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Faculty Perspectives on the Impact of World Rankings on Academic Practices

Januard D. Dagdag*
Isabela State University – Roxas Campus
Roxas, Isabela, Philippines

Judith E. Daracan
Isabela State University – Angadanan Campus
Angadanan, Isabela, Philippines

Abstract. World university rankings have become powerful instruments shaping the strategic directions of higher education institutions globally. While extensive research has examined their institutional and policy-level implications, relatively little is known about how these global metrics are experienced by faculty—particularly in non-Western contexts. This study explored how faculty members in Philippine higher education institutions experience the growing influence of world university rankings on their academic roles, institutional responsibilities, and perceptions of educational quality. Grounded in the frameworks of academic capitalism and social constructivism, the study employed a qualitative descriptive design involving 10 faculty participants from five higher education institutions, representing diverse academic disciplines and ranks. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and written reflections, then analyzed thematically. The five key themes that emerged were: (1) institutional credibility and global visibility, (2) expanded faculty roles and workload, (3) strategic realignment of institutional policies, (4) perceived effects on educational quality, and (5) faculty well-being and coping strategies. While global rankings were seen to enhance institutional prestige and drive strategic reforms, they also led to increased administrative burdens, performance pressures, and diminished emphasis on teaching and community engagement—particularly in non-research-intensive disciplines. The findings underscore the need for more inclusive, context-sensitive ranking metrics and greater institutional support for faculties. The study contributes to future research by highlighting the differentiated faculty experiences across disciplines and suggesting new lines of inquiry into job satisfaction, resistance strategies, and policy alignment. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers and administrators to balance academic priorities with the pressures of rankings.

* Corresponding author: *Januard D. Dagdag, januard.d.dagdag@isu.edu.ph*

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, world university rankings have emerged as powerful instruments that shape the identity, behavior, and strategic direction of higher education institutions. Rankings developed by agencies such as the Times Higher Education, QS World University Rankings, and the Academic Ranking of World Universities have not only influenced public perceptions of institutional quality but have also become a form of global currency in the academic marketplace (Hazelkorn, 2015; Marginson, 2007). These ranking systems, while varying in methodology, commonly prioritize metrics such as research output, international visibility, faculty credentials, citation indices, student-to-faculty ratios, and global engagement. As a result, universities worldwide—especially in developing regions—have begun to incorporate ranking metrics into their strategic priorities, often viewing upward movement in rankings as a proxy for success, excellence, and competitiveness (AI-Youbi et al., 2020; Pedró & Galán, 2022).

This widespread adoption of global rankings has led to a transformation in how universities manage academic work and define institutional goals. Governments, accreditation agencies, and funding bodies increasingly rely on ranking outcomes to determine policy directions, resource allocations, and reputational standing (Edu, 2025; Hazelkorn, 2018). In the Philippine context, public universities are encouraged to participate in global ranking systems as part of a national strategy to internationalize higher education and align with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and global benchmarks (Commission on Higher Education, 2023). This has triggered a cascade of internal reforms across institutions—including the revision of performance evaluation systems, intensified pressure on research productivity, and an expansion of documentation practices aimed at showcasing institutional achievements (Bond et al., 2021).

While global rankings may offer opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and academic visibility, critics have highlighted the unintended consequences of such systems. These include the overemphasis on research output at the expense of teaching and community engagement, the marginalization of disciplines with low citation potential, and the adoption of managerial practices that prioritize quantifiable outcomes over academic freedom (Hazelkorn, 2018; Brew, 2010; Kezar & Maxey, 2016). Moreover, faculty members—who play a central role in producing the research, teaching, and service outcomes on which rankings depend—often experience these institutional shifts most acutely. Changes in performance metrics, increased administrative workload, and pressure to publish in indexed journals significantly affect their daily responsibilities, professional identity, and psychological well-being (Medrano & Salazar, 2021; Gonzales & Núñez, 2021; Brew, 2010).

To better understand this phenomenon, the present study was informed by two complementary theoretical frameworks: academic capitalism and social constructivism. The former, as developed by Slaughter and Rhoades (2009),

explains how higher education institutions increasingly behave like market actors, competing for resources, prestige, and global recognition. Within this framework, world university rankings function as instruments of market rationality, pushing universities—and, by extension, faculty—to engage in behaviors aligned with capitalist values such as productivity, competition, and commodification of knowledge. Faculty are seen not just as educators and researchers but as contributors to institutional branding, fund generation, and global ranking performance.

