

Exploring Faculty and Research Development Strategies among Top-Ranked VISMINS Universities in the Asian University Rankings

Jason V. Chavez^{1*}

¹Graduate School of Education, University of Perpetual Help System–DALTA, Las Piñas City, Philippines

*Corresponding author: jasonchavez615@gmail.com

ABSTRACT. Institutional rankings are essential for universities, stakeholders, and the wider academic community as they provide a comparative measure of institutional performance across multiple dimensions, including research productivity, teaching quality, internationalization, and societal impact. This qualitative exploratory study examined how VISMINS academic institutions implemented strategic initiatives for faculty and research development in top-ranked Philippine universities, including the structures, mechanisms, and practices that enhanced faculty competencies, research productivity, and institutional excellence. Academic leaders from 8 top-ranked universities were interviewed about their institutional initiatives in terms of faculty development and research production. The study found that individual faculty development programs were systematically structured and implemented to enhance teaching and research competencies through targeted training, mentorship, and collaborative planning. Universities established institutional mechanisms, such as faculty development centers, learning communities, and performance monitoring, to promote collective participation and knowledge sharing. Faculty development was strengthened through transparent policies, competitive incentives, and continuous evaluation aligned with national and international standards. Research productivity was strengthened by setting clear priorities, providing structured support, mentorship, and collaborative opportunities, while ensuring effective dissemination through conferences, journals, and digital repositories. Lastly, aligning faculty development with institutional missions and incorporating incentive systems encouraged a sense of purpose, motivation, and sustained engagement, resulting in high-quality, impactful academic and research outcomes.

KEYWORDS: *faculty development, higher education, institutional rankings, research production, VISMINS*

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Introduction

As higher education continues to evolve within a global context, international university rankings have emerged as vital benchmarks for institutional achievement. Leading ranking systems like the QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education (THE), and the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) evaluate universities using a range of

performance metrics, such as research productivity, instructional excellence, faculty-student ratios, and global engagement (Maringe & Sing, 2020). These create a competitive environment that shapes how universities design and execute initiatives aimed at enhancing their international reputation and visibility (Edu, 2025).

In some countries, the government distributes financial resources to universities in accordance with their placement in global rankings, and institutions often use these rankings to appeal to high-achieving students and distinguished faculty (Noble & Novak, 2021). Consequently, many universities have shifted their focus toward efforts that can boost their ranking performance, including expanding research production, building global academic partnerships, and upgrading campus infrastructure (Cretu & Grosseck, 2025). Ulyanova and Denisov (2023) note that students tend to favor higher-ranked universities, equating institutional prestige with superior academic experiences and improved employment prospects.

The global emphasis on equipping educators with high-quality professional development opportunities gained prominence over the past two decades (Subekti et al., 2024). This emphasis has intensified as education systems worldwide confront unprecedented challenges and an increasing demand to support all learners in dynamic and evolving learning contexts (Zhang et al., 2024). The establishment of the fourth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal has urged international education systems to uphold inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education, while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (Molina et al., 2024). In line with this, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has identified teacher engagement in effective professional development initiatives as a key indicator in achieving this goal (Zhang et al., 2024).

The efficiency of academic departments in higher education institutions (HEIs) is a critical factor influencing institutional performance and broader societal development. Key inputs, such as budget allocation, faculty qualifications, staffing levels, and total enrollment, are essential for achieving academic efficiency and performance in global rankings (Heredia, 2023; Rafique et al., 2024). For example, faculty credentials, particularly the number of doctorate degree holders, are closely linked to research performance and instructional quality, while student enrollment influences workload and resource distribution (Bastian et al., 2023; Yee & Yee, 2023).

This research responds to the lack of a standardized framework in the country by documenting and analyzing context-specific practices that contribute to academic excellence in Philippine universities, especially among the top-ranked universities in VISMIN. The study highlighted how these institutions solve challenges, develop systems for institutional renewal, and build environments that sustain academic excellence. The study aligns with the broader discourse on how organizational systems in education must strategically invest in people, culture, and processes to remain competitive and globally relevant.

Research Questions

This study answered six important questions about faculty development and research productivity among top-ranked VISMIN universities. Below are the specific questions answered in this study.

1. How are individual faculty development programs structured and implemented in these universities?
2. What institutional mechanisms are in place to promote faculty development as a collective effort?

3. How do universities build and sustain a reputable faculty professional development program?
4. What strategies are evident in cultivating a strong research culture within VISMIN universities?
5. How do these institutions ensure effective dissemination of research outputs?
6. What strategic practices do universities follow to increase faculty research production?

Literature

Faculty members are essential forms of human capital, and their expertise, creativity, and scholarly output are essential to institutional performance in research and innovation. Luthra, Dixit, and Arya (2024) emphasized that investment in academic capacity not only boosts individual productivity but also yields macro-level gains in societal knowledge production. As universities develop strategic frameworks for faculty development, such as competency mapping, skill upgrading, and performance evaluation (Kardiyem et al., 2023), they enhance their human capital readiness. This readiness contributes to research quality and quantity, which could improve institutional visibility in global rankings.

Olaniyan and Uzorka (2024) examined the influence of professional development programs on faculty members' integration of modern technology in HEIs. Their findings revealed four primary outcomes: enhanced technological skills, modifications in teaching methods toward student-centered approaches, improved adaptability to the evolving educational landscape, and the promotion of an innovative academic culture. Such programs are crucial in equipping faculty to effectively use technology, shift pedagogical practices, respond to changing educational demands, and foster innovation within institutions. Participants emphasized these effects, noting increased confidence in technology use and greater focus on interactive and engaging teaching strategies.

Similarly, Ambon et al. (2024) investigated the influence of continuous professional development on teaching effectiveness, with a particular focus on pedagogical skills, classroom problem-solving, and the mediating influence of institutional leadership. Analysis identified five key themes: student perceptions and teaching quality, teacher learning through professional development, leadership's role in faculty growth, assessment and evaluation strategies, and collaborative practices in teaching. Findings indicate that continuous professional development substantially enhances teaching quality by strengthening pedagogical competencies and classroom problem-solving abilities, while institutional leadership could help in maximizing these benefits.

Furthermore, Iqbal et al. (2025) examined how organizational culture influenced knowledge sharing and absorptive capacity within microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Pakistan, with attention to the moderating effect of institutional size. Results indicated that knowledge sharing mediated the relationship between culture and absorptive capacity, with larger MFIs benefiting from structured practices yet facing bureaucratic constraints. The findings suggested that embedding collaborative cultural values not only enhanced innovation and service delivery but also aligned with broader societal goals of financial inclusion and poverty reduction.

