

Balancing support and bureaucracy: the enabling–constraining dynamics of research funding policies in a Philippine state university

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ABSTRACT

Research funding policies has a critical role in shaping research productivity and governance in higher education institutions (HEIs). However, limited empirical studies have examined how these policies are experienced by faculty members and administrators, particularly in state universities within developing country contexts. This study explores the implementation of research funding and assistance guidelines in a Philippine state university using a phenomenological approach. Data were collected from 34 participants (15 administrators and 19 faculty members) through semi-structured interviews and document analysis and were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal an enabling–constraining dynamic in the implementation of research funding policies. Institutional support, including funding, incentives, and structured processes, enhances faculty motivation, research engagement, and planning quality. Conversely, bureaucratic complexity, procedural rigidity, and delays in fund release constrain efficiency, limit participation, and discourage sustained engagement. Anchored in self-determination theory (SDT) and structuration theory, the study demonstrates how research funding policies simultaneously influence faculty motivation and are shaped by institutional structures. These findings highlight the need for streamlined processes, consistent implementation, and faculty-centered support systems. The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence of the enabling–constraining paradox of research funding policies and offers insights for improving research governance in higher education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Experiential insights are valuable in understanding how teachers engage with institutional policies and practices [1]. These insights allow educators to reflect on their interactions with systems and services, including how policies are implemented and experienced in real contexts [2]. Through such feedback, institutions are able to assess effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and enhance service delivery [3]. Moreover, experiential perspectives can be used to examine satisfaction trends and ensure that institutional processes continue to improve over time [4]. In the context of research policy implementation, these insights are particularly important as they provide a deeper understanding of how faculty navigate research-related guidelines and systems [5].

Institutional research manuals serve as formal guides that outline procedures, standards, and expectations for conducting research in universities [6]. These manuals provide direction on data collection methods and analytical approaches that can be used in scholarly work [7]. They also incorporate ethical considerations, including the protection of participants and proper data management practices [8]. As comprehensive references, research manuals support researchers from the initial stages of planning to the final stages of dissemination [9]. In doing so, they help ensure that research activities are conducted in a systematic, consistent, and reliable manner [10].

Research is widely recognized as a fundamental function of higher education institutions (HEIs) and a key driver of academic and institutional development [11]. Universities therefore establish structured policies and funding mechanisms to support research productivity and governance. These policies are often embedded within research manuals, which regulate research processes, funding allocation, and compliance requirements. While such structures are designed to enhance research quality and accountability, their implementation may vary across institutional contexts and user experiences.

Recent studies have emphasized the increasing role of institutional policies and funding mechanisms in shaping research productivity and faculty engagement in higher education [12]–[14]. However, emerging evidence also highlights that bureaucratic structures, administrative complexity, and policy implementation gaps can constrain research participation and efficiency [15], [16]. These findings show that the effectiveness of research policies depends not only on their design but also on how they are experienced and operationalized within institutional contexts.

Despite the recognized importance of research funding and assistance guidelines in higher education, limited empirical studies have examined how these policies are experienced by faculty members and administrators, particularly within state universities in developing country contexts. Existing literature has largely focused on research outputs, productivity metrics, and institutional performance, with less attention given to the lived experiences of those who directly engage with research systems. This gap is critical, as institutional policies are not merely administrative instruments but operate as dynamic structures that may simultaneously enable research engagement while constraining participation through bureaucratic processes.

Emerging evidence suggests that research policies exert a dual influence on faculty engagement. On one hand, funding support, incentives, and structured processes can enhance motivation, improve research planning, and increase participation. On the other hand, procedural rigidity, administrative delays, and complex requirements may hinder efficiency and discourage faculty involvement. However, existing studies have not sufficiently explained how this enabling–constraining dynamic is experienced and negotiated by faculty and administrators in actual institutional settings.

In response to this gap, the present study explores the experiences of faculty members and administrators in implementing research funding and assistance guidelines in a Philippine state university. Using a phenomenological approach, it examines the perceived advantages and disadvantages of these guidelines, their implementation processes, and their impact on the research system. The study aims to provide deeper insights into how institutional policies shape research engagement and to inform the development of more responsive and effective research governance systems by focusing on lived experiences.

This study contributes to the literature in three significant ways. First, it adopts a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of faculty members and administrators in navigating research funding policies. Second, it examines research funding guidelines through a policy implementation lens, highlighting how institutional processes shape research engagement in practice. Third, it provides empirical evidence of the dual effect of research policies, demonstrating how they simultaneously function as enabling and constraining mechanisms within HEIs.

To further examine these dynamics, this study is framed through a conceptual model that views research funding and assistance guidelines as both enabling and constraining mechanisms within the institutional context. The framework focuses on three key dimensions: i) the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the guidelines; ii) faculty and administrators' experiences in their implementation; and iii) their impact on the research process. These dimensions reflect the core areas through which institutional policies shape research engagement and outcomes.