In contrast, social constructivism emphasizes the role of social context, interaction, and shared meaning-making in shaping how individuals interpret institutional reforms (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). Faculty are not passive recipients of policy but active participants who construct meanings about academic quality, institutional credibility, and performance expectations through conversations with colleagues, institutional culture, and disciplinary norms. By combining these perspectives, this study views the global ranking agenda as both a structural force (academic capitalism) and a socially interpreted reality (social constructivism) that influences faculty behavior and institutional culture in complex and uneven ways.

Existing research has largely focused on how university rankings affect institutional policies, funding models, and reputational dynamics at the macro level (Hazelkorn, 2015, 2018). While such studies provide valuable insights into organizational change, they often overlook the micro-level realities of those who implement and respond to these policies, namely, the faculty. The perspectives of faculty are essential to understanding how ranking metrics are internalized, negotiated, resisted, or reinterpreted at the ground level. However, limited research has examined these experiences in depth, particularly in non-Western contexts, where global metrics may not align with local academic values and capacities (Bond et al., 2021; Stack, 2021).

In the Southeast Asian context—and the Philippines in particular—there is a pressing need to explore how faculty members perceive their evolving roles amidst the institutional pursuit of global competitiveness. Faculty face growing demands to engage in international publication, complete extensive documentation for institutional audits, and align their teaching and research with global standards, often with limited institutional support (Bilal et al., 2019). Moreover, these pressures can exacerbate issues of work-life imbalance, professional dissatisfaction, and inequity across disciplines. For instance, faculty in the sciences and engineering may have greater access to publication opportunities than those in the social sciences or education, leading to disparities in recognition and reward (Kayyali, 2023).

Despite these developments, research on how faculty themselves experience and interpret institutional transformations remains limited in scope—especially in relation to global university rankings. Existing studies (Medrano & Salazar, 2021) have explored faculty well-being and work-life balance in higher education settings, while others have examined faculty responses to performance-driven

academic environments (Chen & Chan, 2021; Kayyali, 2023). However, these investigations often focus on generalized academic stressors or productivity pressures and do not directly examine the specific effects of international ranking systems on faculty roles, institutional governance, or academic identity. Additionally, much of the literature has been conducted in Western or highly ranked Asian institutions, with limited attention to faculty experiences in Global South contexts such as the Philippines (Hazelkorn, 2018; Gonzales & Núñez, 2021). As such, there remains a critical need for qualitative, context-specific research that explores how faculty in Philippine universities interpret and respond to the rising influence of world university rankings—particularly in relation to their teaching, research, documentation responsibilities, and sense of academic purpose.

Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap by providing a qualitative, faculty-centered investigation into the perceived impacts of world university rankings on academic practices in Philippine higher education institutions. Through a thematic analysis of interviews and messenger 'chats' with faculty members from various disciplines and institutions, the study examined their lived experiences, coping strategies, and critical reflections. In doing so, it contributes to a more grounded understanding of how global ranking systems are reshaping faculty roles, institutional priorities, and conceptions of educational quality.

To guide this inquiry, the following research questions were posed:

1. How do faculty members perceive the influence of world university rankings on their professional practices and responsibilities?
2. What are the implications of world university rankings for institutional policies and priorities within higher education?
3. In what ways do world university rankings affect the overall quality of education provided to students?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global University Rankings: Origins and Mechanisms

Global university rankings have transformed the landscape of higher education, creating a highly competitive environment where institutions are increasingly judged based on quantitative indicators. Since the early 2000s, ranking systems such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities, QS World University Rankings, and Times Higher Education have become dominant forces in defining what counts as academic excellence (Hazelkorn, 2015, 2018; Marginson, 2007). These rankings typically rely on metrics such as publication counts, citation impact, international student ratios, research income, and faculty-student ratios. Though differing in methodology, these systems share a reliance on quantifiable performance indicators, presenting a simplified yet powerful portrayal of institutional quality (Peters, 2017).

Institutions that perform well in these rankings benefit from reputational gains, enhanced student recruitment, international collaboration opportunities, and increased funding from both public and private sectors (AI-Youbi et al., 2020). In developing countries, participation in global rankings is often tied to government

strategies aimed at positioning national universities within the global academic hierarchy (Commission on Higher Education, 2023; Edu, 2025). As a result, many universities adopt strategic plans designed to optimize their ranking performance—revising policies on faculty workload, research incentives, and publication expectations.

However, critics argue that this global race for visibility imposes constraints on the traditional missions of universities, such as teaching, community engagement, and the cultivation of democratic citizenship (Brew, 2010; Kezar & Maxey, 2016). The pursuit of ranking indicators can marginalize disciplines that are less "publishable" or globally visible, such as the arts, humanities, and education (Hazelkorn, 2015; Rauhvargers, 2011). This marginalization is often due to the reliance of ranking systems on bibliometric indicators that favor research output in the natural sciences and engineering, thereby disadvantaging fields in which scholarly contributions are less frequently captured by such metrics (Gonzales & Núñez, 2021; Peters, 2019). These concerns raise critical questions about equity, relevance, and authenticity in ranking-driven higher education reform (Rauhvargers, 2011).