Mabkhot and Keong (2025) examined how collaborative culture, academic culture, personal career factors, innovation climate, and self-efficacy influenced the development of a research culture in Saudi Arabian HEIs, with innovation culture serving as a central driver and knowledge sharing as a moderating factor. The results showed that these cultural and personal factors significantly contributed to strengthening innovation culture, which in turn had a strong impact on research culture. In addition, knowledge sharing was found to enhance this relationship,

showing the importance of open communication and interdisciplinary collaboration in academic settings.

Kadikilo et al. (2023) explored how leadership perspectives strengthen research culture and enhance Tanzania's national development. Using a qualitative approach with higher education policymakers, senior university officials, and academic staff from four universities and two regulatory institutions, the findings revealed seven key themes: research governance, capacity development strategy, reinforcement strategy, collaboration and networking, establishment of research centres, dissemination strategy, and institutionalisation of research activities. The results demonstrated that a weak research culture had constrained productivity in Tanzanian HEIs. However, by embedding these strategies, institutions could build a vibrant research environment that promoted innovation, academic growth, and societal advancement.

Despite growing research interest, gaps persist in understanding academic efficiency and institutional performance. A major concern in the Philippines is the absence of a standardized framework, as existing methods vary depending on regional, financial, and institutional contexts (Dulzura-Bautista & Gono Jr, 2024). Likewise, the prevailing focus on quantitative indicators, such as publication output and enrollment figures, tends to marginalize qualitative factors like faculty-student engagement and the broader societal benefits of university programs. Future studies are encouraged to adopt more holistic approaches that incorporate these qualitative elements and to develop innovative strategies for resource optimization designed to meet the needs of high HEIs (Bucăța & Tileagă, 2023; George & Wooden, 2023).

Methodology

1. Research Design

Qualitative method allowed for a rich exploration of administrators' perspectives, experiences, and institutional practices. It is most appropriate for uncovering complex, context-specific ideas that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures (Chavez, 2022). In qualitative methods, exploratory design is a valuable approach for examining emerging issues and understanding phenomena that have received limited scholarly attention. It utilizes deliberate and systematic methods to uncover meaningful patterns supporting the analysis of sociocultural and psychological dimensions (Harrison et al., 2020). Although questions have been raised regarding its methodological rigor, researchers emphasize its function in deepening insights into research problems and facilitating the systematic collection of qualitative data (Gupta & Mukherjee, 2022).

2. Selection and Sampling Process

Exploratory research traditionally employs a small sample size to enable an in-depth examination of essential variables and how they interact with one another (Inoferio et al., 2024; Leon et al., 2024). Such studies usually concentrate on a specific group to gain a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Wutich et al., 2024). The selection of participants is often limited, guided by their ability to provide meaningful insights relevant to the study purpose (Duhaylungsod & Chavez, 2023). A widely used method in this context is purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling strategy where individuals are intentionally chosen based on particular characteristics or their importance to the research topic (Campbell et al., 2020; Chavez et al., 2023). The target population in this study was the academic leaders from different HEIs in the Philippines. Five sampling characteristics were applied: (1) a school administrator/president/vice president/director), (2) their institution is among the recent top 1000 Asian Universities for Faculty Professional Development and Research and Development (QS, THE, WURI, Unirank), (3)

employed in the institution at least 5 years, (4) manages human resources, research development, or quality control, and (5) willingness to participate in one-on-one interview sessions. 8 participants agreed to be interviewed in this study.

3. Instrument of the Study

The credibility and reliability of qualitative research findings are fundamentally influenced by the methodological rigor applied during data collection procedures (Bang, 2024; Monday, 2020). One-on-one interviews were deliberately designed to maintain a level of adaptability, enabling participants to articulate their insights freely, introduce relevant concerns, and, where applicable, shape the direction of the conversation (Ruslin et al., 2022). The development of the interview guide adhered to the framework proposed by Kallio et al. (2016), which involved identifying key elements, integrating insights from existing scholarly literature, drafting a preliminary version, executing a pilot study, and refining the final instrument. Expert input was sought to enhance content validity and ensure coherence with the objectives (Bhalla et al., 2023). The study conducted an expert review by consulting three experts in the fields of educational leadership, internationalization of schools, and faculty development to assess the relevance and clarity of the guide questions. In addition, pilot testing among five participants would help to assess the clarity, relevance, and capacity of the questions to generate meaningful and in-depth responses. **Table 1** presents the final interview guide after expert validation and pilot testing.

Table 1. Guide questions asked during interview

Research Questions	Guide Questions
How are individual faculty development programs structured and implemented in these universities?	Can you describe the specific components or activities included in your university's individual faculty development programs? How are faculty members selected or encouraged to participate in these professional development initiatives?
What institutional mechanisms are in place to promote faculty development as a collective effort?	What policies or support systems does your university implement to foster a culture of continuous faculty development? How does your institution coordinate or monitor faculty development programs at the department or college level?
How do universities build and sustain a reputable faculty professional development program?	What strategies does your university use to enhance the visibility and reputation of its faculty development programs? How is feedback or evaluation used to maintain or improve the credibility and effectiveness of these programs?
What strategies are evident in cultivating a strong research culture within VISMIN universities?	What initiatives or programs has your university introduced to motivate faculty members to engage in research? How is interdisciplinary or collaborative research promoted within your institution?
How do these institutions ensure effective dissemination of research outputs?	What platforms or channels does your university use to share faculty research locally and internationally? Are there incentives or institutional support provided to faculty for publishing and presenting research?
What strategic practices do universities follow to increase faculty research production?	What specific strategies are used to support faculty in generating consistent research output? How does the university manage research workload alongside teaching and administrative responsibilities?

4. Data Gathering Procedure

Interviews were conducted to elicit detailed and essential responses from the participants, serving as a primary qualitative technique for capturing their personal narratives and insights based on their work experiences. The interview procedures were organized to ensure coherence between the research objectives and the thematic substance of the questions (Chavez & Ceneciro, 2023;

Taherdoost, 2021). In-depth individual interviews typically last between 30 minutes to an hour and focus on exploring a participant’s personal experiences, perceptions, beliefs, or attitudes related to a specific topic (Guest et al., 2023). To promote an atmosphere of psychological safety and mutual trust, participants were encouraged to communicate openly. They were given the opportunity to speak using the language they are most comfortable with (Chavez & Vicente, 2025). Although initial responses tended to reflect general perspectives (Ceneciro et al., 2023), the use of follow-up prompts and probing techniques helped in uncovering deeper meanings associated with the participants’ values, experiences, and conceptual understandings. To uphold the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data, all interview sessions were audio-recorded using mobile devices to ensure the fidelity of participants’ narratives.

