

Research, Rankings, Reputation, Reproduction: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Student Research in a Philippine University

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Abstract: As with other stakeholders in the university, students are expected to engage in research endeavors, allowing them to immerse themselves in the process of producing knowledge and inadvertently become participants in the inherent politics of research. The relevance of research has continually grown in the current higher educational landscape as global university rankings continue to shape what universities should deem as relevant in a continuous effort to retain or improve their standing, as it stands as the modern measure of academic institutional reputation. In this paper, we aim to examine how research is valued by a Philippine University through an engagement with themes that highlight its introduction and involvement of students in research undertakings. Through a critical investigation of the politics of research and stemming from the

interviews conducted with students, we examine how neoliberal tendencies and practices have shaped the reduction of the value of research from an epistemic activity into a transactional instrument that reinforces a marketized view of institutional reputation and inherent hierarchical tendencies. Ultimately, the paper offers a call for the university to examine the politics of research involving students and engage in developing the potential of critical research and rediscover the mission of the university in developing its most important stakeholders as advocates of truth.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, philosophy of education, politics of research, student research

BEING CRITICAL OF RESEARCH (IS RESEARCH POLITICAL?)

Invoking the question about the political aspect of research is a natural query that needs to be addressed, as common understanding of research invokes elements that are positivist, data-driven, empirical, and neutral.¹ But as with almost all human endeavors involving knowledge and the process of its acquisition, research is inherently political. As research operates within the dimension of education which in itself, is inherently political, it can and should be examined through the lens of critical pedagogy to unveil the underpinned concepts and ideologies that shape the “politics of research.”

The term “critical pedagogy” is attributed to the North American cultural critic Henry Giroux, who described critical pedagogy in various ways in his extensive body of work critiquing neoliberal culture and education. In his work *On Critical Pedagogy*, Giroux described critical pedagogy as wholly dependent on context because it is the outcome of particular struggles that are based on the specificity of communities, contexts and students.² In another work reflecting on the contributions of the forefather of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire in the formulation of the critical pedagogue, Giroux mentioned how critical pedagogy “attempts to understand how power works through the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge within particular institutional contexts and seeks to constitute students as informed subjects and social agents.”³

It would be challenging to pinpoint an exact definition of what critical pedagogy is, given its heterogeneity and the necessity for continuous reinvention. What can be considered as constant in the ever-changing landscape of critical pedagogy is its critique and analysis of

¹ See Robert K. Merton, *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

² Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 4.

³ Henry A. Giroux, “Rethinking Education as The Practice of Freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy,” in *Policy Futures in Education*, 8:6 (2010), 717.

education as an instrument of both emancipation and oppression and the belief that all education, in its broadest sense, is a part of the project of freedom and is imminently political.⁴ And as research is considered as an academic activity and ontologically pedagogical, examining it through the lens of critical pedagogy ultimately unveils notions that shape struggles, dimensions, and perceptions inherent in the teaching of research and its practice.

For Freire, education is imminently political because it equips the students with skills that are necessary for self-reflection and notions of critical agency and through this, education plays a part in the project of freedom.⁵ Research is considered by universities to be one of their primary functions, as institutions vested with the responsibility of producing and disseminating knowledge. Currently, this impetus is threatened by the contemporary landscape of higher education, which is now shaped by corporatization and marketization, which originated from neoliberal politics. For Lynch, this turn to neoliberalism had universities adopt the belief that the market is now the primary producer of cultural logic and value.⁶

This component of the overarching investigation of the research project exploring the politics of research, examines it through the lens of critical pedagogy and augmented (rooted) interviews conducted with students from different programs in a Philippine University which will be referred to hereafter as HEIM. We prepared a set of guide questions and corresponding corollary questions in an attempt to surface the politics of research inherent on how students perceive research as an academic endeavor and the underlying politics that essentially shape such perceptions and ultimately, research itself as an academic and political activity.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 716.

⁵ Giroux, "Rethinking Education as the Practice of Freedom," 716.

⁶ Kathleen Lynch, "Neo-liberalism and Marketisation: the implication for higher education," in *European Educational Research Journal*, 5:1 (2006), 3.

RESEARCH AND THE UNIVERSITY

Research has long been regarded as an educational endeavor aimed at advancing knowledge. Its purpose may have varied based on a given epoch in human history and its relevance even in an age of memory economics and artificial intelligence, is still undeniable and even more pertinent. Research has become the primary moving force of knowledge-based disciplines, primarily the natural sciences and the social sciences; disciplines that serve as the very foundation of schools and universities.⁷ But before its proper integration in formal education as a part of the explicit curriculum in almost all educational institutions, the concept of looking for evidence, observation of phenomena, and crafting of theories and hypotheses is considered as an intellectual human activity, predating the conception of formal schooling.

