationship between internationalization and its outcomes (Gergerson-Hermans,2015). In order to enhance generalizability, future studies should consider expanding the sample to include multiple Moroccan universities or HEIs. This would provide a broader understanding of how intercultural learning and inclusion practices as well as internationalization policy implementation vary across different contexts. In addition to analyzing online platforms, future studies should take into account incorporating direct observations and interviews with students, professors and administrators to reflect on their internationalization experiences and practices within the realm of the universities.

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