5. Data Analysis

The study employed reflexive thematic analysis, a method that emphasizes the researcher’s active engagement in the analytical process and promotes reflexivity as a means of recognizing and addressing subjectivities (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). Rather than viewing the researcher’s position as a limitation or source of bias, this approach considered it an analytical asset that can enrich the depth of the interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2024). The analysis followed the six-phase model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) (see **Figure 1**), with each phase designed to facilitate rigorous yet flexible interaction with the data. In addition, the inductive method guided the development of themes, minimizing the influence of prior assumptions and enhancing the objectivity of the interpretation (Perkins & Roe, 2024).

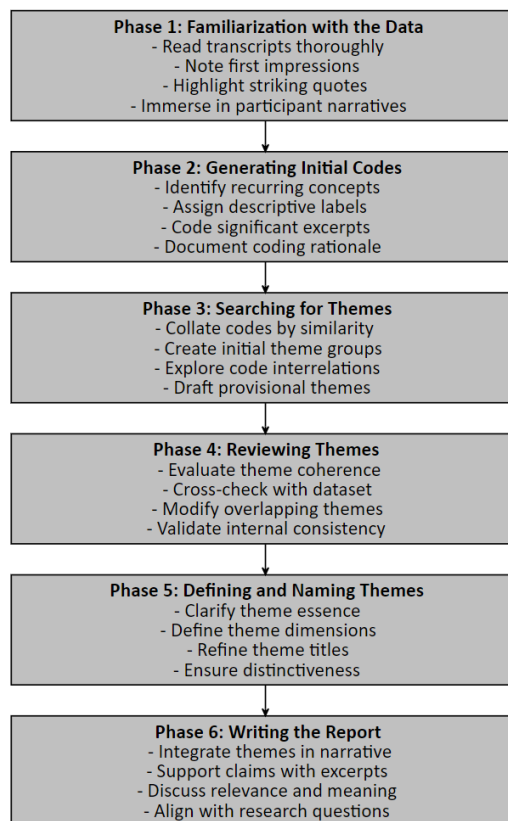


Figure 1. Workflow of Data Analysis Process

Results and Discussion

Question 1. How are individual faculty development programs structured and implemented in these universities?

Theme 1: Bottom-Up Approach for Faculty Development

Top-ranked universities in VISMIN follow a bottom-up faculty development approach, wherein the structuring and implementation of programs are driven primarily by the specific needs and aspirations of faculty members. The process begins at the departmental or college level, where faculty and administrators collaboratively assess skill gaps, hiring priorities, and opportunities for professional advancement.

In practice, the bottom-up approach is structured around long-term faculty development plans prepared by individual colleges. These plans detail projected hiring needs, identify existing specialization gaps, and set clear priorities for faculty upskilling. In technology-based schools, the College of Engineering might forecast the need for more faculty trained in renewable energy systems due to rising demand in the curriculum and industry trends. The administration then uses these inputs to allocate resources, whether in the form of scholarships for graduate studies, grants for research, or financial support for attending international conferences. This method creates a dynamic feedback loop between the faculty's evolving needs and the university's resource distribution.

“We have a Faculty and Staff Development Program guided by a bottom-up approach. While budget is always a consideration, our priority is the specific needs of the faculty.”

“Colleges are required to prepare long-term faculty development plans, identifying future hiring needs and specialization gaps.”

“Colleges are required to submit a 10-year Human Resource Development plan to the HRDMO, identifying future faculty needs in line with their academic programs.”

“Rather than evaluating each program in different terms, we look for opportunities to maximize growth across disciplines. For instance, in BS Biology, we have majors in both Biotechnology and Medical Biology, each with unique triggers for professional growth.”

Theme 2: Policies for Systematic Faculty Development Initiatives

In top-ranked universities, faculty development programs are designed and executed within the framework of well-defined institutional policies that prioritize transparency, accountability, and alignment with the university's mission and goals. These policies provide a structured pathway for identifying, implementing, and monitoring faculty training initiatives, ensuring that every activity serves a clear academic and institutional purpose. For some institutions, strict adherence to established rules not only maintains operational integrity but also safeguards compliance with oversight bodies such as the Commission on Audit. Clear and objective guidelines govern selection for faculty development opportunities. Candidates are chosen based on their alignment with projected program offerings, emerging academic demands, and industry-relevant skill requirements.

“We are very strict in implementing our rules and regulations because we do not want to be flagged by the Commission on Audit. We establish policies to be transparent and systematic in faculty development.”

“We have clear guidelines for selecting faculty for development programs. The criteria are aligned with the skills and expertise needed in our upcoming program offerings and industry demands. This ensures that the resources we invest in training are producing faculty who can deliver what our students truly need.”

“Our policy is to document and evaluate all faculty training activities, both local and international, to ensure they reflect our institutional values. This system prevents us from approving development programs that are impressive on paper but irrelevant to our mission.”

Theme 3: Proper Documentation of Activities

Among the top-ranked universities, individual faculty development programs are structured and implemented with a strong emphasis on thorough and systematic documentation. Before any activity, such as seminars, training sessions, or workshops, can proceed, it must undergo a formal process that includes the preparation of detailed proposals, securing the required endorsements, and obtaining administrative approval. This process ensures that every initiative is intentional, aligned with institutional goals, and compliant with policies set by regulatory bodies like the CHED.

Once activities are conducted, meticulous record-keeping is observed to preserve evidence of completion and effectiveness. Universities require program documentation such as participant lists, attendance sheets, event photos, certificates of participation, and post-activity evaluation forms. These records are compiled in both digital and hard copy formats to ensure accessibility and security.

In some cases, quality assurance teams are tasked with consolidating all documentation at the institutional level to maintain an organized archive, which can be readily presented during accreditation visits or CHED evaluations.

“Because we have strong policies that need to be followed, we need to ensure that every activity we conduct in relation to faculty development is documented.”

“In our college, no faculty development activity can proceed without proper documentation. This includes preparing a formal proposal, securing the necessary endorsements, and filing an official report after the activity. We keep copies of all these documents, both in hard and digital form, so that we can easily present our compliance during CHED evaluations or accreditation visits.”