History offers a variety of examples of notable leaps in intellectual development from famous scientists like Galileo, with his debunking of the geocentric universe, and Darwin's monumental scientific theory pertaining to evolution. For Les Coleman, Charles Darwin is "history's pre-eminent researcher" who has dedicated half a decade to observing and studying nature in pursuit of developing a revolutionary scientific concept that materialized as the Theory of Evolution, which is a product of half a decade of studying natural phenomena and a decade of constructing a scientific theory.⁸ What can be surmised from these historic intellectual ventures anchored on research is that researchers endeavor to challenge and go beyond established concepts in an effort to advance human knowledge, whether in the humanities, natural sciences, or social sciences. By observing certain patterns, may it be in the natural world or human

⁷ For Les Coleman, knowledge based disciplines can be divided into two categories namely: natural sciences and social sciences with the former primarily focused on explaining the phenomena occurring in the world and the latter explain the behaviour of man and his place in the natural world. Les Coleman, *Research in Crisis: Blueprint to Overhaul the Broken Knowledge Factory* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*

behavior, researchers have always come up with the very foundation of research itself and its driving force as an intellectual pursuit.

The idea that education and research are connected is therefore established and perennially accepted as both operating under the concept of knowledge development and progressing human understanding of oneself and the world. It is then natural for research to flourish in the institution associated with pushing the boundaries of knowledge and the abode of advanced learning—the university.

In the year 2021, there were over 20,000 research institutions in the world, most of them based in universities and other higher-education institutions.⁹ This figure illustrates how the contemporary world continues to view research as a vital tool for advancing knowledge and how it is inextricably linked with higher education. The connection between research and the university led to the rise of the so-called *research-oriented university* which is, according to Fram and Lau, perceived to be academically superior compared to a *teaching-oriented university* because of higher academic standards, a broader range of programs, and qualified doctoral faculty.¹⁰ It is no wonder that research has become an integral part of almost all academic programs at the tertiary level in education that in the Philippines, inculcating research skills among students even in basic education has become a primary concern to prepare them for the rigors of tertiary level research activities.¹¹

Research has also become an invaluable tool in the development of technology that also serves as the grassroots of good commercial venture. This led to the partnership between universities and higher-education institutions with commercial companies in the name of both the advancement of knowledge and its commercialization. Today, research

⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰ Eugene H. Fram and Gloria H. Lau, “Research Universities vs Teaching Universities: Public Perceptions and Preferences,” in *Quality Assurance in Education*, 4:3 (1996), 30.

¹¹ In the context of the Philippine educational system, two mandatory courses in research, namely Practical Research 1 and Practical Research 2 are taken in Senior High School, which is still classified as part of basic education.

mostly flourishes in the halls of the academe, but it has also taken a commercial facet in the form of consultancies primarily focused on developing ideas and technologies with the ultimate purpose of profiting from them.¹²

Industry partners are becoming the monetary lifeblood of research in universities, primarily in the field of science and technology. These industries may have bigger expendable capital for research, but what they lack is manpower and proper expertise that can do advanced problem solving and decision making; something that university researchers can do on their behalf.¹³ Looking at the bigger picture, commercialization of university research can result in national revenue through the sale of R&D and from products generated by innovations.¹⁴

The “research facet” of the university and its role in advancing science, learning and knowledge coupled with its important role in society which is to produce graduates for the workforce presents a serious dilemma considering that both are supposed products and considered as “the primary resources of advanced knowledge-based economies.”¹⁵ With research being considered as an indelible part of the university and its conduct of educating its students together with the rise of research-oriented universities, it has become apparent that the capacity of a higher-education institution to conduct, support and produce viable research has become a factor in various university rankings.

¹² Coleman, *Research in Crisis*, 6

¹³ Nur Syaswani Suhaimi, Muhammad Abi Sofian, Abdul Halim, and Hafiza Aishah Hashim, “Commercialization of academic research: assessing the perception of academicians at a public university in Malaysia,” in *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 14:1 (2022), 70.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁵ Ken-ichi Arai, Thomas Cech, Jean-Lou Chameau et al., “The Future of Research Universities: Is the model of research-intensive universities still valid at the beginning of the twenty-first century?,” in *EMBO (European Molecular Biology Organization) Reports*, 8:9 (2007).

RESEARCH AS AN ACADEMIC ENDEAVOR FOR STUDENTS IN HEIM

Universities have attempted to navigate a two-pronged pursuit between prioritizing what can be learned through teaching and the task of seeking knowledge through research by integrating research courses into the curriculum. The inclusion of research in the tertiary curriculum and across various disciplines demonstrates that research activity is not merely a pursuit of knowledge advancement, but also an indispensable part of the learning process serving as a vital pedagogical tool.¹⁶

Imafuku et al. defined research in the undergraduate level as “any teaching and learning activity in which undergraduate students are actively engaged with the research content, process, or problems of their discipline.”¹⁷ In the case of how research is introduced to students, it is noticeable in the explicit curriculum that various faculties and colleges offer that there is a considerable increase in the number of research units at the undergraduate level. The number of research courses doubled throughout the academic years from six to twelve units.

HEIM, which is the focus of this study, is an educational institution rich in heritage, history, and culture as one of the premier universities in the Philippines. The university often figures in recognized university rankings most prominently in the QS University Rankings, classifying it well within the below 1000 range. The inclusion of the university in various rankings is heavily contributed by its employer reputation, international faculty ratio, and faculty student ratio. Even now, the university continues to figure as one of the top universities in the Philippines based on various rankings, maintaining its position as one of the top universities in the Philippines in 2025. In the field of research, the university houses research centers catering to various disciplines both in natural and social sciences.

