


# Chapter 12

## Overcoming Social, Structural, and Symbolic Boundaries Through Student Mobility Traditional Pathways and Technological Innovations

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter examines international student mobility in Morocco, revealing another dimension of student mobility, which is often treated as physical displacement. It presents the enduring importance of physical mobility among Moroccan students and the influence of globalization through technology on the perception or conviction of a significant number of students who have chosen virtual mobility over physical mobility. The education system and the labor market in Morocco favor physical student mobility over virtual mobility. In this chapter, we show how the thoughts and traditions inherited from previous generations and politics can directly and indirectly influence our perceptions and decisions regarding migration. Crossing geographical borders to undertake international student mobility will greatly help Moroccan graduates overcome social and professional barriers after their return. Since the protectorate, student migration has become a social determinant that shapes the identity of both students and employers.*

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## INTRODUCTION

International student mobility is a topic that is rarely discussed in the African context and seldom addressed in the Moroccan context, despite its global importance. Students are a mobile source of wealth that connects two countries: a sending country that relies on them as bearers of knowledge and a wealth of experience that will add value to the country's atmosphere, especially if it is a third world country, and a receiving country that benefits from the multidimensional cognitive investment brought by international students. The sensible benefits of this mobility have attracted many countries to enter the global higher education market, which is highly profitable and beneficial at all levels, by trying to attract as many students as possible. Other countries are taking the opposite approach by promoting outgoing student mobility as a means of development through the transfer of knowledge acquired abroad to the country of origin (Tsouli, 2025). With global development, student mobility is growing in order to keep pace with technological progress, which has produced a new form of virtual mobility that is more convenient, accessible, and less restrictive than physical mobility. With the increase in barriers imposed by particularly developed countries on migration, many universities around the world have offered online distance learning programs leading to degrees and certificates, enabling students to engage in international virtual mobility.

States shape student migration through their policies by regulating visa issuance, tuition fees, length of stay, work restrictions, and more. International students are often tolerated primarily because their reason for migration — education — is socially and politically accepted. As Sassen (1999) puts it, they can be seen as “guests”: welcomed for their studies but not recognized as full political subjects, due to the temporary nature of their stay.

Contemporary globalization is often presented as a process of geographic proximity and the erosion of borders. However, as Sassen (1999) argues, globalization has not eliminated borders but reconfigured them, and in doing so, it has also reshaped global inequalities. Students for instance from the Global North can circulate relatively freely, whereas those from the Global South face significantly stricter forms of control. Similarly, students from affluent families tend to enjoy greater freedom of movement, while those from lower-income backgrounds often encounter substantial barriers to mobility. Ahmed (2004) adds another dimension by showing how the emotions of host societies help draw the line between “us” and “them”. In the context of student mobility, this means that even students — despite having legal status — can be positioned as “guests” and not fully part of the host society. They may be affected by collective emotions such as suspicion or fear, which reinforces their status as legal, yet still foreign, bodies.

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