2.2 Faculty at the Forefront of Ranking Pressures

Despite the central role of faculty in producing the outputs that rankings assess—such as research publications and internationalization efforts, their voices are often absent in ranking-related literature. Faculty members are responsible for generating research, engaging in students, publishing scholarly work, and contributing to institutional development. However, institutional responses to rankings frequently impose top-down mandates that faculty must navigate, often without adequate consultation or support (Bond et al., 2021; Gonzales & Núñez, 2021; Marginson, 2024; Teixeira et al., 2021). These dynamics often reflect managerial approaches that emphasize institutional competitiveness over collegial decision-making and academic freedom.

Multiple studies have documented the pressures faculty face in ranking-driven environments. These include increased expectations for international publication, intensified administrative responsibilities, and reduced time for teaching and student mentorship (Dembereldorj, 2018; Gad-el-Hak, 2004; Gonzales & Núñez, 2021). For instance, the "publish or perish" culture emphasizes research output, often at the expense of teaching and mentoring responsibilities (Gad-el-Hak, 2004). Additionally, faculty members frequently experience stress, role overload, and emotional exhaustion stemming from performance-based management systems and heightened workloads (García-Arroyo & Osca, 2019; Cao et al., 2024).

2.3 Academic Capitalism and the Marketization of Higher Education

To understand critically the influence of global university rankings on faculty work, academic capitalism provides a useful theoretical lens. Developed by Slaughter and Rhoades (2009), academic capitalism conceptualizes universities as entrepreneurial institutions embedded in a global market of prestige, competition, and capital accumulation. In this framework, faculty are not merely knowledge producers—they are economic agents whose output can be measured, monetized, and leveraged to secure institutional advantage. Academic capitalism explains

how rankings function as mechanisms of market discipline, transforming universities into performative spaces in which research grants, publication metrics, and reputation scores dictate strategic decisions. This dynamic leads to a redefinition of academic labor: teaching becomes secondary to publishing; collegiality gives way to competition; and institutional planning becomes oriented toward short-term performance gains (Hamann & Ringel, 2023; Watermeyer et al., 2024).

Faculty in this system are incentivized to prioritize research over other responsibilities, sometimes to the detriment of students and communities. Hangle and Schmidt-Pfister (2023) argued that such performative environments increase faculty anxiety, compromise ethical standards, and perpetuate inequities between those with access to resources and those without. In low-income and middle-income contexts, such as the Philippines, where institutional capacity may be limited, the burden of academic capitalism is even more pronounced—particularly in terms of workload, recognition, and burnout **(**Algar et al., 2025**).** From this perspective, global rankings are not neutral or technical instruments. They are ideological tools that shape institutional behavior, faculty priorities, and national education policy. Thus, the drive to perform well in rankings represents a form of neoliberal reform, wherein academic success is defined through competitiveness, standardization, and quantifiable outcomes.

2.4 Social Constructivism and Faculty Sensemaking

While academic capitalism highlights structural pressures, social constructivism focuses on how faculty make sense of these pressures through social interaction, institutional discourse, and disciplinary culture. The social constructivist theory, founded in the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Berger and Luckmann (1966), emphasizes that knowledge and meaning are co-constructed within specific sociocultural settings.

In the context of global rankings, social constructivism enables a deeper exploration of how faculty interpret institutional mandates and navigate shifting academic expectations. Studies show that faculty develop shared narratives about rankings—some embracing them as opportunities for growth, others critiquing them as bureaucratic impositions. These narratives are shaped by conversations with colleagues, departmental norms, institutional history, and personal values (Brankovic et al., 2023; Bond et al., 2021).

For example, Ma (2024) found that in universities undergoing aggressive internationalization, faculty in newer departments viewed rankings as aspirational, while senior faculty in legacy programs saw them as distractions from teaching and collegiality. Similarly, Stratford et al. (2024) observed that early-career academics tend to view global rankings as career-enhancing, whereas mid-career faculty are more likely to critique their reductive impact on academic life.

This interpretive lens also reveals faculty agency in shaping institutional responses. Faculty do not passively comply with ranking demands; they reframe,

negotiate, and at times resist them. In some cases, faculty repurpose institutional mandates for their own professional goals, using ranking requirements as leverage to initiate collaborations, seeking funding, or advocate for research support (Gilmour, 2023). In other instances, faculty form peer communities that provide emotional and logistical support for navigating performance expectations. Social constructivism highlights the importance of institutional culture in mediating the effects of global reforms. Rankings may be global in scope, but their interpretation is local, contextual, and deeply relational.

