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The University Professor Between Academic Status and Ethical Responsibility: A Sociological Perspective in the Moroccan Context

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the dialectical relationship between academic status and professional responsibility of university professors in Morocco, drawing on a qualitative sociological approach based on semi-structured interviews with twenty faculty members from diverse disciplines and institutions. The findings indicate that academic status is not merely determined by rank or seniority, but is constructed through the accumulation of scientific capital (peer-reviewed publications, doctoral supervision, and participation in research projects), alongside symbolic capital reflected in institutional and social recognition. Ethical integrity and teaching quality also emerged as key determinants of sustainable academic legitimacy. The study highlights the tension between the pursuit of international recognition—through publications and rankings—and the fulfillment of teaching, ethical, and societal commitments. These results underscore the specific dynamics of the Moroccan university, where maintaining academic status requires balancing scientific excellence, moral integrity, and meaningful societal engagement.

Key words: Academic status; Responsibility; University professors; Morocco; Bourdieu; Weber; Castells.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, higher education has undergone profound transformations associated with the expansion of access to universities, the increasing social demand for knowledge, and the global pressures generated by the knowledge economy and the growing influence of international rankings (Hazelkorn, 2015). Within this context, the university has become a space where cognitive and societal dimensions intersect, which has directly impacted the position of the academic as a central actor in the university field. The professor is no longer a mere transmitter of knowledge but rather a producer of meaning and a symbolic actor whose legitimacy derives from both scientific capital and societal responsibilities (Bourdieu, 1984).

Expectations from society toward universities and their professors have also increased. Their role is no longer confined to teaching and research but extends to participation in public debates, contributions to development, and the defense of societal values (Boyer, 1990; Giroux, 2012). This shift aligns with the so-called “scholarship of engagement,”

which frames the professor as a partner in societal issues rather than limiting his or her profession to the classroom.

In the Global South, this dialectic emerges in a more complex manner due to dual pressures: on the one hand, universities are expected to serve national development goals, and on the other hand, they must strive for integration into the global academic arena (Teferra, 2009; Cloete et al., 2015). In Morocco, the debate around the university has been closely linked to the professor's academic status and ethical and professional responsibility, within the context of structural and organizational challenges (Al-Omari, 2025). This situation reflects the tension between local legitimacy and the demands of international recognition, making the academic's position subject to constant renegotiation.

Against this backdrop, this study raises three central questions: How do Moroccan academics construct their status within the university? How do they perceive their scientific, pedagogical, and societal responsibilities? And what factors reshape the relationship between status and responsibility in the Moroccan context?

The importance of this research lies in two complementary dimensions. Theoretically, it aims to enrich the sociological debate on the academic field by mobilizing Bourdieu's concepts of scientific and symbolic capital, Weber's thesis on the ethics of academic vocation, and Castells' vision of the university's role in the knowledge society. Practically, it offers an exploratory analysis that can contribute to formulating university policies that strike a more balanced compromise between the symbolic legitimacy of professors and the societal accountability required of them.

Accordingly, the article is structured into five main sections: a review of the relevant literature, presentation of the theoretical framework, exposition of the research methodology, analysis of the results, followed by the discussion and conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. International Literature: Transformations of Academic Status and the Expansion of Responsibility

International literature has examined the status of the university professor as a pivotal actor in the academic field, perceived not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a producer of meaning and a symbol of scientific legitimacy. Altbach (2007) argued that what is referred to as the "academic class" historically emerged as a distinctive group endowed with symbolic and intellectual privileges, yet simultaneously tied to responsibilities toward the public good. In recent decades, however, this prestigious status has come under increasing pressure, notably due to the rise of the knowledge economy, academic globalization, and the competitiveness of international rankings, which have compelled academics to renegotiate their role between the privilege of autonomy and the demands of accountability (Hazelkorn, 2015).