“Every seminar, training, or workshop that we organize for faculty members is fully documented. We create a program of activities, participant lists, attendance sheets, and post-activity evaluation forms. These are submitted to the dean’s office and later compiled by our quality assurance team to ensure all records are intact and accessible when needed.”

“We strictly follow a system where all faculty development initiatives, whether internally or externally conducted, must have proper documentation. This means photos of the event, the official invitation, activity proposals, and signed certificates of participation. We treat these documents as evidence of our commitment to continuous improvement and compliance with CHED requirements.”

Question 2: What institutional mechanisms are in place to promote faculty development as a collective effort?

Theme 1: Reflection of the University Core

Institutional mechanisms to promote faculty development as a collective effort are anchored on a shared vision and mission that guide academic and operational priorities. Strategic planning sessions are regularly conducted at the institutional, college, and departmental levels to reaffirm these guiding principles. Through these sessions, faculty members collectively identify goals, assess performance, and formulate coordinated actions. This ensures that all academic units work in synergy toward common objectives, which then helps in strengthening their sense of shared purpose.

“Cohesiveness stems from strategic planning anchored on our university’s vision and mission, which are discussed and reaffirmed at multiple levels. We are also committed to leadership development, ensuring that new leaders are trained and mentored.”

“Ensuring knowledge growth is closely tied to our vision of becoming a globally recognized institution while sustaining local relevance.”

“Our core is anchored on a responsive and collaborative academic framework, where faculty development is shaped through active engagement with industry, alums, and the community.”

Theme 2: Ensure Cohesiveness among the Faculty

Faculty cohesiveness is deliberately cultivated through a combination of structured leadership development, consistent academic engagement, and sustained mentorship programs. These institutions recognize that a unified academic body is essential for delivering high-quality education, achieving research excellence, and advancing institutional reputation.

Top-ranked universities implement structured mentoring and training programs for newly appointed leaders, including department chairs and program coordinators. These initiatives equip leaders with the necessary skills to guide their respective units effectively while remaining aligned with the university’s overarching strategic directions. This ensures an efficient flow of communication, consistent decision-making, and a leadership culture grounded in collaboration.

Regular academic exchanges, such as monthly faculty colloquia, provide a dedicated platform for open dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and academic alignment. These gatherings encourage the exchange of best practices, discussion of emerging trends, and critical reflection on teaching, research, and extension initiatives. The academic leaders believed that maintaining an open forum for communication, their university builds a transparent and inclusive environment where faculty members actively contribute to shaping institutional directions.

“We sustain institutional cohesion through regular strategic planning workshops and leadership mentoring programs.”

“Monthly faculty colloquia provide a platform for open dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and alignment of academic goals, ensuring that everyone works toward common institutional priorities.”

“A faculty mentorship program pairs senior professors with early-career faculty to enhance professional growth and cultivate a supportive academic culture.”

“Some departments conduct their own Faculty Day, during which every faculty member engages in team-building activities to strengthen their relationships. Of course, the college deans also have to approve this.”

Theme 3: Reward System for Leadership Players

Some institutions designed reward systems for leadership players among the faculty. In this context, the institution not only invests in the professional growth of its faculty by providing free access to specialized leadership workshops but also reinforces a culture of excellence by granting tangible rewards such as monetary incentives, performance bonuses, and sponsorship to prestigious conferences.

One of the primary mechanisms in place is the provision of free enrollment in specialized leadership workshops. These programs equip faculty members with relevant skills in project management, policy formulation, and stakeholder engagement, enabling them to take on more significant roles in institutional initiatives. Upon completion, participants receive formal certificates and monetary incentives, such as Php 3,000 to Php 5,000, serving both as recognition and motivation.

The institution also employs a performance-based reward system for faculty members who take charge of major institutional projects. Leading events such as research conferences, curriculum innovation initiatives, or community outreach programs are recognized with performance bonuses. This incentivization not only celebrates the contributions of individual leaders but also encourages faculty collaboration, as leadership projects typically involve multidisciplinary teamwork. The system ensures that rewards are tied to meaningful, high-impact contributions.

“In our institution, we encourage our faculty to work on their leadership skills by providing free enrollment in specialized leadership workshops. Upon successful completion, they receive certificates and a monetary incentive ranging from Php3,000 to Php5,000 as recognition of their initiative.”

“Faculty members who lead major institutional projects, such as research conferences or community outreach programs, are given a performance bonus.”

“Outstanding leadership performance is recognized during our annual Recognition Day, where top faculty leaders receive a trophy and a cash reward, along with public acknowledgment from the administration.”

“In addition to cash incentives, we sponsor leadership awardees to attend national and international conferences, covering travel, accommodation, and registration fees.”

Question 3: How do universities build and sustain a reputable faculty professional development program?

Theme 1: Implement Strict Faculty Recruitment

Strict faculty recruitment serves as a cornerstone for building and sustaining reputable faculty professional development in top-ranked universities. Top-ranked institutions ensure that incoming faculty members possess not only advanced academic qualifications, such as at least a master’s degree, but also a demonstrable track record in research and extension work. This level of selectiveness ensures that the faculty body is composed of individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to the academic productivity and institutional performance, which is a critical metric in SUC leveling and other performance-based evaluations.

A major insight from this approach is the deliberate prioritization of specialized expertise over generalist backgrounds. For example, in a BS Biology program, it is not enough to have faculty with a general biology background; instead, the university actively seeks experts in zoology and botany to ensure that students receive in-depth and highly relevant training. This specialization extends to niche programs such as fisheries, forestry, or microbiology, where deep

disciplinary knowledge directly impacts the quality of instruction, research output, and student preparedness for the workforce. With these specialization standards, universities not only uphold academic excellence but also cultivate a competitive advantage in their program offerings.

“When hiring faculty, we examine their capabilities in research and extension work. This is essential for sustaining the university’s long-term growth, especially since SUC heavily rewards strong research performance.”

“Specialized faculty are particularly important. For example, in our BS Biology program, we need professors specializing in zoology and botany. Unfortunately, many applicants have only general backgrounds in biology without deep expertise. Without such specializations, our students would be shortchanged in their education.”

“For specialized programs such as fisheries, forestry, or microbiology, we actively seek experts with deep disciplinary training rather than generalists, ensuring our students receive the most relevant and high-quality instruction.”

“Currently, we have about 300 regular faculty members for 8,000 students and 60 part-time lecturers. We are also looking to open additional positions, as there are still unfilled posts in the university.”