2.5 Educational Quality Under the Shadow of Rankings

A recurring theme in the literature is the tension between ranking-driven reforms and educational quality. While rankings claim to measure excellence, their primary focus on research outputs often neglect dimensions of teaching, mentorship, and holistic student development. Faculty in highly ranked institutions frequently report that instructional preparation is sacrificed in favor of publishing and documentation work (Medrano & Salazar, 2021; Teng, 2024). Recent studies confirm these concerns.

Wang et al. (2024) found that in five ranking-focused universities in Asia and Africa, students perceived a decline in teaching quality as faculty allocated more time to research. Similarly, Underwood et al. (2025) highlighted how rankings contributed to the proliferation of superficial curriculum reforms—emphasizing Sustainable Development Goal alignment and English-medium instruction for international appeal, often at the cost of local relevance and student engagement.

However, the literature also presents a counterpoint: in some contexts, rankings stimulate investment in academic infrastructure, curriculum modernization, and pedagogical training (AI-Youbi et al., 2020). In these cases, rankings act as motivators for institutional development, particularly when integrated into long-term quality assurance systems rather than treated as short-term performance goals. The key insight here is that the impact of rankings on educational quality is not predetermined. It depends on how institutions interpret and implement ranking metrics and on whether faculty are meaningfully included in that process. Institutions that use rankings to complement rather than replace pedagogical goals are more likely to preserve academic integrity and teaching excellence (Ai Tran et al., 2025).

3. Methods

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how university faculty experience and respond to the growing influence of world university rankings on their professional practices. This design was chosen because it allows for a detailed but low-inference account of participants' views, especially useful when the aim is to describe how people understand institutional changes in their own terms (Sandelowski, 2000; Magilvy & Thomas, 2009). While the coding was inductive, the analysis was interpreted through the two theoretical lenses of academic capitalism and social constructivism. These helped make sense of how market pressures and institutional reforms are both experienced structurally and constructed socially by faculty.

The study involved 10 faculty members selected through purposive sampling from five public higher education institutions in the Philippines. These institutions varied in size and geographic location, offering a range of exposure to global ranking initiatives such as Times Higher Education. Participants were chosen based on their experience in full-time teaching (at least three years), their involvement in or familiarity with institutional quality assurance or publication processes, and their willingness to reflect on how these ranking-related reforms affect their work.

The group included four men and five women from different ranks (i.e., three instructors, three assistant professors, two associate professors, and two full professors) and disciplines (i.e., Fisheries, Elementary Education, Mathematics Education, Science Education, Hospitality Management, Language Education, Engineering, Social Science, Agriculture, and Information Technology). This range allowed the study to gather insights across various contexts. The number of participants was guided by data saturation, which was achieved by the eighth interview, but two more were included to confirm the consistency of the themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Data was collected through two methods: semi-structured interviews and written responses via Facebook Messenger, depending on participant preference and availability. Using Messenger was a practical choice, as it allowed faculty to respond flexibly and in writing, which often resulted in thoughtful, well-developed reflections. Interview sessions, whether face-to-face or online, were guided by consistent prompts addressing teaching, research, workload, institutional policy, and perceived educational quality. While the exact wording varied, all participants were asked similar questions to ensure alignment across formats (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The combination of interviews and chat formats helped capture different levels of spontaneity and reflection, and contributed to data triangulation.

Thematic analysis was used to process the data, following the six-phase approach by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher began by familiarizing with the transcripts and chat messages, then manually coded them line-by-line using an open coding strategy (Saldaña, 2016). Codes were clustered into broader categories that reflected common meanings. These themes were then reviewed, refined, and interpreted using the theoretical perspectives mentioned earlier. While the coding itself was grounded in the data, the interpretation drew on the idea that faculty are both shaped by and shape the systems in which they work.

Ethical standards were followed throughout. Participants gave informed consent and were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. The researcher conducted all interactions with participants respectfully and sensitively, recognizing their expertise and experiences, and was responsive to participants' comfort levels during interviews. No institutional names, academic ranks, or personal identifiers were included in the final report. Data from interviews and chats were stored securely and were accessible only to

the research team. Reflexivity was maintained by engaging in peer discussions to recognize potential bias. This study received approval from the relevant authorities and followed guidelines for qualitative research involving human subjects.

4. Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts and written responses via Messenger yielded five core themes aligned with the study's research questions: (1) perceptions of institutional credibility and global visibility, (2) changes in professional roles and responsibilities, (3) institutional realignment and ranking-centered governance, (4) implications for educational quality, and (5) faculty well-being and coping strategies. These themes emerged through an inductive process of open coding, thematic clustering, and review. Data saturation was reached after eight participants, with two additional interviews conducted to validate the recurrence and consistency of themes.

Each of the following subsections begins with an analytical synthesis and is supported by indented quotes that reflect a diverse range of faculty contexts—including discipline, academic rank, and age group—while preserving confidentiality.

4.1 Institutional Credibility and Global Visibility

This theme addresses research question 1, exploring how faculty perceive the influence of global university rankings on their professional work, particularly in relation to the institution's external reputation. Across disciplines and academic ranks, participants consistently acknowledged that institutional participation in world rankings contributed to heightened visibility and legitimacy. However, this recognition was often double-edged—while it fostered pride and a sense of belonging, it also introduced increased expectations.

The participants viewed ranking participation as a symbolic achievement. An Instructor in Fisheries (female, 30s) expressed that global visibility enhanced both institutional and personal credibility:

> "*Itinataas nito ang kredibilidad ng isang guro sapagkat ang institusyon natin ay hindi nagpapahuli at nakikipagpaligsahan sa iba pang unibersidad sa buong mundo.*" (It elevates the credibility of a teacher because our institution is not being left behind and competes with other universities around the world.)

Similarly, a Science Education Associate Professor (female, 30s) emphasized the professional benefits of ranking participation, such as exposure to international best practices:

> "*Oportunidad na makipag-collaborate sa ibang institution, mapalawak ang funding grants sa ibang agencies at mahasa ang pagtuturo … sa curriculum designs, metodolohiya sa pagtuturo at pag-assess sa mga estudyante.*" (An opportunity to collaborate with other institutions, expand funding grants from various agencies, and enhance teaching skills in curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment.)

However, this sense of prestige was often accompanied by a recognition of the performance pressures associated with global branding. Faculty felt their institution's improved image increased internal expectations, affecting how they were evaluated and what counted as meaningful academic contributions.

4.2 Expanded Roles and Intensified Responsibilities

This theme also addresses research question 1, extending into the ways in which professional roles are reshaped by ranking participation. Faculty described a shift in expectations from being primarily educators to multitasking academic agents—researchers, documentation writers, and institutional marketers.

An Assistant Professor in Mathematics (male, 30s) noted the growing demand for non-instructional outputs:

> *"Lalong dumami ang trabaho na walang kinalaman sa instruction … gaya ng accreditation, pagalingan lang din mag-prepare ng documents."* (The workload unrelated to instruction has increased … like accreditation, it is mostly about who can prepare documents better.)

This task shift reflects broader dynamics of academic capitalism, where faculty labor is restructured around market performance indicators (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). Many participants expressed concern that the intensified focus on publication output was not accompanied by structural support or workload adjustments.

An Assistant Professor in Social Science (female, 30s) explained:

> "*Pressure sa pag-publish dahil world ranking ay nakatuon sa mga research outputs, citations, and publications.*" (There is pressure to publish because world rankings focus on research outputs, citations, and publications.)

Faculty, especially those in teaching-intensive departments such as Education and Language Studies, reported difficulty in balancing these demands, often due to limited access to indexed publication outlets. The lack of institutional mentorship in research writing exacerbated this imbalance. Moreover, instructors in applied disciplines such as Hospitality and Agriculture described a disconnect between their practical community engagement activities and the ranking metrics that prioritized citation-based outputs.

4.3 Strategic Realignment and Policy Shifts

Answering research question 2, this theme describes how institutions restructure governance, policy, and planning processes in response to ranking frameworks. Participants across all five universities indicated that institutional strategies had increasingly been reshaped to align with the methodologies of THE and QS rankings.

A full Professor in Elementary Education (female, 40s) emphasized how ranking participation had redefined the function of internal meetings:

> *"Lalong dumalas ang pagpupulong namin upang mag-strategize na mapabilang sa Top 1000 universities … halos lahat tuloy ng aktibidades ng school ay nire-report na sa social media."* (Our meetings have become more frequent to strategize on how to be included in the Top 1000 universities … almost all school activities are now being reported on social media.)

Faculty from both junior and senior ranks pointed to a growing culture of documentation, with less emphasis on long-term pedagogical or social goals. An Instructor in Language Education (female, 40s) explained:

> *"Binago ng institusyon ang patakaran kaugnay sa mga pagpapatupad ng mga gawain o serbisyo, pagdodokumento, at pagpapabatid nito sa publiko."* (The institution has revised its policies regarding activity implementation, documentation, and public communication.)