Boyer (1990) provided a critical review of the narrow conception of academic achievement centered exclusively on

publication, and proposed the notion of "multiple scholarships," which broadened the scope of academic duties to encompass quality teaching, innovative research, and community service. This proposition has resonated with recent studies emphasizing the need to recognize all dimensions of the academic profession rather than reducing it to publication and citation metrics (Benneworth et al., 2021). Giroux (2014), in turn, advanced a more critical perspective, calling for the professor to be understood as a "public intellectual" bearing ethical and political responsibilities in democratic societies, and rejecting the subordination of the university to neoliberal market logics that undermine its civic mission. These perspectives converge with more recent contributions, such as Marginson (2022), which highlight the centrality of social responsibility as a core criterion for assessing universities globally.

Thus, international scholarship reveals a fundamental shift in the definition of professorial status: from a traditional position based on symbolic privilege to a conditional status grounded in the professor's ability to reconcile scientific production with ethical commitment and societal engagement.

2.2. Literature from the Global South: The University as a Developmental Actor under Structural Constraints

In the Global South, and particularly in Africa, the issue of academic status has emerged within the dual framework of national development imperatives and weak institutional infrastructures. Teferra and Altbach (2004) noted that African universities face chronic challenges such as insufficient funding, fragile infrastructure, brain drain, and the absence of coherent national research strategies—factors that weaken the status of university professors and constrain their ability to fully exercise their roles.

Cloete et al. (2011) developed the concept of the "developmental pact," which presupposes the construction of a political and societal consensus that defines the developmental mission of the university and grants professors dual legitimacy: academic and developmental. However, the absence of such a pact in many African countries has forced professors to assume heavy developmental responsibilities without adequate institutional support.

Shabani (2007, 2013) underscored the necessity of institutionalizing quality assurance and academic accreditation as essential conditions for the credibility of both universities and professors. With the quantitative expansion of universities and the rising student population without parallel qualitative improvements, the status of university professors has declined, alongside heightened ethical and professional pressures. Recent studies (Cloete, 2021; Tight, 2019) confirm that pressures to integrate into the global academic space have exacerbated this tension, as professors are torn between the imperative of publishing in international journals and the need to address local community needs.

These studies demonstrate that professorial status in the Global South cannot be reduced to academic credentials alone; rather, it is the product of an interaction between

scientific capital and developmental challenges, making academic responsibility particularly complex in these contexts.

2.3. Moroccan Literature: Between Social Mobility and Academic Ethics

In Morocco, although peer-reviewed research remains limited, some academic contributions have begun to shed light on the status of university professors and their ethical and societal roles. Hammoudi (2009) showed that the profession of university teaching has served as a vehicle for social mobility for students from working and middle-class families, but currently suffers from a crisis of status due to low salaries, an aging faculty, and the declining attractiveness of the profession. The study also pointed to the phenomenon of “relative deprivation,” reflected in the gap between professional aspirations and actual rewards, which has contributed to diminished job satisfaction and increased intentions to leave academia.

More recently, Bennis (2024) has called for the institutionalization of research ethics in Moroccan universities, criticizing the absence of independent ethics committees in many institutions and the subsequent threat to academic credibility. Public debate in recent years has increasingly focused on issues of academic integrity, particularly following scandals linked to harassment and administrative corruption, making the ethical dimension an inseparable part of the professor’s social legitimacy.

Nonetheless, a review of Moroccan literature reveals several critical gaps:

1. The absence of a locally grounded theoretical framework capable of accounting for the specificities of Moroccan universities.
2. The scarcity of recent empirical studies after 2010, despite major transformations (digitalization, reform of the regulatory framework, and the expansion of access).
3. The weakness of qualitative approaches that explore professors’ representations of their multiple roles.
4. The lack of an institutionalized framework for academic research ethics, leaving ethical commitment dependent on individual initiatives.