The study is anchored on self-determination theory (SDT) and structuration theory, which together provide a comprehensive lens for understanding the interaction between individual motivation and institutional structures. SDT explains how research funding, incentives, and institutional support influence faculty motivation, particularly in terms of autonomy, competence, and engagement. In contrast, structuration theory explains how institutional rules, procedures, and policies both enable and constrain faculty actions within the research system.

In this study, these frameworks are not treated as parallel perspectives but as complementary analytical lenses. SDT is used to explain how institutional support mechanisms shape faculty motivation,

engagement, and participation in research activities, while structuration theory is applied to examine how institutional rules and practices both shape and are shaped by faculty actions. Collectively, these frameworks guide the interpretation of findings by linking individual experiences with broader institutional structures. This perspective positions research funding guidelines not merely as administrative tools but as dynamic structures that simultaneously enable and regulate research practices. It provides a basis for analyzing how institutional policies influence faculty behavior, research quality, and overall research productivity in the university setting.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to examine the lived experiences of faculty members and administrators in implementing research funding and assistance guidelines [17]. Specifically, a descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological approach was adopted to capture the essence of participants' experiences from their own perspectives. The researchers applied bracketing (*epoché*) to minimize preconceived assumptions and allow meanings to emerge directly from participant narratives [18]. This approach enabled an in-depth understanding of how participants perceive and experience institutional research policies in practice.

2.2. Research participants

Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants with direct experience in research implementation and funding processes [19]. The study involved 34 participants, consisting of 15 administrators, and 19 faculty members from various colleges, ensuring broad disciplinary representation. Participants varied in age, academic rank, years of service, and research experience, reflecting a diverse range of perspectives. Most participants held doctoral degrees, while others had master's degrees or doctoral units. Their research experience included publication, presentation, and involvement in funded projects, providing a strong basis for examining institutional research practices. The sample size was deemed sufficient as it enabled both depth and diversity of perspectives across faculty and administrative roles. Data saturation was achieved when no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews, indicating adequacy of the sample for capturing the phenomenon under study.

Figure 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants. The study involved 34 participants, consisting of 15 administrators, and 19 faculty members from various colleges, ensuring broad disciplinary representation. Participants varied in age, academic rank, years of service, and research experience, reflecting diverse perspectives on research implementation. Most participants held doctoral degrees, while others had master's degrees or doctoral units, indicating a high level of academic preparation. Overall, the sample captured a range of early-career to senior academics, providing both depth and variation in experiences relevant to the study.

2.3. Instrumentation

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit in-depth insights into participants' experiences with research funding and assistance guidelines [20]. The instrument underwent pilot testing to refine questions, improve clarity, and ensure alignment with the study objectives [21], [22]. Content validation was also conducted to establish the reliability and appropriateness of the instrument in capturing relevant data [23].

2.4. Research procedure and analysis

Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with faculty members and administrators actively involved in research activities. These interviews enabled participants to describe their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in implementing research funding guidelines [24]. Documentary analysis of the university's research manual was also conducted to contextualize the findings and support data triangulation [25].

Data analysis followed a systematic thematic approach. Interview transcripts were first subjected to open coding to identify significant statements. These codes were then grouped during axial coding to establish relationships among categories, followed by selective coding to generate overarching themes representing the essence of participants' experiences. To enhance analytic rigor, coding was conducted iteratively using constant comparison across transcripts to refine categories and ensure conceptual consistency. Emerging themes were further reviewed and validated through peer debriefing to minimize researcher bias and strengthen credibility.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied established qualitative rigor criteria. Credibility was achieved through member checking and triangulation of interview and documentary data. Transferability was supported through rich contextual descriptions, while dependability was ensured through an audit trail of procedures and analytic decisions. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling and peer review of coding and thematic development.

2.5. Ethical consideration

Ethical protocols were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and procedures, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed for analysis. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by removing identifiable information. All data were securely stored and used solely for research purposes. Participants were treated with respect, and their perspectives were accurately represented without bias.

