

Influence of the material living conditions of foreign students on their study paths at UT1 Capitole

Regular surveys conducted by the Observatoire National de la Vie Etudiante on the living conditions of students show that foreign students are systematically less satisfied with their living conditions than their French counterparts, particularly on issues related to financial resources and housing. As these material conditions also vary greatly between students, we can ask ourselves what are their influences on the overall study path taken by these students? At the University of Tours, for example, it has been shown that students in the first year of their Bachelor's degree who deem their income insufficient for them to enjoy a good life as students are under-represented among three-year Bachelor's graduates and over-represented among those leaving after enrolment (Froment, 2013). Is there such a relationship between financial resources and the continuation of studies among international students? First of all, we set about characterising the financial situation of foreign students within the University of Toulouse 1 Capitole (UT1 Capitole), as well as their housing situation, and comparing it to their French counterparts. We then sought to characterise the influence of these resources on student retention and success, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Methodology:

The following results are based on the living conditions survey conducted in partnership between the three Toulouse universities and the IEP. The survey was conducted during 2011/2012 among all students enrolled in full-time education on undergraduate or graduate degrees (first year of Bachelor's degree to second year of Master's degree).

The survey yielded 6,714 responses out of a total of 44,165 students polled, representing a response rate of 15%. In order to ensure that the responses were representative of the full-time population, data were weighted on the following variables: "university", "component", "level of training", "gender" and "nationality group". The analysis focuses on foreign students at UT1 Capitole (training taken in France, individual mobility) and on French students at the university, as well as on French students at the three Toulouse universities (excluding offshore sites) in order to make a comparison at the regional level.

Living conditions and financial resources

Independent accommodation and financial assistance

Scarce studios or one-roomed apartments

Almost all foreign students have accommodation that is independent of that of their parents (91% of them). They mainly live in rented accommodation such as studios or one-roomed apartments and most often live alone. One in two students reports having had difficulty finding accommodation. This proportion is identical at the regional level for foreign students, but may be higher than at the national level, excluding the Ile-de-France region (National Student Survey - 2010). The real estate market in the city of Toulouse may indeed be more strained than any other city outside Paris due to the size of the Toulouse conurbation and the very large number of non-resident students it welcomes each year. In any case, foreign students encounter difficulties much more frequently than their French counterparts at UT1 Capitole (33% say they have encountered difficulties in finding accommodation).

Significant financial support from parents and few bursaries

The majority of foreign students receive financial support from their parents, whether it is direct financial assistance (60% of students) or partial or total coverage of certain expenses such as rent, health fees or university tuition fees. The direct financial assistance from parents amounts to an average of €400 for a first-year Bachelor's foreign student and €500 for a Master's student.

Half of the foreign students with independent accommodation receive state benefits to finance their accommodation: CAF housing benefit (APL), social housing benefit (ALS) or family housing benefit (ALF). This equates to about one third of the rent.

Only 21% of foreign students receive a bursary to help them financially with their studies. These are mainly bursaries based on social criteria (14% of foreign students).

We note that foreign students are somewhat less often assisted by their parents than their French counterparts (at UT1 Capitole as well as at the regional level, 71% of French students receive direct financial assistance from their parents). This can be explained by the higher proportion of Bachelor's students among French students, who are still very much helped by their parents. However, when they are assisted, foreign students receive much more direct parental support (€200 more in median value compared to the regional level of French students). This assistance certainly compensates for the state subsidies (housing, bursaries based on social criteria), which are less numerous for foreign students.

Students who have obtained their baccalaureate in France

Among the 40 survey respondents who obtained their baccalaureate in France, 27 were found to have parents residing in France in 2011/2012 and 13 had parents residing abroad in the same year. These students are also often financially supported by their parents, but the amount of this support is very much lower than that of foreigners who have obtained their baccalaureate outside France (€270 difference in median value). At the same time, it can be seen that this lower level of support is frequently compensated by the scholarships on social criteria that these students obtain more often. Ultimately, the students who obtained their baccalaureate in France had overall resources that are €70 lower (in median value).

Paid work and financial resources

A paid job for a third of foreign students

Twenty-two percent of foreign students are in paid employment during the academic year. This proportion is identical to that of French students at the regional level. This year-round work by foreign students includes both bursary and non-grant recipients, and more often the third-year Bachelor's students and first-year Master's students. This work is carried out during the day as well as in the evening, during the week or at weekends, and for a working time that exceeds 31 hours per month for one out of two employed students.

Seventeen percent of foreign students work during the summer holidays.