¹⁶ Rintaro Imafuku, Takuya Saiki, Chichiro Kawakami, and Yasusuki Suzuki, “How do students’ perceptions of research and approaches to learning change in undergraduate research?,” in *International Journal of Medical Education*, 6 (2015), 47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

These research centers provide the core of the university's publishing machinery by sponsoring faculty and student research.

The claim that the university is geared towards the development of research capacities of students is a claim that is backed by the growing space allotted to research in the undergraduate curriculum. With time as the most important resource in the "economy of education," it is commendable how the university has provided more spaces for the development of the research capacities and skills of the students. Rightly so, as undergraduate research plays an important part not just on the contribution to the variables factored by ranking institutions but also on the development of a research culture that ultimately defines how research is perceived by students.

Research at the undergraduate level may be the lone research work experience for those who will not pursue further studies, but it is just an initial foray for those who seek to pursue postgraduate education. Postgraduate students, may it be in disciplines that fall under natural or social sciences, are expected to engage in rigorous research work in the course of their study. Graduates of postgraduate studies are expected to contribute to the growing "pool of knowledge" in their own field through their capacity to engage in critical thinking, scientific research, and ultimately, through their original academic work.¹⁸

The university's Graduate School requires students to engage in research endeavors above what is required by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED).¹⁹ There are also instances, particularly in some academic units, where students are directly involved in the development of research as they collaborate with their professors and instructors through

¹⁸ Ufuk Sem Komsu, "Postgraduate Students' Perceptions of Research Self-Efficacy and Critical Thinking Disposition and Their Impact on Academic Creativity: Case of Mersin University," in *TOJET*, 20:4 (2021), 53.

¹⁹ Commission on Higher Education, "Policies, Standards, and Guidelines for Graduate Programs," CHED Memorandum Order No. 15, Series of 2019, <<https://legacy.ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/CMO-No.-15-Series-of-2019-%E2%80%93-Policies-Standards-and-Guidelines-for-Graduate-Programs-Updated.pdf>>.

the establishment of research groups. This provides students with the opportunity to publish even before earning a baccalaureate degree and encourages them to continue engaging in research endeavors by enrolling in graduate school. In the interview conducted by the researchers, a participant mentioned that he/she is still working within the research group that he/she belonged to even during his/her undergraduate years.

This is praiseworthy on the part of the university as reflected in another study conducted by Wishkoski et al. involving undergraduate social science research course students, the study proved that perceptions of research among students generally improve as they become more engaged in academic research work. Participants shifted their perspectives on research from “something that highly-educated professionals do to an individually satisfying and socially meaningful process that students themselves could conduct to advance knowledge.”²⁰ They also opined that instructors must be adaptive in consideration of the varying levels of interest, attitude and experience of students regarding research.²¹

All of these commendable efforts to uplift the degree of involvement of stakeholders in research helped in making the university one of the top universities in the Philippines and a frontrunner in various fields and disciplines. With this surge of interest in research, it is evident to state that the university values research as an integral part of its functions and one of its core focuses, being an institute primarily built on the principles of truth and knowledge.

With all the effort to increase the number of published researchers and wider engagement in research of various stakeholders, comes the inevitable obsession with rankings that has paved the way for the excesses of the politics of research that ultimately brought it in crisis, as Muller puts it, “Once we become fixated on measurement, we easily slip into believing

²⁰ Rachel Wishkoski, Diana J. Meter, Sarah Tulane, Michael Q. King, Kevin Butler and Laura A. Woodland, “Students attitude toward research in an undergraduate social science research methods course,” in *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 7:1 (2022), 30.

²¹ *Ibid.*

that more is better.”²² This fixation with the value of measurement made waves on how research activity is treated in the university from the structural down to the individual level and most importantly, it also presents a perplexing question that is philosophical in essence: Why do we value research?

The next part of the paper presents a number of responses from interviews conducted by the research team which were analyzed and investigated through the polemical lens of critical pedagogy with the objective of understanding how its politics has shaped the way that research is valued from the perspective of the students and ultimately answer the teleological reason why research is conducted.²³

A QUESTION OF RANKINGS, AN ISSUE OF INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION

For Ewa Agnieszka Lekka-Kowalik and Jovito V. Cariño, many universities of contemporary time are facing a “crisis of purpose” as they try to grapple with the changing times and the question of what they are for.²⁴ The history of the university, from its conception and through most of its existence, shows that it is an institution that is primarily concerned not just to conserve, but also to proliferate knowledge to succor the flourishing of humanity. Yet, the call of the times adheres to neoliberal tendencies concerned with figures and metrics which transformed the university into a business-like entity. This is apparent in how the academic staff of a university is being treated as mere employees concerned with output like

²² Jerry Z. Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 67.

²³ There were nine students who participated in the interview. The students are under different colleges of HEIM. The interview was conducted during the Academic Year 2024-2025. The student-participants are from different levels with six undergraduate students and three graduate students. They were presented with the same guide questions for the interview supplemented by additional corollary questions to enrich the dialogue.