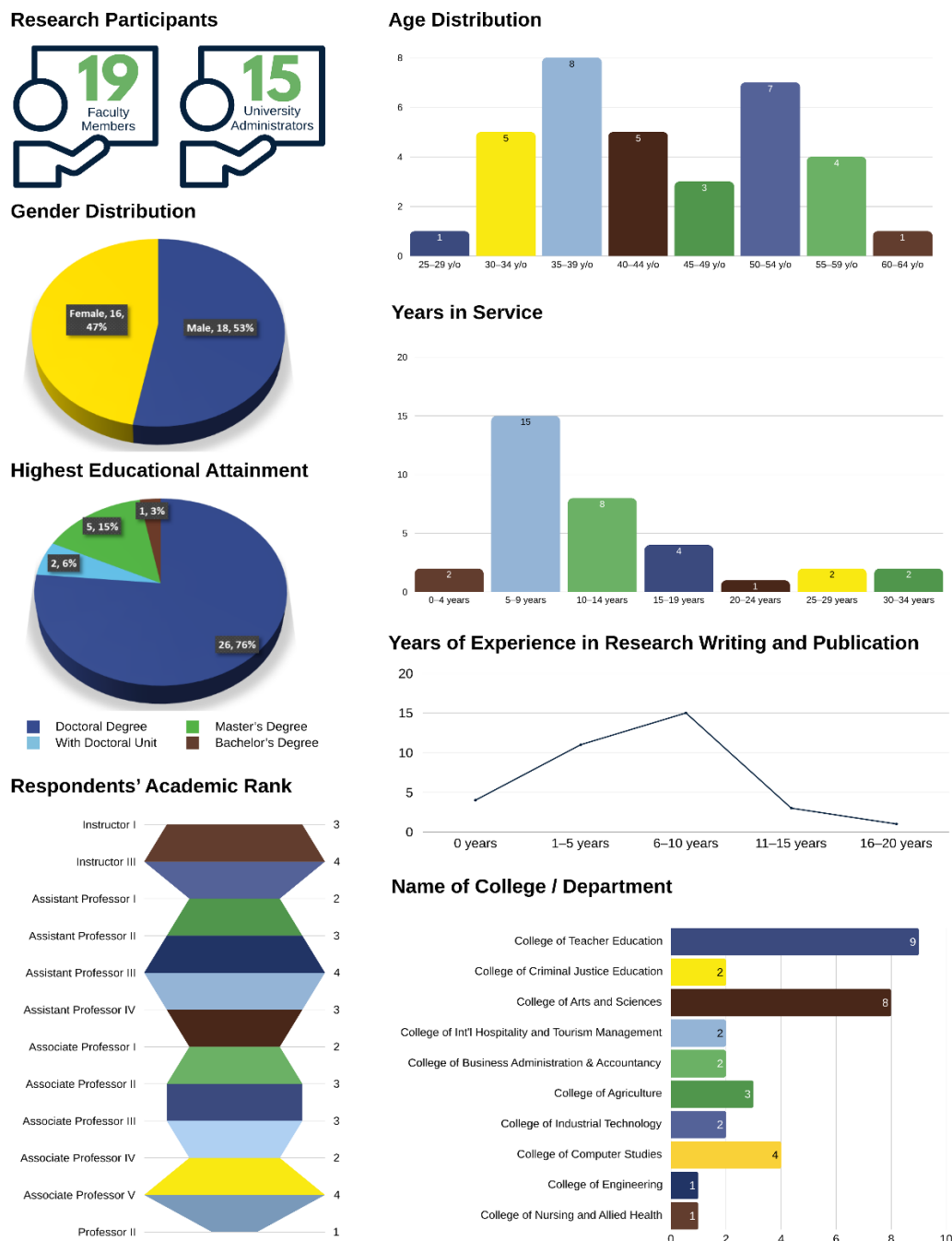


Figure 1. Research participants' profile

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 2 presents the thematic mapping of qualitative findings on the experiences of faculty members and administrators in implementing the research manual particularly focusing on the research funding and assistance guidelines.