Lastly, we note that 33% of foreign students have at least one paid job during the year. This proportion of employed students is much lower than among their French counterparts (58% at the regional level). The difference is mainly due to the work during the summer holidays.

Even if we notice a trend towards financing leisure activities through paid employment, we can see that more foreign students are working to finance their studies or support themselves than their French counterparts.

A shoestring budget to cover expenses

We note that, like the French students in Toulouse, foreign students have a tight budget to cover all their expenses (one student in two has less than €500 per month; an amount that is mostly deemed insufficient by these students). Nevertheless, students are particularly well equipped with telephone or computer equipment (87% of them own a mobile phone and a computer). However, as with French students, almost one student in two does not have additional healthcare cover and some care is not provided due to lack of money (in particular optical and dental care).

More pronounced loneliness

Independent accommodation evokes mixed feelings among students, ranging from freedom and fulfilment to loneliness. But the feelings that predominate among Toulouse foreign students, after having their own accommodation, are those of freedom and solitude (56% of people with independent accommodation). Such loneliness is more prevalent among foreign students than by French students, whose family ties can be more easily maintained throughout the year by returning to their family home at weekends, for some students, or during the short school holidays.

Serious economic difficulties for some

We also note that 26% of students with independent accommodation report having serious difficulty in coping with this situation, particularly from a financial point of view. This proportion is much higher than among French students (13% at the regional level). The students with independent accommodation, who mainly have less than €500 per month, are both bursary recipients and non-grant holders, employees or non-employees, and of different socio-professional origins (father at executive level, employee or unskilled worker). However, the students with independent accommodation are somewhat less likely to receive financial assistance from their parents.

This raises the question of how these financial difficulties affect the pursuit and success of these students. Depending on the financial resources available to students and the difficulties they may encounter, are there more or less rapid pathways to success? More or less interrupted courses of study before the qualification is validated? More or less frequent pursuit of graduate studies?

Financial resources, education and success

To observe the links between academic programs, success and students' living conditions, we employ a multiple correspondence analysis using 16 variables. This analysis distinguishes students according to geographical mobility, financial resources, autonomy and success. It allows us to identify three student profiles that we will describe.

Resident students

(baccalaureate obtained in France)

They do not have sufficient financial resources and leave the university during an unfinished year of their Bachelor's degree that has not been validated. They combine a non-French family cultural environment with unfavourable social conditions that will lead them to stop their studies at UT1 Capitole before the validation of the planned curriculum. This is despite the fact that these students receive assistance from universities (bursaries) or family (family accommodation). But this support is not enough for students who are not content with their resources. Finally, like their parents, they hold a baccalaureate qualification, but find themselves failing in higher education from the outset.