²⁴ Ewa Agnieszka Lekka-Kowalik and Jovito V. Cariño, “The University as Business: A Chance or a Blunder?,” in *Philippiniana Sacra*, 58:175 (2023), 86.

“middle-rank executives” and “call center staff.”²⁵ This notion of a seemingly institutional “identity crisis” puts universities in a precarious position: maintain their inherited reason of being as creators and guardians of knowledge or succumb to the call of neoliberalism and its enterprise ethics by becoming a consumer-oriented entity concerned with profit, figures, and metrics.

The current fascination with metrics embodied by the celebration that follows after being ranked in the university rankings shows how universities try to keep in step with two different tunes as they hold on to the university’s “enlightenment inheritance” and the call of current times that makes it cling to the tendency to uphold neoliberal values.²⁶ Most of the time, it is the latter that provides a more urgent call that is being heeded by universities as characterized by its current fascination with metrics, quantifications and measurements as universities willingly subject themselves to be surveilled and more importantly, ranked. An apparent manifestation of what Krzeski claims that our age is the age of surveillance capitalism.²⁷ The placement of the university in recognized university rankings has become one of the primary concerns of tertiary educational institutions that top administrators of universities go to great lengths in maintaining and improving the institution’s rankings.²⁸

This fascination with rankings, that Muller refers to as the “Ranking Arms Race”²⁹ is a mania that does not just afflict the administrative level as it also cascades down to the academic staff level as discussed in the other components of our research project, and interestingly, even the student population of the university. Various university papers closely cover every

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁶ Lynch, “Neo-liberalism and Marketisation,” 2.

²⁷ Jakub Krzeski, “In-Against-Beyond Metrics-Driven University: A Marxist Critique of the Capitalist Imposition of Measure on Academic Labor,” in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Marxism and Education*, ed. by Richard Hall and Krystian Szadkowski (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 163.

²⁸ Muller. *The Tyranny of Metrics*, 76.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

release of recent rankings by popular ranking groups and institutions. And in a colloquial sense, relative to the context of the Philippines and its universities, rankings play a big part not just in institutional reputation but also in the supposed *value* of the degree that they will attain once they graduate.

For one of the participants, “I think it’s important to maintain it (rankings) because the students inside (name of HEIM) are the ones benefiting from it. *Siyempre* (of course), we’re not gonna sugarcoat. After we graduate, (name of HEIM) graduates are the ones most sought after by employees.” In a country that values the diploma as the gateway towards getting employed, rankings have become an important factor as they greatly shape the institutional reputation of the university, which in turn, makes its graduates more marketable and employable. This principle of satisfaction that defines the supposed value of a baccalaureate degree greatly adheres to the neoliberal turn of a university’s purpose.³⁰

This has important implications for how research is valued in the university, as it is one of the most salient components in determining the ranking of the institution. This resonates with a response from another participant of this study:

S1: *“I think kapag narinig ko research in (name of HEIM), the first thing that comes to my mind is global competence and yung quality of education that it provides. Kasi, to be able to be ranked dito sa global rankings like QS and THE, inaassess nila yung quality ng output and yung number din ng output na pinaproduce ng university.”*

(I think when we hear about research in (name of HEIM), the first thing that comes to my mind is global competence and the quality of education that it provides. (Because) to be able to be ranked in these global rankings like QS and THE,

³⁰ Lekka-Kowalik and Cariño, “The University as Business,” 93.

they assess the output and number of outputs produced by the university.)

As rankings continuously occupy a vital space in both academic and industry consciousness, it can be assumed that the relationship between rankings and institutional reputation resting under the mantle of prestige is already forged and continuously strengthened. In relation to research which plays a prominent role in determining the rankings, even students perceive the act of conducting research is directly influenced by the capacity of the institution to produce research outputs. This ultimately puts in question the primary motivating force that drives a university to engage in research activities.

This raises questions about the main motivation of engaging in frantic measuring and the tendency to equate everything to a form of numerical, quantitative value. Education cannot and should not get rid of measurement, but the moment that it becomes the currency of education itself is the moment that we should begin asking if we are measuring the unmeasurable, and if it is right to do so. As Muller puts it, “There are things that can be measured. There are things that are worth measuring. But what can be measured is not always what is worth measuring; what gets measured may have no relationship to what we really want to know.”³¹ As rankings continue to shape and influence institutional reputation, universities risk becoming slaves to appearances as the image of prestige that should ontologically be grounded on how it rightfully fulfills its onus to the truth has been reduced to mere quantification as its supposed prestige is now built upon the foundation of its ranking.