“In faculty recruitment, we now only accept candidates with at least a master's degree, ensuring that new hires are already research-capable. For faculty development, we conduct regular training and workshops, including programs for startup researchers.”

Theme 2: Encouraging the Pursuit of More Challenging Knowledge

Top-ranked universities recognize that faculty professional development is inextricably linked to the acquisition of advanced and specialized knowledge. For them, encouraging faculty to pursue challenging postgraduate courses, institutions ensure continuous intellectual growth, which directly enhances the quality of teaching and research output.

For example, faculty enrolled in advanced molecular biology or renewable energy systems programs are better equipped to integrate cutting-edge knowledge into their curriculum, ensuring that students receive contemporary and relevant education. This deliberate push for intellectual rigor helps sustain a faculty body capable of maintaining high academic standards across all programs. Similarly, a faculty member who completes a specialized data analytics course can introduce new methods for research data interpretation, which colleagues in related disciplines may then adopt. Such initiatives strengthen the overall intellectual capacity of the faculty and ensure that institutional teaching and research remain aligned with global trends and technological advancements.

Strategically, encouraging engagement in demanding postgraduate programs also supports the university's goal of remaining competitive in performance-based evaluations and national rankings. Metrics such as faculty qualifications, research productivity, and specialized expertise are often key indicators in rankings and accreditation processes. By increasing the proportion of faculty with high-level competencies, universities directly improve these evaluative indicators. Institutions may prioritize support for faculty pursuing doctorate or postdoctoral fellowships in emerging fields.

“With the advent of new discoveries, we encourage our faculty to take difficult postgraduate courses. This helps us ensure quality education.”

“In light of rapid advancements in research and technology, our institution actively motivates faculty members to pursue rigorous postgraduate programs that challenge their intellectual capacity and broaden their academic expertise.”

“Encouraging our faculty to engage in difficult and specialized postgraduate courses is a strategic step toward maintaining high educational standards and ensuring that our curriculum remains relevant and forward-looking.”

Theme 3: Faculty Development Branding

Faculty development branding serves as a strategic tool for universities to communicate their commitment to continuous professional growth and academic excellence. Top-ranked institutions demonstrate to their internal and external stakeholders that faculty competence and development are central to their mission. This visibility motivates faculty members to engage in training, research, and professional advancement actively, building a culture of excellence and lifelong learning within the academic community.

Top-ranked universities integrate faculty development achievements into broader institutional branding strategies. Whenever faculty attend national or international conferences, earn postgraduate degrees, or complete professional certifications, these milestones are publicly recognized through newsletters, official portals, or social media announcements. This practice not only celebrates individual accomplishments but also positions the institution as a hub of continuous learning and expertise. Such transparency encourages other faculty members to pursue similar development opportunities, creating a positive cycle of motivation and professional growth.

“We also have faculty development branding in our institution. To show our stakeholders that we are serious about our mission, we post on our university Facebook page about the training they received.”

“Our institution has actively developed a branding strategy around faculty development to showcase our commitment to academic excellence. Whenever faculty complete specialized training or attend workshops, we highlight these achievements on our official university website and social media platforms to communicate our dedication to quality education.”

“Whenever faculty members attend national or international conferences, complete postgraduate courses, or earn certifications, these accomplishments are posted on our university portal and newsletters. This visibility helps strengthen our institutional image as a center of excellence where faculty are continuously upskilled.”

Question 4. What strategies are evident in cultivating a strong research culture within VISMIN universities?

Theme 1: Establish a System for Research Processes

A formalized research process covers review mechanisms for all proposals, ensuring that quality, feasibility, and compliance with ethical standards are rigorously assessed before projects proceed. For example, an institution receiving dozens of proposals per funding cycle must have a robust in-house evaluation system capable of managing large-scale submissions while maintaining fairness, transparency, and consistency in decision-making. In addition, policies and incentives, such as publication rewards to financial support for advanced degrees, could motivate the faculty

and scaffold the learning process, enabling them to pursue ambitious research agendas while maintaining rigorous scholarly standards.

For some universities, another essential component of an efficient research system is the categorization and capacity-building of researchers. They distinguish faculty as Early Career, Leading, or Established Researchers, which helps their institutions strategically channel resources, mentoring, and professional development opportunities to cultivate a sustainable pipeline of high-performing scholars. This structured approach ensures that early-career faculty are not left to deal with the challenges of research all by themselves but are instead supported toward achieving prominence.

“Research proposals first undergo campus-level filtering. The most promising are forwarded for university-level funding consideration. External reviewers evaluate all proposals to ensure impartiality and adherence to quality standards.”

“Research and extension activities are developed through a bottom-up approach. Colleges submit proposals, which are reviewed by our Research and Extension Evaluation Committee, comprising both technical and social science experts, before they are finalized and implemented.”

“Each college has its own research head, empowered to implement initiatives designed to meet the needs of their department. We also conduct in-house reviews for all research proposals at the college or campus level. On average, we receive around 80 proposals for each call for papers, and we currently have about 250 ongoing projects under review. Remarkably, approximately 91% of our faculty are engaged in research in some capacity.”

“When I assumed the role of Research Director in 2019, one of my priorities was to bring order and structure to the university's research system. We developed 18 new research policies, covering areas such as publication incentives, research assistance, and financial grants for faculty completing their master's or doctoral degrees.”

“In line with CHED guidelines, we have developed a categorization system for university researchers: Early Career, Leading, and Established Researchers. This classification serves as the basis for our capacity-building programs. We actively create opportunities for Early Career Researchers to progress into the Leading category, which helps expand our pool of experienced scholars.”

Theme 2: Setting Targets for Research Initiatives

Target setting is a deliberate mechanism that guides faculty, departments, and research centers toward coordinated, purpose-driven scholarly output. Universities create a structured system of accountability that aligns local efforts with institutional priorities by institutionalizing specific targets for research, from publications and proposal submissions to institutional linkages as well as from central administration to individual colleges and centers. This top-down connection ensures that every unit understands its responsibilities while contributing proportionately to broader research objectives.

Institutionalized targets provide faculty with a clear roadmap of expectations, allowing them to prioritize projects, plan their workloads, and make strategic decisions about research focus areas. For example, increasing Scopus-indexed publications from single digits to a target of 100 or more annually challenges faculty to maintain consistent scholarly productivity while emphasizing quality over quantity. Such targets also drive professional development, as

researchers are incentivized to pursue collaborations, mentorship, and capacity-building opportunities that enhance their ability to meet or exceed these benchmarks.