Students pursuing mobility opportunities

who are not financially independent

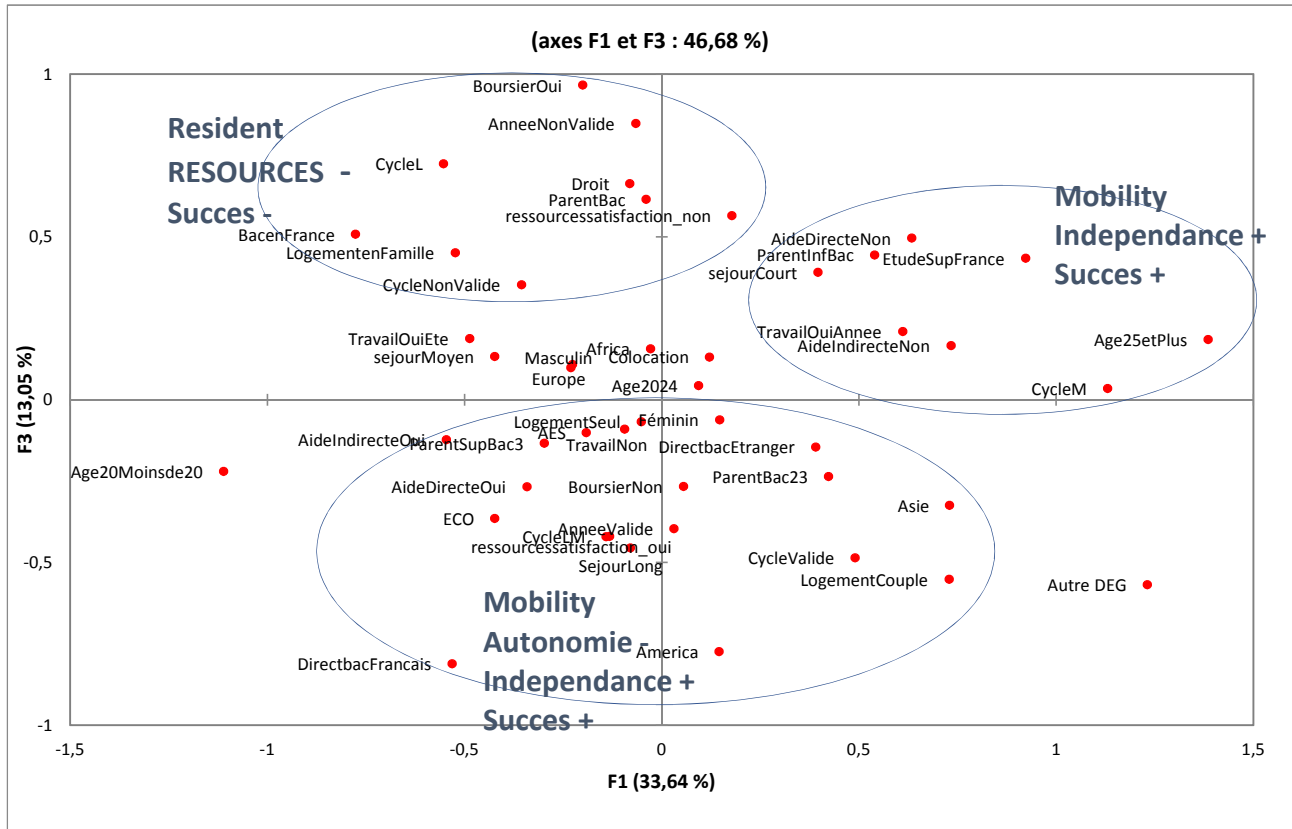
They have sufficient resources and very favourable family financial conditions that enable them to pursue and validate their entire study programme in France. After obtaining the Bachelor's degree at university, these students will continue with a Master's degree which they will also validate. This female group is of Asian or American origin. While they are not financially independent because they enjoy direct and indirect assistance, the geographical distance from their country of origin is a factor boosting the transition to adulthood. Indeed, this group has accommodation that is independent of that of their parents and some of them are already living as a couple.

Students pursuing mobility opportunities

who are financially independent

They come to UT1 Capitole only to enrol on a Master's degree and validate their academic studies. They do not receive any direct or indirect assistance. These are older students (25 years and over) who work while studying. It is very likely that this work is probably partly constrained: there is an increase with age in the frequency of students' economic difficulties, linked in part to the decrease in parents' financial assistance, thus following the evolution of residential autonomy. This group is more frequently male and of African origin. These results are consistent with other research, at the national level (Vourch, 2011) or at the local level at other universities (Cordazzo et al, 2015). They show that while economic difficulties are more severe for foreign students, they are generally more so for students of African origin. Nevertheless, it can be seen that these students who are welcomed into the university at a very advanced stage of their studies have had to acquire sufficient maturity and autonomy for the validation and continuation of their studies in France.

These profiles thus highlight the impact of the student's resources on the choices to pursue studies and the validation of the study courses followed at UT1 Capitole, in particular on drop-outs at the beginning of the course. And once again, resident students, who obtained their baccalaureate in France, stand out from students pursuing mobility opportunities by lower incomes and a more frequent drop-out of studies within the university.



Source: Survey on the living conditions of foreign students enrolled at UT1 Capitole in 2011/2012
 Scope: Students of foreign nationality enrolled at UT1 Capitole as part of their individual mobility and following a training course in France

Conclusion

The analysis of the living and study conditions of foreign students shows us that these students are very dependent on the financial assistance provided by their family circle and that their independence remains very relative for most of them. As the number of students pursuing individual mobility opportunities is much higher than that of those pursuing academic mobility opportunities, the number of foreign students studying in France without a scholarship is just as high. Moreover, without financial assistance from the family unit, a certain number of students find themselves in serious economic difficulties that will have consequences on their study path. Factoring in the diversity of the category of "foreign students" thus makes it possible to underline that living and studying conditions such as the degree of independence, forms of mobility and financial resources play a role in the success and pursuit of studies for foreign students who come to study at UT1 Capitole. This diversity of types of stays reflects the great diversity that exists within the group of foreign students, which cannot simply be analysed by a single nationality indicator. Improving the accuracy of statistical indicators on foreign students is therefore necessary for universities in order to obtain information adapted to the reality of these students and to contribute to the improvement of their working and living environment.