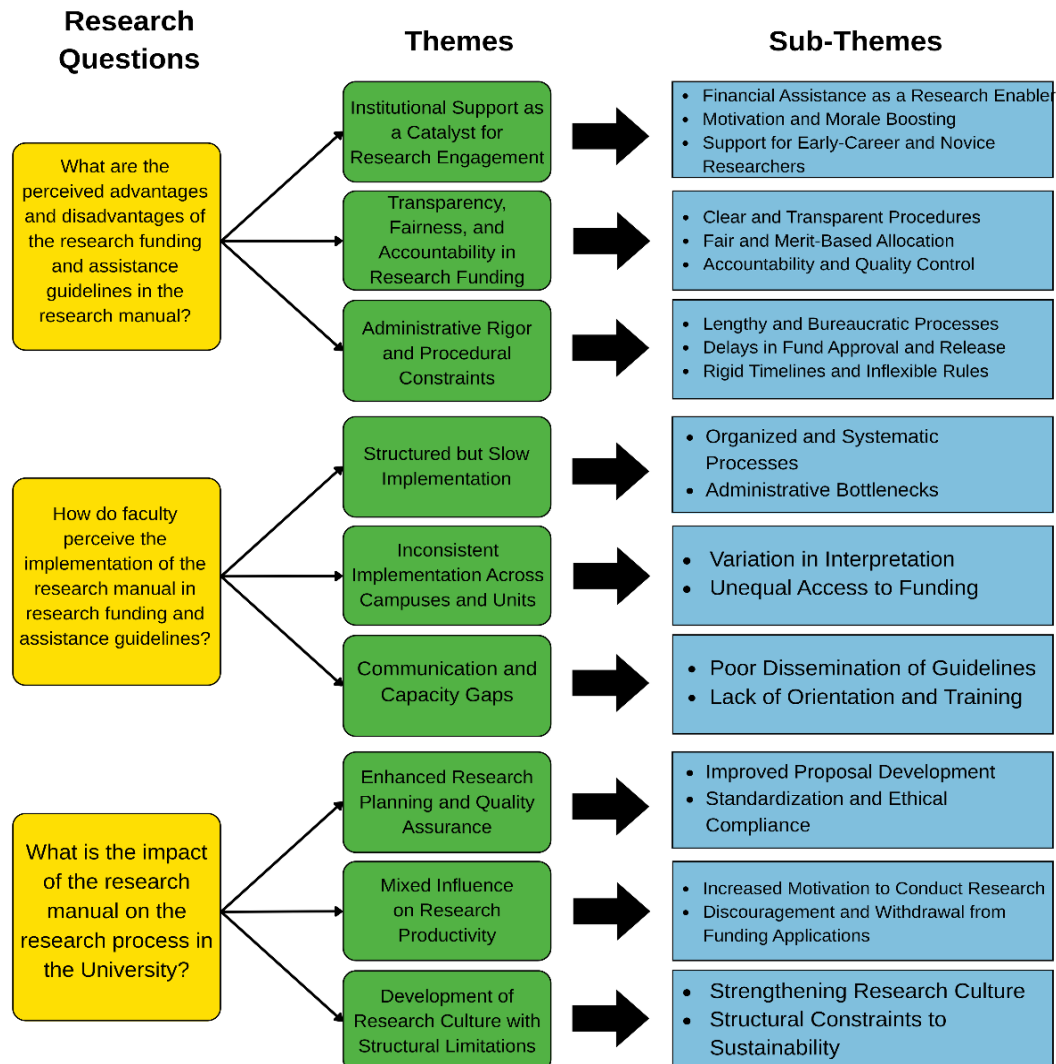


Figure 2. Thematic mapping

3.1. Institutional support as a catalyst for research engagement

This theme captures how participants perceive the research funding and assistance guidelines as a central institutional mechanism that enables, sustains, and encourages research engagement. Across responses, participants viewed the guidelines not merely as procedural requirements but as a manifestation of the university's commitment to research. Institutional support, particularly through funding, incentives, and structured assistance, was identified as a key factor in lowering barriers and strengthening participation.

3.1.1. Financial assistance as a research enabler

Financial assistance emerged as a primary dimension of institutional support. Participants emphasized that funding reduces the personal financial burden associated with conducting research. As noted by one participant (Faculty 3), "*There is monetary assistance provided by RDO,*" highlighting the accessibility of institutional funding. Similarly, another participant (Faculty 13) explained that funding "*...would help ease the financial burden of the research,*" particularly in covering expenses related to data collection and materials.

Participants also associated financial support with research dissemination. A faculty member (Faculty 10) shared that funding “...assured that I don’t have to carry all the financial burdens of publishing.” From the administrative perspective (Admin 1), “funding mechanisms enable participation in conferences and research-related activities.” These findings indicate that financial assistance is perceived as a foundational requirement for active research engagement.

3.1.2. Motivation and morale boosting

Participants described research funding as a strong motivational factor that enhances morale and encourages participation. One faculty member (Faculty 1) stated, “It motivates faculty to conduct research,” while another (Faculty 14) noted that the guidelines “...help boost the morale of the researcher.” From the administrative perspective, incentives were also viewed as encouraging research engagement. One administrator (Admin 4) shared that “it motivates us if there is monetary incentives,” emphasizing the role of incentives in sustaining faculty interest. These responses suggest that institutional support contributes to a positive research climate by reinforcing confidence and commitment to research activities.

3.1.3. Support for early-career and novice researchers

Participants highlighted that structured guidelines are particularly beneficial for early-career and novice researchers. One faculty member (Faculty 17) explained that the guidelines “...help early-career researchers begin conducting research with the support of the university,” indicating that institutional backing provides direction and security. Another participant (Faculty 18) noted that “...having structured guidelines helps faculty understand what funding is available and how to access it,” emphasizing the importance of clarity in policy implementation. These findings suggest that the guidelines contribute to building research capacity among emerging scholars.

3.2. Transparency, fairness, and accountability in research funding

This reflects how faculty members and administrators perceive the research manual as a governance instrument that structures decision-making and safeguards the integrity of research funding. Participants consistently described the guidelines as providing clarity and order to the research funding process, helping ensure that decisions are not arbitrary but anchored on clearly defined criteria and procedures.

3.2.1. Clear and transparent procedures

Participants consistently identified transparency as a key strength of the research funding guidelines. One faculty member (Faculty 4) stated that “...the guidelines ensure transparency, consistency, and fairness in funding decisions.” Another participant (Faculty 15) emphasized that the guidelines “create transparency and accountability,” reflecting trust in institutional processes. Administrators also highlighted the importance of transparency in governance. One administrator (Admin 10) explained that “...clear and transparent procedures ensure fairness and accountability in fund utilization,” indicating that standardized processes support responsible resource management.

3.2.2. Fair and merit-based allocation

Participants perceived the guidelines as promoting fairness through standardized requirements and evaluation criteria. A faculty member (Faculty 3) noted that “...everyone may have the opportunity to enjoy the funding and assistance being provided,” highlighting inclusivity. Another participant (Faculty 19) emphasized that “...the required documents and procedures are standardized, providing a common framework for everyone.” These findings indicate that the research manual supports a merit-based system where funding access is determined by compliance and proposal quality.