“At the start of each semester, targets for research and extension, such as publications, proposal submissions, and linkage agreements, are cascaded from the Vice President’s office down to individual colleges. These targets are divided equitably among centers.”

“Back in 2019, our university had only six or seven Scopus publications. Today, that number has grown to 56. My five-year target is 1,000 Scopus-indexed articles, with a minimum of 100 publications each year.”

“Research output is a key metric for global rankings. For instance, THE (Times Higher Education) requires at least 120 Scopus-indexed publications per year, with consistent performance for three consecutive years.”

“Setting explicit, measurable targets for research initiatives ensures that faculty and departments have clear expectations for outputs such as publications, proposal submissions, and institutional partnerships. This allows the university to monitor progress strategically and allocate resources effectively.”

Theme 3: Collaboration among the Faculty Members

In the advent of research publication initiatives in higher education, collaboration is increasingly recognized as a vital mechanism for enhancing research productivity, promoting interdisciplinary engagement, and ensuring institutional competitiveness at national and international levels. Top-ranked universities create opportunities for knowledge exchange, skill development, and the generation of innovative outputs that extend beyond individual capabilities.

One notable example of faculty collaboration is the establishment of initiatives such as the Research Café, which functions as an informal yet well-documented forum for scholarly dialogue. In these gatherings, external researchers and scientists are invited to share insights, best practices, and emerging trends in various fields. Although the environment is intentionally casual to encourage open discussion, the process is outcome-oriented, where participants are expected to produce tangible outputs, such as concept papers that can be developed into formal research proposals. This approach ensures that informal exchanges translate into measurable academic contributions, encouraging a culture of continuous intellectual engagement.

“The Research Café is an informal yet well-documented gathering where we invite external researchers and scientists to speak about their work and share best practices. While the atmosphere is casual to encourage open discussion, the output is tangible, like a concept paper that participants then develop into a formal research proposal for presentation. Each year, we set specific targets for the Research Café, including the number of concept notes generated. This initiative is one of our unique strategies that distinguishes us from many other universities.”

“To ensure timely and high-quality submissions to national and international ranking bodies such as THE and WURI, we conduct workshops with college representatives to prepare documents well in advance of deadlines.”

“We are also in the planning stage of establishing a dedicated research laboratory structure. The idea is to assign a research leader, someone who specializes in a particular topic, to head a thematic research team. This is similar to the practices observed at the international level, where peers collaborate under a defined research

theme led by an expert. The Research Office will oversee the selection of leaders and the formation of these teams.”

“We also introduced the Scopus-Oriented Publication for Excellence Writeshop in April 2023. This initiative focuses on helping participants prepare various types of scholarly work, including original research, thought papers, book reviews, commentaries, editorials, and critical essays. Participants present their drafts, receive feedback, and are then guided on submitting their work to appropriate Scopus-indexed journals.”

Question 5: How do these institutions ensure effective dissemination of research outputs?

Theme 1: Probing of External Works

Dissemination of research outputs is primarily strategic in top-ranked universities. It is driven by a multi-channel process that ensures scholarly work reaches both academic and non-academic audiences. This process begins with exposing outputs to different platforms, such as institutional repositories, conference proceedings, and national or international research networks.

With dissemination, research becomes accessible not only to specialists within the academic community but also to policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. Administrators believed that accessibility is necessary to make an impact, and thus they invest in digital infrastructure, open-access systems, and partnerships that expand the reach of their scholarly contributions.

Partnerships with other academic institutions, industry players, and professional organizations allow for co-hosted events, joint publications, and cross-listing of research outputs in multiple platforms. A paper presented at an international tourism summit may also be uploaded to the university’s online portal and simultaneously included in a national tourism research network. This integration not only amplifies visibility but also provides opportunities for networking, citation, and collaborative follow-up projects.

“This year, I created the Technology and Business Section to handle inventions, startups, and prototypes. Recognizing the workload involved, I recommended to the president that another faculty member take the lead. Innovation is now a clear trend in higher education, and most universities are developing similar credentials. I also collaborate with peers from other institutions to integrate conference proceedings and other outputs into our research portfolio.”

“After a faculty member presented a study on sustainable tourism at the Tourism Summit, the paper was uploaded to our university’s online portal and cross-listed in a national tourism research network. This ensures that both local stakeholders and global researchers can access our findings without delay.”

“We work closely with external partners to transform academic findings into applied solutions that can be showcased in industry-focused platforms. For example, our faculty-developed mobile application for local fishery monitoring was featured at the national proceedings, where it attracted interest from private companies and government agencies. This exposure significantly increased the likelihood of commercialization and further funding.”

Theme 2: Publication of Institutional Outputs

Administrators of top-ranked universities encourage the publication of institutional outputs to reputable publishers. The publication of institutional outputs is an essential strategy for

disseminating research findings beyond the confines of the academic community. It ensures that the intellectual contributions of faculty members are shared with a broader audience, including other researchers, policymakers, industry practitioners, and the general public.

Publication of output strengthens their academic reputation, attracts funding, and contributes to the body of global knowledge. This process requires a well-structured system that removes barriers, provides targeted support, and aligns dissemination channels with the nature and scope of the research.

While offering wide visibility, open-access journals often charge significant publication fees, which can be prohibitive for faculty members, especially in resource-constrained settings. Institutions that cover these costs remove a substantial barrier to international publication, which encourages more faculty members to submit their work to high-impact outlets.

Along with the practice of publication, sustaining research integrity requires preventing predatory publishing. Many faculty members, especially early-career researchers, may be unaware of deceptive journals that exploit authors for profit without ensuring rigorous peer review. Institutions can safeguard their researchers by maintaining and regularly updating a vetted list of credible, non-predatory publishers organized by discipline. This practice prevents reputational damage, saves time, and reinforces a culture of quality scholarship.

“To maximize dissemination, we strategically align our research outputs with external publication opportunities.”

“When one of our researchers completed a study on indigenous weaving patterns, we submitted it to an ethnographic journal and simultaneously arranged a public exhibit in collaboration with the local cultural center.”

“Our administration covers the cost of publication fees, especially for open-access journals, to remove financial barriers that often prevent faculty from publishing internationally. Last year, we funded 28 publication fees for journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, which directly contributed to a 40% increase in our indexed publication count.”

“We actively help faculty identify suitable journals by maintaining an updated database of credible, non-predatory publishers categorized by discipline. This saves time for researchers and prevents them from unknowingly submitting to predatory journals.”