HEIM has progressed leaps and bounds on its mission to retain its lofty position as one of the top universities in the country as evidenced by its consistent placing in the university rankings and continuous recognitions by industries. It can be claimed that it continues to uphold its

³¹ Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics*, 3.

tradition of excellence if it is wholly based on what can be quantified and the metrics that hierarchize the contemporary tertiary education landscape. Yet the question of excellence remains an interesting point that needs further clarification. Looking at how Quacquarelli-Symonds (QS) framed its indicators, it is apparent that the notion of “academic reputation” considered by the global higher education company is inherently related to ‘excellence’ that in trying to gauge academic reputation, they asked the question: “Which universities are demonstrating academic excellence?”³²

The question of excellence becomes dramatically blurred when it is reduced to mere quantification. Treating excellence from an exclusively empirical perspective is a positivist trap that institutions should be wary of, as Giroux puts it, the victory of positivism may pave the way for a new form of social administration and domination.³³ Metrics have quantified our notion of excellence, and students are beginning to reduce academic reputation to that which can be computed. This presents a danger as this reduction to a positivist attitude may also corrupt the very essence of the conduct of research itself and in a more dangerous manner, reduce research to mere reproduction of a culture blinded by a reputation built on the shaky foundation of metrics.

RESEARCH AS CULTURAL REPRODUCTION

Faculty researchers and full-time faculty members who engage in teaching recognize the importance of instilling the value of research in their students, often stating that it is vital for those who teach research to be engaged in their own academic research endeavors. According to one faculty participant “We cannot teach what we do not have. If we want (our)

³² QS Quacquarelli Symonds, “Academic Reputation (Indicator),” <<https://support.qs.com/hc/en-gb/articles/4405952675346-Academic-Reputation-Indicator>>.

³³ Henry A. Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 13.

students to engage in research, we must also engage ourselves in research.” and for another, “Research is the only way to validate our teaching.”

Yet, even with these developments and progress in the field of research, there still exists an underlying issue that lies beneath the surface of curriculum space, incentives, rankings, and research-oriented developments within the university. Research, in its true nature, is fueled by inquiry and necessity. Early researchers are driven by the mysteries of the universe and the questions that have changed the course of history. But what can be surmised about the driving force of research in the neoliberal educational setting? Wherein research is driven by numbers, metrics, and the arithmomanic tendency of educational institutions operating under an enterprising mindframe?³⁴

A primary ambition of the neoliberal tradition is not to destroy but to reshape. This is more apparent in how neoliberalism has affected the universities from pedagogy to research. This continuous reshaping of how research should be done and more importantly, why it should be done has dire implications on the *raison d’etre* of engaging in research. The enterprise ethics of neoliberalism has reduced the perception of research activity into a mere commodity, something that must be accomplished in order to finish one’s studies; a stumbling block that needs to be hurdled to finally claim the most exclusive of academic privileges—an academic degree. Research as a terminal requirement reinforces the audit culture apparent on how some students see it as exemplified in this statement:

S2: “*Kung mapapansin ko talaga na parang honestly speaking rin po, bihira lang rin yung interest ng mga estudyante pagdating sa research eh. Since ang pinaka connotation talaga pagdating sa research, parang na - instill na sa simula pa nung high school kami, is mahirap, matrabaho, intimidating. Kasi, ay, haharap sa panelists*

³⁴ Franz Giuseppe Cortez, “Arithmomanic Education and the Metric Society,” *Kritike*, 17:2 (2023), 40.

na mga, Lalang dito sa college, na yung mga panelists mo, mga prof mo, mga matatas na yung distinction, hindi na, there's that pressure that comes to it. And lalo na siguro ngayon as college students, na ang dami pang mga iba ibang mga subject, na dami mga iba-ibang mga course na kailangan niyo pagsabay. Of course, na parang yung thesis, isa lang yun sa mga ano, ipasa na lang natin ito para makapag-graduate tayo.”

(I noticed that students are quite disinterested when it comes to research. Because they hold on to the connotation even back in high school, that research is hard, tenuous and intimidating. Even more so in college wherein your panelists are professors. And as college students, there are also academic subjects that we are concerned with. Of course, we think of thesis as just another requirement that we have to submit in order to graduate.)

What is apparent is an approach that mirrors the culture of reproduction that is in place and continually being reinforced. One is then left to wonder and ponder upon this question: Should the quest for knowledge and its attainment be a mere accidental cause? A mere secondary to the primary purpose of conducting research? The politics of research has turned research from the process of producing knowledge into an instrument of reproducing neoliberal tendencies exemplified by transactional relations and defined by the “audit culture” of universities.³⁵

Educational institutions are vital and effective instruments of reproduction, especially if they adhere to the neoliberal capitalist principles. Such is also perceivable not just in the conduct of research but

³⁵ Cf. Henry A. Giroux, “Public Intellectual and the Neoliberal University,” in *Qualitative Inquiry Outside the Academy*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Michael D. Giardina (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2014).

also in the act of teaching research. The way that research is introduced inside the classroom and even the very act of asking students how to properly engage in research activities are irrevocably pedagogical activities. From the standpoint of critical pedagogy, all forms of pedagogy are considered political and this does not excuse the way that research is being taught in the classroom. For Giroux, schools harbor the tendency to treat their classrooms as mere instructional sites and ignore the notion that these are cultural sites as well.³⁶ This neutralizing tendency also affects the way that research is supposedly taught.