3.2.3. Accountability and quality control

Accountability emerged as another important dimension of the guidelines. Participants emphasized that the manual establishes expectations for reporting, ethical compliance, and deliverables. One faculty member (Faculty 19) noted that “...the manual establishes clear expectations for financial reporting, ethical compliance, and project deliverables.” Administrators (Admin 4) reinforced this perspective by emphasizing that “the guidelines promote proper resource utilization and methodological rigor.” These findings show that accountability mechanisms function as quality assurance processes that enhance research credibility.

3.3. Administrative rigor and procedural constraints

This captures the tensions experienced as they navigate the highly structured processes embedded in the research funding and assistance guidelines. While participants acknowledged the necessity of formal procedures to ensure transparency and accountability, many expressed that the level of administrative rigor has inadvertently created barriers to efficient research implementation. This reflects how procedural

complexity, bureaucratic layers, and rigid compliance requirements shape the participants experiences which was often transforming institutional support mechanisms into sources of frustration rather than facilitation.

3.3.1. Lengthy and bureaucratic processes

Despite the advantages, participants reported that administrative complexity poses significant challenges. A faculty member (Faculty 5) described the process as “...*too long of a process*,” reflecting procedural fatigue. Another participant (Faculty 6) used a metaphor, describing the guidelines as “...*like a horror storybook but the cover is decorated with unicorns and rainbows*,” illustrating the contrast between expectations and actual experience. These responses indicate that excessive procedural requirements create barriers that affect efficiency and researcher motivation.

3.3.2. Delays in fund approval and release

Participants identified delays in fund approval and release as a major constraint. One faculty member (Faculty 4) noted “...*time-consuming documentation and delays in fund approval or release*,” while an administrator (Admin 7) acknowledged that “...*the release of funding takes time*.” These delays disrupt research timelines and, in some cases, require researchers to use personal funds to continue their projects, highlighting a gap between policy intent and operational efficiency.

3.3.3. Rigid timelines and inflexible rules

Participants also highlighted the rigidity of timelines and procedural rules. One faculty member (Faculty 17) stated that “...*the existing guidelines are too strict and not faculty-researcher friendly*,” indicating misalignment with research realities. Another participant (Faculty 17) explained that “...*even if approved by BOR, proposals are archived due to procedural delays*,” demonstrating how rigid compliance requirements may discourage participation and affect research continuity.

3.4. Structured but slow implementation

This reflects the collective experience who recognize that the research funding and assistance guidelines are formally organized, rule-based, and aligned with institutional and government standards, yet operationally slow and difficult to navigate. Participants generally acknowledged that the research manual provides a clear framework for research governance; however, they also emphasized that the rigidity and layering of procedures significantly affect the pace and practicality of research implementation. This illustrates how formal structure, while essential for accountability, can unintentionally impede efficiency and responsiveness in the research process.

3.4.1. Organized and systematic processes

Participants acknowledged that the implementation of the research manual follows a structured and systematic process aligned with institutional and government standards. One faculty member (Faculty 4) noted that “...*the implementation at the university is generally systematic and transparent*,” indicating that procedures are clearly defined and consistently followed. Similarly, an administrator (Admin 6) described the system as “...*systematic and based on the government guidelines*,” highlighting alignment with regulatory frameworks. These responses suggest that the university has established a formal structure for research governance, ensuring consistency, accountability, and procedural clarity in research implementation.

3.4.2. Administrative bottlenecks

Despite the presence of organized systems, participants consistently reported administrative bottlenecks that slow down research processes. A faculty member (Faculty 5) described the experience as “...*there are too many toll booths to pass on before the research approval*,” illustrating the burden of multiple procedural steps. Another participant emphasized that delays are often caused by numerous approval layers, making the process time-consuming and difficult to navigate. Administrators also acknowledged these challenges, describing the system as “cumbersome” (Admin 8) and “...*a little bit complex*” (Admin 14). These findings indicate that while structured processes promote accountability, they also introduce inefficiencies that hinder timely research implementation.

3.5. Inconsistent implementation across campuses and units

This highlights the observations that the research funding and assistance guidelines are not applied uniformly across campuses and academic units. While the research manual is standardized, participants reported differences in interpretation, processing, and outcomes which influence perceptions of fairness.

3.5.1. Variation in interpretation

Participants observed that the research funding guidelines are not uniformly implemented across campuses and units. One faculty member (Faculty 5) noted that “...*there are different implementations between the four campuses,*” while another stated (Faculty 19) that implementation “...*differs across campuses, offices, or committees.*” These variations suggest inconsistencies in policy interpretation and execution, which may create confusion among faculty and affect the overall effectiveness of implementation.