Overall, the literature review demonstrates that the relationship between professorial status and responsibility is a complex dialectical one that varies according to context. In the West, academics face pressures stemming from market logics and international rankings, whereas in the Global South they oscillate between local developmental needs and integration into the international academic field. In Morocco, this dialectic acquires a dual specificity: it reflects, on the one hand, structural constraints and limited resources, and on the other, rising ethical stakes that condition academic legitimacy on the professor’s ability to combine scientific excellence, integrity, and societal engagement.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Pierre Bourdieu’s Perspective: The Academic Field

and Symbolic Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1975, 1984) developed a sociological approach to understanding the academic field as a relatively autonomous space characterized by struggles over status and legitimacy. Within this field, academic actors compete for different forms of symbolic capital, which grant them power and recognition within the university institution. Bourdieu (1996) distinguishes between academic capital, expressed in organizational and administrative authority such as control over decision-making positions and hiring or promotion criteria, and scientific capital, which relates to mutual recognition among peers based on the quality of scholarly production (Bourdieu, 2001).

From this perspective, academic status is not limited to job title or rank but depends on the accumulation of scientific capital and reputation within the field. As Bourdieu (1990) emphasized, “the reputation of quality is quality itself,” meaning that collective recognition determines the scientific value of the individual. He also introduced the concept of “misrecognition,” where academics assume their intellectual activity is guided solely by the pursuit of truth, while in reality it is driven, at least in part, by the implicit desire for social recognition. This critical perspective underscores the tension between status and responsibility: academic status can only be achieved through adherence to integrity and rigor, and scientific responsibility constitutes the necessary condition for legitimacy within the field.

3.2. Max Weber’s Perspective: Science as a Vocation and the Ethics of Responsibility

Max Weber (1919/1946) conceptualized science both as a profession and as a vocation. He explained that the German term *Beruf* carries a dual meaning, combining occupation and calling, implying that academic work requires a profound ethical commitment to knowledge. In this framework, Weber argued that the university professor must embody intellectual integrity and objectivity, clearly distinguishing between scientific facts and value judgments. The Arabic translation of Weber’s lectures (2013) reinforces this idea, highlighting that the academic is required to combine scholarly excellence with ethical rectitude, which together form the essence of the academic profession.

Weber stressed that the professor is neither a preacher nor a political advocate but rather a mediator in transmitting knowledge and training students in critical thinking. He considered ethical responsibility to lie in the academic’s readiness to assume the consequences of their words and actions for students and society. Consequently, academic status is not measured by authority or influence but by the level of ethical commitment and fidelity to the vocation of science. Within this view, professorial status derives its legitimacy from the authenticity of the scholar’s performance of duty and their willingness to bear responsibility for telling the truth, even when the truth is uncomfortable or socially inconvenient.

3.3. Manuel Castells’ Perspective: The University, the Knowledge Economy, and Social Responsibility

Manuel Castells (2001, 2010, 2017) emphasized the role of the university within the knowledge society and knowledge economy, in which academic institutions have become central actors in producing human capital, supporting innovation, and contributing to socio-economic development. The university is no longer merely a site for transmitting knowledge but has become an institution for generating and circulating knowledge as well as producing cultural meaning.

From this standpoint, the university bears responsibility for reducing social inequalities by expanding access to higher education and promoting social justice through the dissemination of knowledge. It also plays a cultural role by renewing values and generating new cultural forms responsive to rapid societal transformations. At the same time, Castells noted bureaucratic and conservative constraints that limit the effectiveness of universities, calling for reforms in organizational culture that balance the dual mission of knowledge production and social responsibility. Thus, the status of the university in the knowledge economy is conditioned by the extent to which it fulfills both its scientific and societal functions.

3.4. Integrating Perspectives: The Dialectic of Status and Responsibility across the Three Theories

Although rooted in different theoretical traditions, the perspectives of Bourdieu, Weber, and Castells complement each other in offering a comprehensive understanding of the dialectical relationship between status and responsibility. Bourdieu shows that academic status is acquired through the accumulation of scientific capital and collective recognition within the field (Bourdieu, 1988, 1994). Weber stresses that status has no meaning without an ethical commitment to the vocation of science and intellectual objectivity (Weber, 1919/1946). Castells extends the debate to the institutional dimension, emphasizing that the university's status in the modern era is measured by its contribution to development and cultural meaning (Castells, 2010, 2017).