Education itself can knowingly or unknowingly reinforce the capacity of its sites of learning to reproduce certain dominant cultural practices related to the production of values that support the reproduction of neoliberal principles.³⁷ Hence, this makes formal schooling itself the most effective Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) as it teaches and molds the skills and knowledge that “constitute the subjectivity of future generation of workers.”³⁸

The concept of reproduction, particularly the notion introduced by Karl Marx, served as one of the most important frameworks of social and cultural critique by radical educators and the development of a critical science of education.³⁹ The way the politics of research reveals its capacity to reproduce the enterprise and audit culture has affected the value of research itself in relation to the erosion of its epistemic endeavoring impetus.

At this point, it is important to ask the question “What is being reproduced in how we teach and conduct student research?” In response,

³⁶ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 74.

³⁷ Louis Althusser explored this notion of the school as an agent of social reproduction. For David Backer, the eventual focus on schools by Althusser, which are traditionally outside the workplace and beyond the enterprise is how the “capitalist ruling class attempts to renew and maintain their favored relations of production. David I. Backer, *Althusser and Education* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 19.

³⁸ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 80.

³⁹ Henry A. Giroux, “Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education: A Critical Analysis,” in *Harvard Educational Review*, 53:3 (1983), 257.

we present a two-pronged answer to the question: Firstly, what is reproduced is the production of values which support the transactional relationship apparent in existing relations of knowledge production and secondly, reinforcement of the established hierarchical valuation of knowledge and intelligences apparent in the academe.

TRANSACTIONAL NECESSITY AND REINFORCING HIERARCHICAL TENDENCIES

Although it is apparent that the curriculum is now more geared towards the development of the students' research capacities, the way that it is taught and managed inside the classroom still reflects the reality that the university remains as a teaching university masquerading as a research university. That in the end, for one faculty participant, "we (still) train our students to become employees and not researchers."

The purpose of research for students is not an engagement in the pursuit of truth, but rather an estranged activity that needs to be accomplished to fulfill the transactional relationship between the student and the university, which is a manifestation of its *audit culture*. The results of rankings, as the university remains in the upper echelon of how higher education institutions are valued, do not reflect the relegation of truth as accidental and in the market-oriented relation between university-student, as a product of the business-clientele relation.

As with how the value of rankings cascade from the importance bestowed to it in the administrative level down to the students, so is the transactional relationship between the student and the university and one of the currencies that needs to be audited and accounted for in such relationship is the fulfillment of the research requirements in order for a student to graduate. In such a relationship, it is easy to perceive the politics of research embedded in it that mirrors the transactional quality of the neoliberal economic structure. Interestingly, this mirrors not just how research but also how teaching is valued in the university, as Stefan Collini

puts it, “The value of research has then to be understood in terms of its contribution to economic innovation, and the value of teaching in terms of preparing people for particular forms of employment.”⁴⁰

Bowles and Gintis refer to it as the *correspondence principle*, which is apparent in the similar structure characterized by norms, values, and even skills shared by the wider workforce and the dynamics of daily classroom interactions.⁴¹ In order for a student to graduate, she must first fulfill a terminal requirement in the form of a thesis, which involves rigorous research. In this instance, the thesis, which is the product of her research and technically her first foray into the serious endeavor of pursuing knowledge adhering to the classical university’s onus of existing in the midst of truth, has transformed into an object of transactional commodity. Research courses are something that need to be passed, and the thesis is a mere document that needs to be submitted.

Related to such experiences is the tendency for students to view research as a mere transactional instrument rather than a lifelong skill that is genuinely purposeful and relates to the fullness of their existence. This reflects on some of the responses we got from participants, as they state, “What is the point of doing this (research)? We will not even engage in research activities after (graduation)?” and “We think of thesis as just another requirement for us to graduate.”

What can be surmised is a concept that reduces the perception of students on research as a form of labor that is separate, apart, and even alienating to them. It is an activity that is merely done as a form of compliance, its value reduced to mere requirements leading towards the creation of an end-product, which in the end, is an object that is separate from her. Such experience mirrors the overarching criticism of Karl Marx on how capitalism has bastardized man’s capacity to produce separating

⁴⁰ Stefan Collini, *Speaking of Universities* (New York: Verso Publishing, 2017), 156.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

him from the object of his labor.⁴² And as universities slowly transform into business-like entities, the enterprise ethics of neoliberalism is slowly transfiguring the relation of the student to the product of her academic labor—an object that exercises control over her as a transactional instrument in exchange for a degree.

This transactional relationship is furthered and galvanized by how students value research. The seeds of such superficial valuing of research may have been sown through pedagogical means, as a participant puts it:

But before it was transactional. I remember, I didn't just name the professor but I was in college, he would require us 15 pages and I don't think ever because in a class we were like 40 in one year he had like in one (semester) had like 80 students and so we were supposed to read 15 pages times 80 students, I don't think they (professor) read that. I honestly think they just gave us the grade so ever since then research was something, I felt it was something to be dreaded and until today I still do feel the same.

Such a statement relates to how the politics of research is basically an extension of the politics of schooling, which is even apparent in its pedagogical functioning. What can be surmised is another manifestation of the correspondence theory that resembles the business-clientele relation. This is of important interest as the structure of the university itself is hierarchical in its very nature, often observed in how common understanding tells us that professors are considered intellectually superior to students.