Theme 3: Dissemination through Campus Journalism

Campus journalism, particularly through newspapers, online bulletins, and radio programs, serves as a medium to transform technical research outputs into narratives that are both engaging and accessible to different audiences, especially students. Institutions create an informed and research-oriented academic culture using language that is simplified without sacrificing scholarly rigor. This strategy not only increases the visibility of research but also builds an environment where knowledge sharing becomes an integral part of campus life.

A significant part of this process involves publishing feature articles in the campus newspaper that spotlight newly completed faculty and student research. These articles are designed to be reader-friendly while retaining the essence of the scholarly work, thus enabling students from various disciplines, even non-academic audiences, to appreciate the importance of the studies being conducted. They ensure that groundbreaking studies are not confined to journal publications alone but are also shared with the community that can benefit from them.

“We partner with the campus newspaper to publish feature articles on recently completed faculty and student research. This ensures that the language is accessible to non-specialist readers while retaining the academic rigor of the work.”

“The editorial team of the student publication conducts interviews with lead researchers, which are then published as in-depth profiles highlighting the study’s objectives, methods, and social relevance.”

“Whenever research is presented at conferences, the student media team is tasked with covering the event and publishing a news article that includes the researcher’s experiences, key insights, and awards received.”

“The campus radio program, in collaboration with the publication team, airs short research segments where authors discuss their work live, encouraging direct engagement and questions from listeners.”

Question 6. What strategic practices do universities follow to increase faculty research production?
Theme 1: Providing Incentives for Published Papers

In top-ranked universities, the provision of incentives for published papers serves as a strategy to drive research productivity, enhance institutional prestige, and foster a culture of academic excellence.

The incentive framework typically combines financial rewards, point-based recognition, and defined performance benchmarks. Financial incentives are stratified according to the prestige and impact of the publication venue, with higher-tier journals receiving more substantial rewards. For instance, publications in top-quartile (Q1) Scopus-indexed journals may command incentives several times greater than those in lower quartiles. Point-based systems complement these financial measures by recognizing a wider range of scholarly contributions, ensuring that innovative outputs such as intellectual property and creative works are also valued.

Top-ranked universities also implement milestone-based funding mechanisms to encourage project completion and community impact. For example, an initial grant is awarded upon project approval, followed by a significantly larger release of funds based on tangible and visible outcomes, such as societal benefits or industry partnerships. This model ensures accountability and drives researchers to think beyond publication metrics, focusing instead on how their work contributes to broader societal goals.

“Incentives are provided for research publications, intellectual property outputs, and external collaborations. At the beginning of each academic term, clear research and extension targets are communicated from the Vice President’s Office down to the colleges, ensuring that expectations are transparent and measurable.”

“For funded projects, I introduced a Research Project Implementation Incentive. If a proposal is approved, whether funded by the university or externally, the researcher receives an initial Php20,000 grant. Upon completion, and once they demonstrate a tangible community impact within six months, they may receive up to Php100,000 in total funding. Proposals undergo a strict vetting process before approval.”

“To encourage high-quality outputs, we have significantly increased publication incentives. This year, authors of Q1 and Q2 Scopus publications received Php20,000, while Q3 and Q4 publications earned Php10,000. For our institutional journal, the incentive was Php5,000. Starting next year, Q1 and Q2 publications will receive Php100,000, Q3 and Q4 will receive Php80,000, and original research

papers will be awarded the full Php100,000 incentive, even though papers will have incentives, albeit lower. For the university journal, the incentive will increase to Php20,000. All of these rates have been approved by our Board of Regents and the city mayor, with funding already secured for next year.”

“We also use a points-based system for research and innovation. Points are awarded not only for Scopus publications but also for other scholarly outputs such as copyrights. Once faculty reach a certain threshold, they receive corresponding incentives. For example, exceeding performance expectations by 300% might merit Php5,000, while exceeding further could merit Php7,500.”

Theme 2: Promotion based on Research Outputs

Top-ranked universities are committed to building a research-driven academic culture, where faculty advancement and promotion are based on their measurable and impactful scholarly contributions. This ensures that promotions are grounded in the faculty's ability to produce quality research aligned with the institution's academic mission and societal relevance.

Faculty members aspiring for higher academic ranks are required to present a robust research portfolio that demonstrates both breadth and depth in their scholarly endeavors. This portfolio typically includes peer-reviewed publications in reputable journals, funded research projects, and recognized contributions such as patents or innovative community-based initiatives. The underlying principle is that academic excellence extends beyond classroom instruction; it must also involve meaningful engagement with the global body of knowledge and the capacity to generate outputs that address pressing societal challenges.

“Faculty members aiming for higher academic ranks must present a strong research portfolio, which includes peer-reviewed publications, funded projects, and recognized scholarly contributions. This ensures that promotion is tied to both academic excellence and contributions to the advancement of knowledge.”

“When considering promotions, we prioritize the quality and impact of research rather than simply counting the number of publications. Faculty members who publish in high-impact journals, secure patents, or develop projects that have tangible community benefits are given higher consideration. This helps maintain high research standards and aligns with the university’s vision of producing meaningful, socially relevant work.”

“A systematic performance monitoring process supports promotion based on research outputs. Every year, faculty members submit a research dossier detailing their publications, citations, funded projects, and other scholarly engagements. A research evaluation committee reviews these submissions and provides feedback, ensuring that faculty know exactly where they stand and what areas they need to improve before applying for promotion.”

Theme 3: Research Awards and Recognition

Awards and recognition in research serve as a vital institutional mechanism for building a culture of scholarly excellence, motivating faculty members, and enhancing overall research productivity.

Top-ranked universities acknowledged both traditional academic achievements and broader societal contributions, in which the award system ensures that excellence is rewarded in its diverse forms. For example, a faculty member who secures a grant from an international funding

body, publishes in a top-tier journal, and whose work is later cited in government policy documents would be an exemplary candidate for the "Research Excellence Award." This structured recognition not only elevates the individual's academic profile but also enhances the institution's reputation, which in turn attracts further funding and collaboration opportunities.

The awards framework typically involves both individual and departmental categories, allowing recognition to extend beyond personal achievements to collective team efforts. This is significant because interdisciplinary collaboration often leads to high-impact outcomes that cannot be accomplished by a single researcher alone.

"Every academic year, our institution conducts a formal Research Recognition Ceremony where outstanding faculty and departments are honored for their exemplary contributions to research. This includes achievements such as high-impact publications, groundbreaking discoveries, and innovations that address real-world problems."