Hence, academic status cannot be reduced to formal titles or professional privileges but is rooted in the fulfillment of scientific, ethical, and societal responsibilities. Legitimate status emerges from the fulfillment of responsibility, while responsibility is effective only when supported by recognized scientific status. This interdependence reflects the essence of the “dialectic of status and responsibility,” illustrating that the academic is always situated in a position requiring a careful balance between the demands of scientific excellence, professional ethics, and societal engagement.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive, qualitative, and exploratory design to examine how Moroccan university professors perceive their academic status and responsibilities. The choice of this approach was grounded in several key considerations:

1. The subject matter is intrinsically tied to meanings and lived experiences, making qualitative inquiry more suitable than quantitative methods.

2. The framing of “how” and “why” questions requires an interpretive approach that can reveal the symbolic depth of the phenomenon.
3. Previous scholarship has emphasized the effectiveness of qualitative methodologies in examining representations and professional identities (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
4. The Moroccan context, marked by institutional diversity and structural pressures, necessitates listening to multiple voices rather than reducing them to numerical indicators.

Accordingly, this methodological orientation provided a suitable framework to explore the dialectic of status and responsibility by uncovering the patterns and meanings conveyed in professors' discourses and experiences.

4.2. Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection tool, given their ability to balance expressive freedom with structured guidance. This technique allowed the researcher to deepen the discussion with participants while maintaining coherence with the study's objectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

4.3. Interview Guide Structure

The interview guide consisted of three main thematic areas, articulated as open-ended questions with the flexibility to probe further depending on the flow of conversation:

- **Academic Status**
 - How do you describe your position within the Moroccan university?
 - What factors strengthen or weaken this status?
- **Professional Responsibility**
 - How do you understand your responsibilities toward students and the scientific community?
 - What challenges do you face in balancing teaching and research?
- **Dialectic of Status and Responsibility**
 - How does your academic status influence your teaching and research roles?
 - What balance is possible between seeking international recognition and serving the local community?

The guide included 8–10 questions, and each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Modern Standard Arabic to avoid ambiguity and ensure clear communication.

4.4. Sample

The study sample consisted of 20 faculty members (both men and women) from various academic disciplines and Moroccan universities. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted, consistent with the objectives of qualitative research, to capture diversity in rank, expertise, specialization, and gender (Patton, 2015).

Table 1. Symbolic Data of the Study Sample

Cod e	Gender	Discipline	Years of Exper ience	University
P1	Male	Education	18	Mohammed V

		Sciences		University (Rabat)
P2	Female	Arabic Language	10	Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah (Fez)
P3	Male	Physics	7	Ibn Zohr University (Agadir)
P4	Female	Economics	22	Hassan II University (Casablanca)
P5	Male	Chemistry	8	Abdelmalek Essaâdi (Tetouan)
P6	Female	Psychology	5	Chouaib Doukkali (El Jadida)
P7	Male	Education Sciences	25	Cadi Ayyad (Marrakech)
P8	Female	Political Science	12	Mohammed I (Oujda)
P9	Male	Mathematics	4	Moulay Ismail (Meknes)
P10	Female	Sociology	15	Ibn Tofail (Kenitra)
P11	Male	Computer Science	30	Mohammed V (Rabat)
P12	Female	Architecture	9	Abdelmalek Essaâdi (Tetouan)
P13	Male	Media & Communication	6	Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah (Fez)
P14	Female	History	14	Ibn Zohr (Agadir)
P15	Male	Management	20	Hassan II (Casablanca)
P 16	Female	Sociology	11	Mohammed I (Oujda)
P 17	Male	Political Science	17	Hassan II (Casablanca)
P 18	Female	Educational Psychology	4	Moulay Ismail (Meknes)
P 19	Male	Civil Engineering	13	Chouaib Doukkali (El Jadida)
P 20	Female	Arabic Linguistics	19	Ibn Tofail (Kenitra)

Note: Pseudonyms were used to preserve anonymity. Source: Compiled by the authors based on interview data analyzed with NVivo (2025).