Several participants noted that these shifts had created a "top-down" culture, where performance priorities were externally dictated and localized academic needs were often sidelined. While some acknowledged the benefits of improved planning, others found the process exhausting and disengaging. Academic decision-making, they reported, was increasingly centralized and oriented toward rankings rather than internal consultation.

4.4 Educational Quality: Innovation or Displacement?

This theme answers research question 3, focusing on the perceived implications of ranking efforts on the quality of education. Views were highly polarized. Some faculties, especially in STEM and IT fields, noted improvements in curricular alignment with international standards. Others in the humanities and social sciences expressed concern over diminished attention to pedagogy and student support.

An Instructor in Agriculture (male, 30s) shared a generally positive view:

> *"Positibo naman dahil itinataas pa nito ang kalidad ng edukasyon na ibinabahagi naming sa mga estudyante."* (It is positive because it further elevates the quality of education we provide to our students.)

However, a Hospitality Management Assistant Professor (female, 30s) offered a more critical perspective:

> *"Halos lahat ng faculty ay naaabala sa instruction… napupunta ang oras sa paggawa ng documents na isasubmit for world rankings."* (Almost all faculty are disrupted in their instruction … time is spent preparing documents for world rankings.)

A recurring tension in participants' responses was between curriculum innovation and academic distraction. While rankings incentivized resource acquisition and policy improvements, they also led to an instrumentalization of

teaching, where activities were justified only if they contributed to metric-based outcomes.

A Language Instructor (female, 40s) captured this nuance:

> *"Sa positibong aspeto, ay mas napapabuti nito ang kurikulum… sa negatibong aspeto, masyado nang nakatutok ang unibersidad sa world rankings."* (On the positive side, it improves the curriculum… on the negative side, the university is too focused on world rankings.)

This duality reflects the complexity of linking educational quality to institutional prestige. Faculty often feel that while rankings stimulate accountability, they also foster a climate of performativity that can undermine authentic engagement with learners.

4.5 Faculty Well-Being and the Burden of Metrics

This final theme, which also addresses research question 3, foregrounds the emotional and psychological impacts of participating in a rankings-focused academic culture. Across institutions, faculty reported experiencing burnout, disillusionment, and role confusion. These reactions were especially strong among mid-career academics who had witnessed the shift from developmental, teaching-focused missions to output-centric performance regimes.

An Assistant Professor in Social Science (female, 30s) remarked:

> *"Pwede din positive… pero pwede din negative… hindi work-life balance ang nangyayari at nagreresulta ito sa labis na trabaho at stress."* (It can be positive … but also negative … what is happening is not work-life balance; it results in excessive work and stress.)

A senior faculty member in IT (male, 50s), who had witnessed several times of institutional reform, noted the broader consequences of metric obsession:

> *"Ang mga ranking ay kadalasang inuuna ang tiyak na mga sukatan… na maaaring malimutan ang iba pang mahalagang aspeto ng akademya tulad ng kalidad ng pagtuturo, kapakanan ng mga mag-aaral, at pakikipag-ugnayan sa komunidad."* (Rankings often prioritize specific metrics … which may lead to neglecting other important aspects of academia, such as teaching quality, student welfare, and community engagement.)

This perspective illustrates how rankings can inadvertently narrow institutional focus, eclipsing humanistic dimensions of academic life. While some participants had adapted by compartmentalizing tasks or seeking peer support, others felt alienated by the evolving culture. Faculty often reported feeling instrumentalized valued not for their holistic contributions but for their ability to generate measurable outputs.

4. Discussion

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of university faculty navigating the growing influence of world university rankings on academic practices, with particular attention to how these external metrics reshape institutional priorities,

professional responsibilities, and perceptions of educational quality. The findings surfaced a complex interplay between perceived institutional gains and faculty-level costs. While participants acknowledged the reputational and strategic benefits of rankings, they also emphasized their role in reshaping daily academic work—both materially and psychologically. This discussion unpacks these findings through the dual theoretical lenses of academic capitalism and social constructivism, drawing from recent literature to contextualize the results within broader global and national shifts in higher education.

The notion that participation in world rankings enhances institutional credibility is a dominant theme in the study. Faculty across ranks and disciplines expressed pride in their university's inclusion in THE or QS frameworks, often linking it to increased global competitiveness and legitimacy. This is consistent with global studies noting that rankings serve as signals of prestige, attracting students, donors, and collaborators (Adam, 2023; Healey, 2023; Rafique et al., 2024). However, the perception of enhanced institutional status also carries with it a latent burden. Faculty become more accountable, not just to internal stakeholders, but also to external reputational metrics. This shift reflects the logic of academic capitalism, in which universities operate less as public institutions and more as market actors competing for symbolic capital (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009; Montes et al., 2023).