3.5.2. Unequal access to funding

Concerns regarding unequal access to research funding were also raised. One participant (Faculty 11) noted that “*there were only some colleges who availed funded research,*” indicating disparities in participation. Another participant implied imbalances in funding distribution across units. Administrators also recognized resource limitations, noting “...*the budget allocation is low*” (Admin 7) and “...*insufficient fund*” (Admin 1). These findings demonstrate that both structural and resource constraints contribute to perceived inequities in funding access.

3.6. Communication and capacity gaps

The theme reflects participants’ shared concern that insufficient dissemination of information and lack of faculty training hinder effective implementation of the research manual. Despite the existence of formal guidelines, many faculty members reported limited understanding of procedures due to inadequate communication and orientation.

3.6.1. Poor dissemination of guidelines

Participants emphasized that research guidelines are not consistently or effectively communicated. One faculty member (Faculty 11) stated that the guidelines are “*not well discussed and explained to faculty members,*” while an administrator (Admin 9) confirmed that “*the guidelines are not well disseminated.*” These responses indicate that gaps in communication limit awareness and understanding of research policies, leading to underutilization of available support mechanisms.

3.6.2. Lack of orientation and training

Participants highlighted the need for structured orientation and capacity-building initiatives. One faculty member (Faculty 6) stated that “*there should be proper orientation,*” while another (Faculty 3) recommended “*briefing seminars... especially for new faculty members.*” An administrator (Admin 10) further emphasized that “...*regular orientation for faculty and staff would ensure consistent and efficient implementation.*” These findings suggest that strengthening training and support systems is essential for improving the effectiveness of policy implementation.

3.7. Enhanced research planning and quality assurance

This reflects participants’ shared perception that the research funding and assistance guidelines have contributed positively to the way research is conceptualized, planned, and implemented. Faculty members and administrators emphasized that the structured requirements embedded in the research manual promote careful planning, methodological rigor, and adherence to ethical standards. While procedural demands were sometimes viewed as burdensome, participants acknowledged that these same requirements improve the overall quality and credibility of research outputs.

3.7.1. Improved proposal development

Participants reported that the research manual significantly improves proposal development by requiring clear objectives, structured methodologies, and well-defined budgets. One faculty member (Faculty 19) stated that “...*the structured procedures help me plan my projects more effectively,*” indicating that the guidelines promote organization and clarity. Participants further emphasized that structured requirements encourage them to anticipate research challenges and align their studies with institutional priorities, resulting in more feasible and well-developed proposals. Administrators (Admin 12) also noted “*that the guidelines promote detailed and systematic planning, which enhances the overall quality of research outputs.*”

3.7.2. Standardization and ethical compliance

Participants highlighted that the research manual promotes standardized research procedures and ethical practices. One faculty member (Faculty 4) noted that the guidelines “...*promote standardized procedures and ethical practices,*” while another (Faculty 19) stated that they “...*encourage adherence to recognized research standards.*” These responses indicate that the guidelines function as quality assurance mechanisms, ensuring consistency, methodological rigor, and ethical integrity across research projects.

3.8. Mixed influence on research productivity

This captures the dual and sometimes contradictory effects of the research funding and assistance guidelines on faculty research engagement. While some faculty members reported increased motivation and productivity due to institutional support, others experienced discouragement and disengagement as a result of procedural challenges and negative experiences. This theme highlights how the same policy framework can produce both enabling and constraining effects depending on individual experiences and institutional conditions.

3.8.1. Increased motivation to conduct research

Participants reported that institutional support, particularly funding and incentives, increases their motivation to engage in research. One faculty member (Faculty 3) stated, “...it motivates me to conduct research,” while another (Faculty 7) noted “that it encourages productivity and participation.” These findings show that when effectively implemented, research funding guidelines serve as catalysts for increased research engagement and output.

3.8.2. Discouragement and withdrawal from funding applications

However, some participants expressed discouragement due to procedural challenges and lack of support. One faculty member (Faculty 17) stated, “...at this point, I have chosen to discontinue submitting research proposals,” reflecting frustration with the system. Another participant (Faculty 8) shared, “I had a phobia when there was funded research but I couldn’t find help,” indicating that insufficient guidance can create anxiety and hinder participation. These responses suggest that negative experiences with administrative complexity may lead to withdrawal from institutional funding mechanisms.

3.9. Development of research culture with structural limitations

This reflects participants’ recognition that the research funding and assistance guidelines contribute to building a research-oriented institutional culture, while also acknowledging the structural constraints that limit its sustainability. Participants viewed the research manual as instrumental in signaling the importance of research within the university, yet emphasized that policy alone is insufficient to sustain long-term research productivity.

3.9.1. Strengthening research culture

Participants acknowledged that the research manual contributes to strengthening a research-oriented culture within the institution. One faculty member (Faculty 19) noted that the guidelines “...encourage a stronger research culture within the institution,” while another (Faculty 18) stated “observed increased faculty engagement in research activities.” These findings indicate that structured policies and funding mechanisms play a role in institutionalizing research practices and promoting scholarly activity.