4.5. Ethical Considerations

The study complied with all ethical standards applicable to scientific research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, and they were clearly informed about the study's objectives and procedures. Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time were guaranteed (Orb et al., 2001). Participant confidentiality was ensured through pseudonymization, with all recordings and transcripts securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Results were reported in an aggregated and summarized manner, avoiding the disclosure of any personal details that could compromise participants' identities (Tracy, 2010).

4.6. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), served as the primary analytical framework. To enhance rigor in data management and coding, NVivo 15 software was employed, providing advanced capabilities such as importing transcripts into a unified database, conducting open coding by

identifying significant text segments and linking them to initial nodes, and then applying axial coding to group similar codes into broader categories. The software also enabled the construction of concept maps and the extraction of relationships among categories using matrix coding queries. These tools facilitated the identification of recurring patterns across interviews and strengthened analytical precision.

The analysis proceeded in three main stages. First, open coding was conducted through careful reading of transcripts and the generation of initial codes without imposing a prior theoretical framework. Second, axial coding was employed to cluster similar codes into broader categories and to identify their interrelationships, following the approach suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2015). Finally, selective coding was used to construct the overarching themes that captured the shared patterns in professors' perceptions of their academic status and responsibilities.

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, multiple procedures were followed. Member checking was conducted by presenting preliminary findings to a subset of participants to confirm their accuracy. Triangulation was employed by comparing data across faculty of different ranks, disciplines, and gender to reduce bias. In addition, peer debriefing was undertaken as a qualitative expert reviewed the coding and analysis process to ensure coherence and validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The combination of thematic analysis with NVivo thus enabled the construction of rich, nuanced themes that explained how Moroccan university professors perceive their academic status and responsibilities.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Constructing Academic Status

The analysis of interviews revealed that professors' academic status is not reducible to their formal rank; rather, it emerges from a multidimensional accumulation involving research, teaching, institutional recognition, and social perception.

Scientific publishing was highlighted as a central factor in strengthening status. Participants emphasized that publishing in peer-reviewed journals and presenting at international conferences enhances a scholar's reputation within the field. As one professor noted: *"Today, a professor's reputation is built primarily on research. The number of citations to my work has become a key indicator of my academic value, more than anything else"* (P5). Another participant added that supervising graduate students also contributes to recognition: *"When a professor becomes known for producing successful PhD graduates, this increases the respect they receive from colleagues"* (P9). This perspective aligns with Bourdieu's concept of scientific capital (Bourdieu, 1988).

Participants also stressed that the quality of teaching is an equally important dimension of academic status, not only in the eyes of students but also within the broader community.

One participant stated: *“When I see lecture halls full and hear students telling me they truly benefit, I feel my status is confirmed more than by any academic title”* (P7). This status further expands through advisory roles and scientific consultations.

Institutional recognition was identified as another critical element. Promotions, awards, and administrative positions were described as symbolic signals of prestige. One professor explained: *“The feeling of status comes when the university acknowledges your efforts—for example, by awarding me Best Researcher”* (P3).

Professors also highlighted the dynamic nature of status, emphasizing that seniority alone is no longer sufficient as in the past; instead, academic productivity and professional distinction are now decisive. This observation resonates with Bourdieu’s (2001) assertion that academic capital is a dynamic construct, continuously renewed through practice and scholarly achievement. A senior professor summarized: *“The prestige we enjoyed in the past is no longer guaranteed; today you must earn it through hard work and seriousness, day by day”* (P17). Nonetheless, some noted challenges that undermine academic image, such as the oversupply of PhD holders or negative practices that weaken the university’s reputation (Anfaspress, 2023).

In sum, academic status is a complex social construct built upon the accumulation of scientific, teaching, and institutional capital, shaped simultaneously by societal perceptions and the broader academic context.

Table 2 presents the main themes derived from thematic analysis in NVivo. Findings show that “academic status” emerged as the most prominent theme, representing 38% of coded references, followed by “academic responsibility” at 31%. Tensions between status and responsibility accounted for 19%, while institutional and contextual factors made up 12%. This distribution highlights that status and responsibility constitute the central duality in professors’ perceptions.