The symbolic power of being a "ranked" university alters how faculty perceive their roles. In many cases, the association between prestige and performance gradually disseminates into expanded responsibilities but often without commensurate support. As the findings suggest, instructors are increasingly called upon to contribute to institutional documentation, align teaching outputs with Sustainable Development Goals, and prioritize research publications for indexed journals. These expectations mirror what Visser et al. (2024) described as "academic performativity," where success is equated with visibility and quantifiability.

This redefinition of roles is especially pronounced among faculty in teaching-intensive or applied disciplines. For example, participants from Education, Agriculture, and Social Science noted that while their contributions to community engagement or localized problem-solving are vital, these efforts are often invisible in ranking frameworks. This corroborates earlier critiques that rankings prioritize research over teaching and overlook social impact—particularly in non-STEM fields (Hazelkorn, 2015; Healey, 2023; Watermeyer et al., 2024).

In this context, social constructivism offers a useful lens for interpreting how faculty make sense of these new expectations. Rather than universally resisting or accepting ranking-driven reforms, faculty responses vary based on disciplinary culture, career stage, and personal values. For instance, some early-career academics in high-demand fields such as Information Technology see rankings as opportunities for career advancement, while others—particularly those in mid-career or in fields with fewer publication outlets—express disillusionment and role strain. These varying interpretations reflect what Berger and Luckmann

(1966) called the "social construction of reality," wherein faculty reinterpret external mandates through localized lenses of meaning.

Institutional realignment is another salient theme, with faculty describing how their universities restructured policies and governance practices to better align with ranking metrics. These reforms include increasing research incentives, restructuring appraisal systems, and intensifying documentation requirements. While such moves may improve organizational efficiency and external compliance, they also risk marginalizing locally defined goals of education. As Alhazmi and Almashhour (2023) argued, institutions that over-align with global indicators often experience a "misfit" between their strategic vision and grassroots academic realities.

Participants' observations about constant meetings, frequent social media reporting, and institutional branding efforts align with recent studies showing how world rankings introduce a form of audit culture in higher education (Brankovic et al., 2023; Pawar, 2024). In this model, academic life becomes increasingly bureaucratized, with faculty acting as data suppliers rather than autonomous professionals. The role of the educator is, thus, reframed not around pedagogy or public service, but around the university's need to remain competitive in an international marketplace of metrics.

Perhaps the most nuanced theme to emerge from the study was the ambiguous effect of rankings on educational quality. Participants were divided on whether world rankings participation enhanced or eroded the learning environment. Considering one perspective, several faculty members noted that alignment with international standards spurs curriculum reforms, improved instructional design, and attracted better institutional funding. Alternatively, many others reported that the emphasis on documentation and research outputs diverts time and energy from student mentoring, classroom innovation, and formative assessment practices.

These mixed reactions reflect broader tensions in literature. While some scholars argued that rankings can act as a lever for quality enhancement (AI-Youbi et al., 2020; Pedró & Galán, 2022), others cautioned that the metrics used—such as citations per faculty or international student ratios—offer a narrow view of academic excellence (van der Aalst et al., 2023; Seghier & Zaidi, 2024). In developing contexts such as the Philippines, this tension is even more pronounced. Many institutions face infrastructural and funding constraints that make compliance with global standards challenging. As a result, faculty are often left to bridge the gap between aspiration and reality—shouldering the institutional ambition for prestige without the resources to sustain it.

The cost of this misalignment is not merely organizational but personal. The findings clearly show that the pressures of ranking-related reforms affect faculty well-being, especially in terms of work-life balance and emotional health. Instructors and early-career faculty, in particular, expressed frustration over the "invisible labor" involved in preparing reports, crafting narrative justifications,

and constantly revising outputs to meet new benchmarks. These findings resonate with global research on academic burnout, which highlights how the intensification of performance expectations undermines morale and intrinsic motivation (Hangle & Schmidt-Pfister, 2023; Medrano & Salazar, 2021; Douglas et al. 2024).

Importantly, these pressures do not operate in a vacuum. They are mediated by local institutional culture, leadership styles, and peer dynamics. Several participants noted that the burden of rankings felt heavier when there is little faculty consultation or transparency. Conversely, in universities where leadership is communicated openly and faculty contributions are recognized, the stress is mitigated. This again underscores the social constructivist insight that meaning is co-produced, and that faculty agency plays a key role in how reforms are enacted in practice.