3.9.2. Structural constraints to sustainability

Despite these positive contributions, participants emphasized that structural limitations affect sustainability. One faculty member (Faculty 5) stated that “...the majority of our research initiatives are self-funded,” highlighting gaps in financial support. An administrator (Admin 7) added that “...if I will wait for funds, I may not complete any proposed research,” indicating that delays and resource constraints disrupt research continuity. These findings suggest that sustained research productivity requires not only policies but also efficient implementation and adequate institutional support.

4. DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that research funding and assistance guidelines function as both enabling and constraining mechanisms within HEIs, shaping faculty research engagement, implementation efficiency, and research quality. Rather than operating as neutral administrative tools, these guidelines actively structure faculty behavior, decision-making, and participation in research systems. This finding extends existing literature by highlighting the dynamic and dual role of institutional policies in shaping academic practices, particularly within resource-constrained higher education contexts.

4.1. Perceived advantages and disadvantages of the research funding and assistance guidelines

The findings affirm that institutional funding mechanisms are central to enabling faculty research engagement, confirming previous studies that highlight the role of financial support in increasing research participation and productivity [12], [13]. Financial support, incentives, and structured assistance reduce resource-related barriers and create opportunities for faculty to engage in research activities, particularly in

public universities where financial constraints are more pronounced. From a structuration theory perspective, the research manual operates as an enabling structure by providing access to resources and procedural pathways that make research participation possible.

Beyond material support, the findings reveal that funding guidelines also function as motivational structures. In line with SDT, institutional incentives and recognition enhance faculty members' perceived competence and professional value, thereby strengthening intrinsic motivation [26], [27]. This finding extends existing literature by demonstrating that research engagement is shaped not only by resource availability but also by how institutional support is perceived and experienced by faculty.

At the same time, the findings reveal a critical tension: the same structures that enable research also introduce constraints. Transparency, fairness, and accountability mechanisms, while essential for governance, increase procedural demands and administrative workload. Although these mechanisms enhance institutional legitimacy and research integrity [28], they also reflect what structuration theory describes as the duality of structure where rules simultaneously enable and constrain action. This finding confirms prior research suggesting that bureaucratic systems in higher education often produce both positive and unintended limiting effects.

Administrative rigidity, procedural complexity, and funding delays illustrate this constraining dimension. Excessive documentation, strict timelines, and slow fund release reduce flexibility and responsiveness, thereby limiting faculty agency. From an SDT perspective, these constraints undermine autonomy and reduce motivation, particularly when faculty perceive institutional processes as burdensome rather than supportive. This suggests that the effectiveness of funding policies depends not only on their design but on how they are operationalized and experienced at the institutional level.

4.2. Faculty perceptions of the implementation of the research manual

The implementation of the research manual reflects a highly formalized and compliance-driven system. Faculty perceptions of structured and systematic processes indicate strong institutional alignment with regulatory and audit requirements, supporting previous findings in state universities and colleges (SUCs) [14]. From a structuration perspective, this formalization provides stability, predictability, and control within research governance systems.

However, the findings demonstrate that excessive formalization produces unintended consequences. Multiple approval layers, bureaucratic procedures, and limited administrative capacity slow down implementation, creating inefficiencies that contradict the intended purpose of facilitating research. This finding confirms and extends existing literature showing that while bureaucratic structures enhance accountability, they often reduce adaptability and responsiveness in academic environments [15], [29]. It further highlights that efficiency is a critical dimension of policy effectiveness that is often overlooked in compliance-driven systems.

Moreover, inconsistencies in implementation across campuses and units highlight limitations in institutional coordination. Variations in interpretation and execution suggest that policies are not uniformly internalized across the system, reflecting challenges associated with decentralized governance structures [16], [30]. These inconsistencies have significant implications for faculty motivation. From an SDT perspective, perceived inequities and lack of standardization undermine trust and reduce engagement by weakening perceptions of fairness and institutional support. This finding shows that consistency in implementation is as important as policy design in sustaining faculty participation.

Communication and capacity gaps further reveal that policy effectiveness is not solely determined by policy design but also by the strength of institutional support systems. Limited dissemination and lack of training hinder faculty's ability to navigate research processes effectively. In SDT terms, this reduces perceived competence and relatedness, thereby limiting participation despite the availability of formal guidelines [31]. This extends prior research by emphasizing that institutional support mechanisms must accompany policy frameworks to ensure effective implementation.

4.3. Impact of the research manual on the research process

The findings indicate that the research manual contributes positively to research planning and quality assurance. Structured requirements enhance proposal development, methodological rigor, and ethical compliance, supporting existing literature on the role of institutional policies in standardizing research practices and improving output quality [32]. From a structuration perspective, these formal rules guide behavior and contribute to the professionalization of research activities within the institution.

However, the impact on research productivity is more complex and reveals an "enabling–constraining paradox." While some faculty members experience increased motivation and engagement, others withdraw from institutional funding systems due to procedural burdens and negative experiences. This finding extends existing literature by providing empirical evidence of how institutional policies can simultaneously facilitate and inhibit research participation within the same system [33].