⁴² The notion of *alienated labor* can be found in the works of Karl Marx as early as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* wherein Marx devoted a subchapter on how capitalism forced man to engage in alienated labor to support its political economy that thrives on the exploitation of the laborer. See Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. by Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988).

Teachers are supposedly deemed as masters of their specializations and such proficiency is still the most important quality that an educator must possess, a notion that is magnified even more in higher education.⁴³ Therefore, if the professor is just playing the game within the transactional rules of teaching, she is reduced to a mere specialist delivering her knowledge and packaging herself as an expert rather than an exemplar worthy of emulation and reverence. This is tragic for the ethos of the university, as its most important asset, its teaching force, has turned into a “mere consortium of specialist enterprises.”⁴⁴

Common understanding tells that a good researcher is a good teacher, as what she has learned through her research will be directly discussed and transmitted in her classroom discussions. It is quite logical to make such assumption as a researcher becomes a specialist with advanced knowledge on her discipline and it follows that such expertise can be transmitted in the classroom imbuing pedagogy and making learning more effective. Yet, some of our participants offer a different opinion regarding the pedagogical capability of some researcher-faculty members, “I feel like not all researchers are made to be teachers or effective communicators.” and “When they explain concepts and theories, they make assumptions that we already know what they are talking about.”

It may be obvious to take up a defensive position and claim that research is different from teaching as research itself is separate from the latter as its reach is far more extensive, primarily concerning itself with testing existing knowledge and developing new ones.⁴⁵ Even with such friction existing between research and pedagogy, it must not be forgotten that research itself is inherently and ontologically pedagogical. The tendency for some faculty members who are engaged in research having

⁴³ Prince Airick S. Gapo, “The Apprenticeship of Intellectual Laborers: The Possibility of Jacques Rancière’s Polemical Interventions in Teacher Education,” in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 21 (2022), 213.

⁴⁴ Lekka-Kowalik and Cariño, “The University as Business,” 90.

⁴⁵ Brian Martin, “The politics of research,” in *Information Liberation* (London: Freedom Press, 1998), 130.

difficulties in translating their research expertise inside the classroom may be a symptom of how research has become isolated. One of the most prominent factors contributing to this stance of isolation is the very pillars that hold the university's structure together—specializations.

The compartmentalization of universities into invisible walls put up by different specializations prompted and reinforced the hierarchy that exists within universities themselves. This tendency of universities to separate disciplines leads to their fragmentation along artificial lines, leaving these “knowledge disciplines” to be isolated and, more dangerously, engage in siloing the product of their research endeavors.⁴⁶ For a participant who is taking a course which outputs are not considered as scientific research nor included in the factoring of points for ranking, she experienced some forms of discrimination as she quips, “Some would say that it is harder to create quantitative or qualitative studies because there is math ... (name of program), what kind of course is that? *Prerequisite lang naming yan* (It is just one of our prerequisites).”

Such experiences are some of the glaring effects of the compartmentalization of knowledge that may be considered as an underlying facet of the politics of research. For Martin, a sense of disagreement still exists about what constitutes a discipline and there is tension and conflict in universities over the boundaries of discipline.⁴⁷ Such tension exists because there is power and influence beneath ideas produced by these disciplines and specializations. All of these contribute to the hierarchical structure of the university that serves as the foundation of the stratifying tendency of ranking knowledge, which shapes the politics of research within the university itself.

Organizations such as educational institutions cannot rid themselves of hierarchy. The gist of the problem is when hierarchy itself

⁴⁶ Coleman, *Research in Crisis*, 42.

⁴⁷ Martin, “The politics of research,” 129.

permeates our preconception of knowledge and intelligence.⁴⁸ There is a danger of treating the disciplines as “fiefdoms based on monopolies over separate bodies of knowledge.”⁴⁹ Unfortunately, this notion is even reinforced by university ranking companies/agencies as some academic works are not considered or do not even add to the computation of research outputs; a lament that students are also aware of.⁵⁰ The struggle for excellence has now led the conduct of research into an isolated form, in which each citation and each paper produced is considered as the contribution of a stakeholder whose value is based on certain indices. This, for Krezeski, creates tensions with the social aspect of producing knowledge, as knowledge production itself is now directed into producing isolated individuals.⁵¹

RESEARCH AS AN INTELLECTUAL LABOR: FROM AN ACT OF REPRODUCTION TO AN ACT OF EPISTEMIC DISCOVERY

HEIM continues to enjoy its lofty status as one of the highest-ranked higher education institutions in the country. That is a testament to its commitment to enhancing the quantity and quality of research produced by its faculties and colleges, adhering to its mission as a repository of knowledge and an institution primarily concerned with its creation. Yet upon examining the politics of research that manifests through how it is

⁴⁸ The French polemical thinker, Jacques Rancière in his work, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, provided an exposition on the danger of reinforcing hierarchies of intelligences as it divides the world into two: superior and inferior intelligences. Although Rancière provided an exposition related to pedagogy and the supposedly inferior intelligence of the learner compared to the stultifying schoolmaster, it may also be contextualized on how disciplines are valued particularly if students adopt the idea that one discipline is superior to another. Jacques Rancière. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. by Kristin Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 7.