A notable contribution of this study is its illumination of how global reforms, like rankings, are refracted through local academic ecologies. The narratives collected suggest that world rankings do not impose a singular impact but produce differentiated effects—shaped by context, identity, and institutional readiness. In this sense, the study complements recent Southeast Asian research that calls for more grounded, culturally sensitive analyses of how higher education reforms are experienced at the micro-level (Yang, 2023; Kanmodi et al., 2024).

Equally, the study lends credence to recent critiques of overreliance on performance-based funding and ranking alignment in national higher education policy. In the Philippines, as in other Global South contexts, the push to climb the rankings ladder often occurs without sustained investment in faculty development, infrastructure, or research ecosystems. This structural incongruity risks creating a hollow form of compliance—where the form of excellence is pursued more than its substance (Sarpong & Adelekan, 2023; Kadikilo et al., 2025).

Simultaneously, this study avoids a binary stance. Faculty perspectives reveal not only frustration and fatigue but also adaptation and critical engagement. Several participants described how they use ranking initiatives to leverage institutional support for research, connect with peers, and improve their own professional portfolios. Others use ranking mandates as catalysts for reflective teaching and curriculum redesign. These accounts are important because they challenge the narrative of faculty as passive victims of reform. Instead, faculty emerge as active negotiators, capable of appropriating global discourses to advance their own academic goals (Bond et al., 2021).

Theoretically, the dual lens of academic capitalism and social constructivism allows for a more holistic understanding of these dynamics. Academic capitalism highlights how faculty labor is increasingly commodified repurposed to serve institutional ambitions for prestige and capital accumulation. Social constructivism, alternatively, underscores how faculty interpret, resist, or internalize these pressures in diverse ways. The integration of these frameworks

affirms that the impact of world rankings is both structural and subjective embodied in policies but also in emotions, relationships, and institutional culture.

In methodological terms, the use of both interviews and written reflections offered depth and triangulation, revealing how faculty think, feel, and act in response to ranking reforms. While the sample was limited to 10 participants, it spanned disciplines, institutions, and ranks—thus capturing a spectrum of experiences. Future research could extend these findings through larger cross-campus studies or longitudinal designs to assess how perceptions evolve over time, especially as ranking methodologies themselves shift.

Generally, the findings indicate a dual imperative for higher education institutions and policymakers. First, a need exists to engage strategically with global metrics, recognizing their influence on visibility, funding, and collaboration. Second, there is an equally pressing need to protect the core values of education, such as equity, pedagogy, well-being, and critical inquiry. Institutions must avoid allowing the pursuit of prestige to override the commitment to quality. For faculty, recognition, support, and autonomy must be central to any reform strategy. For the ranking systems themselves, more inclusive and context-sensitive methodologies are urgently needed—ones that reflect the richness and complexity of academic work beyond what is easily counted.

5. Conclusion

This study offered a qualitative examination of faculty perspectives on the influence of world university rankings in Philippine public higher education institutions, revealing a nuanced landscape shaped by institutional reforms, disciplinary disparities, and professional identity shifts. Grounded in academic capitalism and social constructivism, the findings highlight that, while global rankings may elevate institutional credibility and encourage alignment with international standards, they also place disproportionate pressure on faculty—manifesting in increased administrative workload, redefined performance metrics, and diminished attention to teaching and community engagement. Faculty responses reflected both adaptation and ambivalence, with some participants embracing rankings as a facilitator for career development, while others voiced concerns over the erosion of academic values and personal well-being.

The study's scope is limited by its sample size of 10 participants from five institutions, which, while rich in disciplinary and positional diversity, may not capture all regional or institutional variations. Future research could extend these insights through broader comparative or longitudinal studies. Moreover, because the data were based on self-reported reflections and asynchronous chats, the depth of inquiry into emotional labor, institutional resistance, or nuanced pedagogical consequences might be constrained. Nonetheless, the study underscores the importance of contextualizing ranking policies through inclusive dialogue with faculty, enhancing institutional transparency, and ensuring that policies supporting world rankings compliance do not sideline local academic priorities.

Thus, higher education leaders are urged to evaluate critically how performance-based reforms affect faculty workload and morale, particularly in non-research-intensive fields, and to invest in capacity-building initiatives that address research inequities and promote meaningful engagement. Policymakers should also advocate for more inclusive and balanced ranking systems that reflect a wider array of academic contributions, including teaching excellence, social impact, and community-based scholarship.

Future research should investigate the psychological and professional effects of rankings on faculty job satisfaction, compare responses across different academic disciplines and institution types (e.g., rural vs. urban, research vs. teaching-focused), and explore how faculty agency might shape, resist, or reframe the narrative around global competitiveness in higher education.

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