From an SDT perspective, this paradox can be explained by the interaction between support and autonomy. While funding and incentives enhance motivation, excessive procedural demands reduce autonomy and increase perceived administrative pressure. As a result, some faculty members disengage or shift toward self-funded research, indicating a misalignment between policy intent and faculty experience. This suggests that balancing support and flexibility is essential in sustaining faculty engagement in research systems.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the research manual contributes to the gradual development of a research-oriented institutional culture. Increased participation, alignment with institutional priorities, and strengthened research practices reflect the role of policies and incentives in shaping organizational norms [34]. However, the sustainability of this culture remains constrained by structural limitations, including funding delays, heavy teaching loads, limited research assistance, and insufficient mentoring. Consistent with existing literature, sustainable research cultures require not only formal policies but also comprehensive support systems, including workload balance, human resource development, and mentoring structures [35], [36]. This finding reinforces the idea that research funding guidelines alone are insufficient to sustain long-term research productivity without broader institutional alignment and support.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on higher education research governance by providing empirical evidence of the enabling–constraining paradox in research funding policies. The study advances a more comprehensive understanding of how individual motivation and institutional structures interact in shaping research engagement by integrating SDT and structuration theory. Moreover, it offers context-specific insights from a Philippine state university, contributing to the limited literature on policy implementation in developing higher education systems. These findings highlight the importance of designing and implementing research policies that balance accountability with flexibility and align institutional structures with the lived experiences of faculty members.

4.4. Implications to practice and policy

The findings highlight that research funding and assistance guidelines function as both enabling and constraining mechanisms, underscoring the need for a more balanced and responsive implementation approach. While structured policies promote transparency, accountability, and research quality, their effectiveness depends on minimizing administrative complexity and improving operational efficiency. Consistent with the enabling–constraining dynamic identified in this study, universities should streamline approval processes, reduce unnecessary procedural layers, and ensure the timely release of funds to prevent disruptions in research implementation and sustain faculty engagement.

At the institutional level, there is a need to shift from compliance-driven systems toward faculty-centered support mechanisms. This includes strengthening communication strategies through systematic dissemination of guidelines, regular orientations, and targeted capacity-building programs, particularly for early-career researchers. Establishing mentoring systems and providing technical assistance can further enhance faculty competence and confidence in navigating research processes. From a SDT perspective, these strategies support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are essential for sustaining intrinsic motivation and long-term research engagement.

At the policy level, research funding guidelines should be integrated within a broader institutional support ecosystem. This entails aligning funding policies with workload allocation, research assistance structures, and human resource support to ensure sustainability. Institutional leaders should also promote consistency in policy implementation across campuses and units to address disparities and reinforce perceptions of fairness. From a structuration theory perspective, aligning policies with practice ensures that institutional structures enable rather than constrain faculty agency. Ultimately, improving research productivity in SUCs requires not only well-designed policies but also adaptive, efficient, and researcher-responsive systems that balance accountability with flexibility. These findings reiterate that policy effectiveness is not solely determined by design, but by how policies are enacted, experienced, and supported within institutional contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the experiences of faculty members and administrators in implementing research funding and assistance guidelines within a university research manual. The findings reveal that these guidelines function as both enabling and constraining mechanisms in the research process. On one hand, they promote transparency, accountability, and research quality by providing structure for planning, standardizing procedures, and enhancing faculty motivation. On the other hand, procedural rigidity, administrative delays, inconsistent implementation, limited funding, and communication gaps constrain efficiency and discourage

participation. This duality reflects the complex interaction between institutional structures and faculty members in shaping research engagement.

These findings highlight a critical tension between governance and usability. While the research manual effectively supports research quality and institutional accountability, its impact is limited by implementation inefficiencies and insufficient faculty-centered support. As a result, faculty responses range from increased engagement to disengagement and withdrawal from institutional funding systems. This underscores that policy effectiveness is not solely determined by design, but by how policies are enacted and experienced within institutional contexts.

Anchored in SDT and structuration theory, the study demonstrates that research engagement is shaped by both motivational factors and structural conditions. The study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how research funding policies operate as dynamic systems that simultaneously enable and constrain academic work. Ultimately, improving research productivity and institutional research culture requires more than well-designed policies. It necessitates responsive, flexible, and consistently implemented systems that balance accountability with efficiency and prioritize the needs and experiences of researchers. Future research may further explore how institutional reforms and support mechanisms can be optimized to sustain long-term research engagement across diverse higher education contexts.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
John Michael D. Aquino	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Rushid Jay S. Sancon		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	

C : **C**onceptualization

M : **M**ethodology

So : **S**oftware

Va : **V**alidation

Fo : **F**ormal analysis

I : **I**nvestigation

R : **R**esources

D : **D**ata Curation

O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft

E : Writing - Review & **E**editing

Vi : **V**isualization

Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors assert the absence of conflict of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data underpinning the conclusions of this study can be obtained upon reasonable request from the corresponding author, [JMDA].

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