"We have a structured awards system that covers both individual and departmental achievements. For faculty members, recognition may be based on factors such as publications in reputable journals, conference presentations, and securing competitive research grants. For departments, the collective research output, collaboration, and interdisciplinary initiatives are evaluated to determine which team deserves the award."

"One of our key awards is the 'Research Excellence Award,' given to faculty whose scholarly work has gained significant citations, received patents, or been adopted in practical applications by industry or government agencies."

One key driver of organizational success is its provision of clear organizational goals (Aguilera et al., 2024). With a clear institutional identity and long-term aspirations, it ensures that faculty development programs, research priorities, and community engagements are not systematically isolated but strategically aligned with ranking indicators such as teaching quality, research productivity, and international outlook. When the mission and vision are consistently embedded in decision-making and practice, the university cultivates a culture of shared responsibility, ethical scholarship, and innovation, which are qualities that enhance institutional reputation and, consequently, global ranking performance.

At the organizational level, the core definition ensures coherence and collective commitment by aligning individual faculty efforts with institutional goals (Hong et al., 2021). It influences policies on faculty workload, promotion, research funding, and international collaboration, ensuring that every initiative contributes to the broader pursuit of academic excellence and global visibility. This clarity of purpose not only positions the institution as a proactive player in addressing societal and global challenges but also strengthens its credibility among stakeholders, partners, and ranking bodies (Ocasio et al., 2023).

A well-structured system integrates policies, processes, and performance metrics into a coherent framework that guides faculty development, research productivity, and institutional visibility. Building a system within the organization aligns closely with the principles of social exchanges because it institutionalizes the reciprocal relationship between faculty members and the university. When systems are designed to provide consistent mentoring, research funding, recognition programs, and career advancement opportunities, faculty members perceive strong organizational support. This perception of fairness and reliability builds trust and motivates the

members to reciprocate through increased productivity, long-term commitment, and collaborative engagement (Melianto et al., 2025). The system serves as the structured mechanism through which universities operationalize support, which then helps in enhancing efficiency and institutional performance (Liang & Yin, 2024).

Furthermore, the system should also ensure the wellness of its members by embedding mechanisms that safeguard work-life balance, psychological health, and professional growth (Krishernawan et al., 2023; Nor et al., 2023). Wellness programs, counseling services, and workload management policies are essential components of a supportive academic environment that recognizes faculty not only as knowledge producers but also as individuals with personal needs. When faculty members feel that their holistic well-being is valued, they are more likely to remain engaged, resilient, and committed to long-term institutional goals.

Lastly, with a clear definition of purpose, a strong system, effective implementation, and efficient human resources, institutions are better positioned to build meaningful and sustainable linkages. These linkages include partnerships with local communities, government agencies, industries, and international academic institutions, which expand the university's capacity to access resources, share expertise, and increase visibility. Collaborative engagements not only create opportunities for joint research and faculty mobility but also enhance the institution's relevance in addressing pressing societal issues. Linkages serve as bridges that transform internal strengths into external recognition, enabling institutions to establish their presence on the global stage (Staub, 2023).

A critical aspect of systematic process is the establishment of standardized guidelines for faculty and research development. Universities develop annual faculty development plans that detail the specific competencies to be enhanced, target training programs, and measurable performance indicators. These plans are often created through collaborative consultations with academic heads and department chairs, ensuring that they reflect both institutional priorities and faculty needs. Such alignment guarantees that professional growth opportunities are equitably distributed and strategically implemented.

Strategic initiatives are designed to be consistent with the institution's long-term goals, ensuring that faculty development and research outputs directly contribute to the university's identity and societal commitments. Research priority areas are anchored on the university agenda, whether in sustainability, community development, technological innovation, or cultural preservation. Regular performance reviews assess alignment between individual faculty work plans and the broader institutional roadmap.

Furthermore, faculty well-being is treated as a cornerstone of productivity, with initiatives such as competitive compensation packages, work-life balance policies, and professional growth opportunities. Universities organize wellness programs, peer-support networks, and recognition ceremonies to boost morale. Mentorship and collaborative research opportunities are offered to encourage intellectual curiosity, collegiality, and sustained enthusiasm for academic work. Competitive compensation remains a critical element in promoting faculty satisfaction. Universities ensure that salary scales are commensurate with faculty qualifications, achievements, and market standards, while also providing incremental increases tied to performance evaluations. This principle is often implemented along with benefits such as research stipends and publication incentives for faculty and their dependents.

Universities conduct regular workshops, seminars, and certification courses on responsible research conduct, data management, and authorship ethics. These programs equip faculty members with the knowledge and skills to avoid common ethical pitfalls, such as data fabrication, selective

reporting, or improper citation. A faculty member conducting a longitudinal study on public health, for instance, would be trained not only in statistical rigor but also in ensuring the confidentiality of patient records, informed consent, and the proper archiving of datasets for future verification.

The integration of ethical principles, integrity, and diligence into institutional culture enhances both the credibility and the long-term sustainability of academic excellence. Embedding these values into policies, training programs, and performance evaluations can help universities create an environment where ethical conduct is the norm. For these universities, faculty contributions are not only intellectually sound but also socially responsible, which then helps in strengthening their status in both local and international academic communities.

Conclusion

This study analyzed different strategies and initiatives of VISMIN universities that helped them in international rankings. It sought to investigate both the structure and execution of individual faculty development programs and the institutional mechanisms that support collective faculty growth. The research further explored strategies employed by universities to sustain reputable professional development, cultivate a strong research culture, and ensure the effective dissemination of scholarly outputs.

Top-ranked universities employed well-defined policies that structured faculty career advancement, research submission, funding allocation, and recognition systems. Faculty development plans were created collaboratively with academic leaders to reflect institutional priorities and individual needs, while digital platforms and standardized evaluation rubrics ensured transparency and efficiency in research processes. Structured programs, workshops, and mentorship opportunities enhanced both teaching and research skills, and recognition mechanisms, including awards, incentives, and professional privileges, building a culture of achievement and continuous improvement, ensuring that faculty were motivated to produce high-quality outputs.

Universities aligned their initiatives with their long-term goals, ensuring that faculty work directly contributed to the institution's mission, vision, and societal commitments. Strategic alignment strengthens the relevance and impact of research projects and faculty development efforts, while performance management systems facilitate ongoing monitoring and recalibration of individual and institutional objectives. These universities promote long-term scholarly engagement and social responsibility through prioritizing faculty satisfaction through competitive compensation, research honoraria, and professional recognition and embedding ethical practices and diligence into institutional culture.

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