Table 2. Main Themes Derived from Thematic Analysis (Axial Coding)

Core Theme	Subcodes	References	% of Total
Academic Status	Publishing – Supervision – Quality Teaching – Institutional Recognition	152	38%
Academic Responsibility	Effective Teaching- Supervision – Community-Engaged Research – Academic Integrity	124	31%

Tension Between Status & Responsibility	Publishing Pressure – Teaching Load – Work–Life Balance – Societal Roles	76	19%
Influencing Factors	Institutional Support – National Policies – Student Expectations – Academic Globalization	52	12%

Source: Compiled by the authors based on NVivo interview analysis (2025).

5.2. Conceptions of Academic Responsibility

The analysis of responses revealed that professors’ conception of academic responsibility encompasses interrelated yet complementary dimensions.

First, effective teaching was identified as the core of professional responsibility. One participant stated: *“My primary duty is to deliver knowledge properly to my students and instill critical thinking and a love of learning”* (P2). Supervision was also regarded as a central commitment, despite administrative and time pressures. This resonates with Fekkak (2019), who argued that Moroccan professors’ status fundamentally rests on their educational responsibility toward students. Research was viewed as another moral responsibility. As one professor remarked: *“For me, research is not a luxury but an ethical duty toward my discipline”* (P10). Some participants stressed that selecting topics relevant to societal issues and development reflects the university’s mission (Boyer, 1990).

Participants further emphasized pedagogical and human responsibilities, including psychological and ethical guidance and fairness in evaluation. One professor noted: *“I feel responsible when my female students see me as a role model; I must meet their expectations academically and ethically”* (P14).

For others, responsibility extended to societal engagement through contributing to public debates and disseminating scientific knowledge, consistent with Giroux’s (2014) call for academics to act as public intellectuals. However, they acknowledged that institutional policies rarely prioritize this role.

Integrity, objectivity, and avoidance of power misuse were also highlighted as core ethical responsibilities. One professor affirmed: *“Our honesty and integrity safeguard our dignity and that of the university”* (P19). Professors also emphasized the responsibility of self-development and keeping up with scientific and pedagogical innovations, especially under technological transformations.

These conceptions indicate that academic responsibility is not a mere functional obligation but a holistic vision combining teaching, research, ethics, and societal engagement—closely

reflecting Weber's notion of *Beruf*, which integrates profession and vocation (Weber, 1919/1946). Nevertheless, some participants acknowledged that workload and institutional policies sometimes hinder full adherence to these responsibilities.

Table 3 highlights gendered differences in the thematic distribution. Male participants placed greater emphasis on "academic status" (98 references), while female participants gave relatively more weight to "academic responsibility" (59 vs. 65 for men). Tensions between status and responsibility were more pronounced in men's narratives (48 references), while women highlighted institutional and student-related factors more prominently. These gendered differences underscore that academic experiences are not homogeneous but shaped by personal and social conditions.

Table 3. Distribution of References by Gender

Theme	Male (n=11)	Female (n=9)	Total
Academic Status	98	54	152
Academic Responsibility	65	59	124
Tension	48	28	76
Influencing Factors	32	20	52

Source: Compiled by the authors based on NVivo interview analysis (2025).

5.3. Tension Between Status and Responsibility

Findings indicate that many professors experience ongoing tension between building their academic status and fulfilling their multiple responsibilities. This tension is evident in daily practice, as professors struggle to balance the demands of publishing with teaching and supervision. One participant expressed: *"Sometimes you feel torn. If you focus on your research to achieve promotion and build a name, you fear neglecting your students. I feel guilty when I prioritize publishing over teaching"* (P6). This reflects the structural contradiction widely discussed in literature on the research-teaching nexus (Tight, 2019).

Several participants argued that institutional metrics emphasizing quantitative indicators, such as number of publications and journal rankings, exacerbate the tension. As one professor put it: *"It's an endless race. If you don't publish enough, you're seen as average or lazy. But if you only chase publications, you neglect other duties"* (P15). This mirrors Münch's (2014) critique of performance culture tied to the obsession with university rankings.