⁴⁹ Martin, “The politics of research,” 130.

⁵⁰ See other components of the research project particularly on faculty members and faculty researchers.

⁵¹ Krezeski, “In-Against-Beyond Metrics-Driven University,” 169.

taught and how it is perceived specifically among students also raises the question if it still remains true to its mission.

It is this danger—the illusion of fulfilling its mandate towards the truth by basing its rankings and supposed established reputation that we find it necessary to reassess the ontological basis of the efforts of the university to support and strengthen its research endeavors. As Lekka-Kowalik and Cariño put it, universities are experiencing an “ontological split” as they try to navigate the call of contemporary times and their seeming identity crisis as a business-like entity or an agent of knowledge-creation.⁵² This identity crisis of contemporary universities even enunciates itself on the driving force of research as an academic endeavor.

In relation to this, Paolo Bolaños speaks of how we are living in an age of “reified education” when the commodification of learning has become the norm reinforced by the ideology of standardization.⁵³ For Bolaños, “In our present context, reified education ... manifests in our obsession with standardized metrics of quality assurance.”⁵⁴ With research being hailed as one of, if not the most important endeavor in higher education, it would not be outlandish to claim that research has also submitted to the reification of education. It is this reification of the meaning and conduct of research that led Bolaños to state that “Quality Assurance” which has been the banner claim of ranking agencies, must be renamed as “Quantity Assurance” as both pedagogy and research become subject to numbers that represent productivity.⁵⁵

The *raison d'être* of why we engage in research needs to be reflected upon for the reason that it greatly reflects how research is introduced to the students, how it is taught in the classroom, and more importantly, on instilling the importance of research as an intellectual labor that not just

⁵² Lekka-Kowalik and Cariño, “The University as Business,” 86.

⁵³ Paolo Bolaños, *Ethics, Justice, and Recognition: Essays on Critical Theory* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2025), 110.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

contribute in the fulfillment of the mission of the university, but something that emanates from *epistemological curiosity*.

Paulo Freire coined the term “epistemological curiosity” in his work, *The Pedagogy of Freedom* and even if Freire did not provide an exact definition of the term, he constructed a notion of curiosity that encapsulates its critical potential. For Freire, curiosity in its many forms constitute an “integral part of being alive” as it is a vital experience present in every act of social and historical reconstruction.⁵⁶ What can be seen in Freire is the treatment of curiosity not just as a mere flicker that sparks the fire of knowledge acquisition but more importantly, a call for the act of seeking knowledge to be critical. Epistemological curiosity is the human capacity to critically inquire into reality through genuine dialogue and praxis that ultimately leads to the awakening of critical consciousness.

Examining the genesis of the Freirean notion of curiosity in research reveals an invitation for universities to reconsider the driving force behind the academic endeavor known as research. For it not to be driven by mere transactional necessity either by rankings, upholding institutional reputation or a tome which serves as fuel to keep the transactional relationship between the student and the university burning, but rather an intellectual pursuit pushed by an inquisitive energy and a critical spirit which seeks not just to know, but also to recognize and act. From a Freirean lens, to deny students meaningful engagement in research is to deny their ontological vocation as beings capable of questioning, naming, and transforming the world.

CONCLUSION: RESEARCH, CURIOSITY, AND TRUTH

Cortez, et al. introduced the notion that research is ontologically pedagogical, a claim that resonates with the arguments presented in this

⁵⁶ Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of Freedom* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 38.

paper.⁵⁷ If pedagogy is inherently political, and research is ontologically pedagogical, then the permeating political dimensions that shape pedagogy as a political act also afflicts the conduct of research. That if pedagogy can be an apparatus for the reproduction of established systems, research can also be instrumentalized to fuel the repurposed university as an “engine of growth” whose goals are subordinated by economic strategies.⁵⁸ When research is taught in accordance with the banking logic, students are directed towards compliance rather than inquiry; they learn to comply rather than inquire.

The politics of research permeates all dimensions and levels of higher academia and it would be almost futile to address all its permutations in a mere academic project such as this. But we implore that there are pockets of resistance that are fertile grounds for the project of shaping the politics of research—such is the treatment of research as pedagogical. If the process of inquiry is overshadowed by the transactional necessity being reproduced by the pedagogy of research, students are positioned to become participants in the culture of reproduction that adheres to enterprise ethics and unknowing contributors to the continuous reification of education. A research pedagogy that is anchored on the notion that students are co-creators of knowledge rather than mere performers of academic labor may give way to the rediscovery of the original essence of research as an academic endeavor borne out of curiosity. To reclaim research as an intellectual labor is to restore epistemological curiosity as its driving force. This presents an orientation that treats inquiry not as mere compliance, but as a critical engagement with reality.

⁵⁷ See Franz Giuseppe F. Cortez et al., “Research as Pedagogy: Administrative Discourse and the Politics of Knowledge Production,” in *Suri*, 3:2 (2025), <https://suri.pap73.site/files/cortezetal_suri_october2024.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Collini, *Speaking of Universities*, 157.

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