Younger faculty members were particularly affected, facing pressure to build strong research records quickly while proving teaching competence and contributing to committees. One remarked: *"At the beginning of my career, I feel like I have to be Superman: publish fast, teach well, join committees... It's exhausting"* (P11). This corresponds with global literature depicting academic work as stressful,

combining high demands with uncertain symbolic returns (Kinman & Johnson, 2019).

The tension was also evident regarding societal roles. Some participants hesitated between engaging in public debates, media, and cultural events, and fearing accusations of neglecting their "core duties." One professor said: *"I enjoy participating in cultural events and media, but I fear being judged as neglecting my lab. Academia can be unforgiving"* (P8). This reflects the tension between viewing the professor as a productive researcher and as a public intellectual (Giroux, 2014).

Female professors particularly stressed that pursuing recognition through conferences and research networks demanded significant time and energy, directly affecting family life—adding a gendered dimension to the tension.

Despite these pressures, some participants believed the tension could be managed through time-management skills and more flexible university policies that recognize teaching and mentoring in promotion criteria, rather than focusing solely on research output. As a senior professor explained: *"Yes, sometimes the workload feels overwhelming, but I've realized that successful professors are those who manage to balance all roles effectively"* (P17). Table 4 presents illustrative quotes coded under the main themes.

Table 4. Representative Quotes by Theme

Code	Participant Quote	Theme
P5	"Today, a professor's reputation is built primarily on research and citations."	Academic Status
P2	"My primary duty is to deliver knowledge properly to my students."	Academic Responsibility
P6	"I feel guilty when I neglect my students in order to publish."	Tension
P16	"My students compare me to professors they watch on YouTube."	Influencing Factors

Source: Compiled by the authors based on NVivo interview analysis (2025).

5.4. Influencing Factors in Status and Responsibility

The findings reveal that professors' experiences of status and responsibility are shaped not by a single determinant, but by a complex interplay of individual, institutional, and contextual factors. This interaction highlights the need for a holistic perspective that accounts for the multiple levels structuring academic work in Morocco.

Figure 1 presents the coding tree generated through NVivo, illustrating the hierarchical structure of main and subthemes identified across interviews. The visual representation shows how academic status (publishing, teaching, institutional

recognition) and academic responsibility (effective teaching, supervision, integrity) intersect with themes of tension and institutional/contextual influences. This figure demonstrates the progression from open coding to axial coding in the thematic analysis.

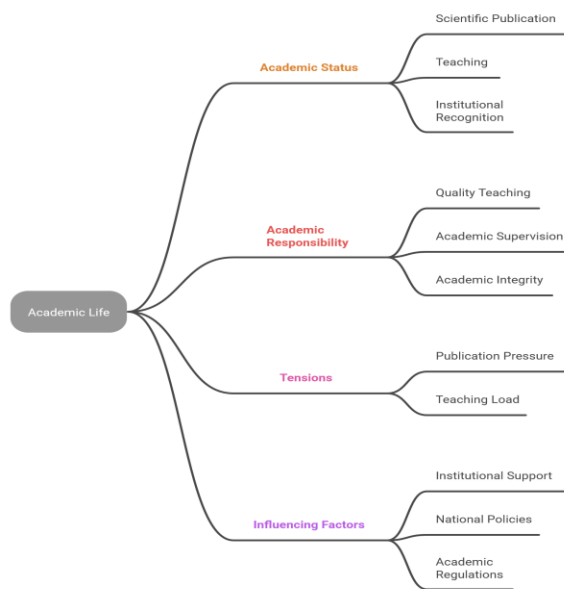


Figure 1. Coding Tree Derived from Interview Analysis

5.4.1. Individual and Personal Factors

At the individual level, personal traits, intrinsic motivation, and internal values emerged as foundational in shaping how professors negotiate their status and responsibility. Professors who view their teaching and research as a noble mission beyond the functional dimension displayed greater willingness to shoulder responsibilities, even in the absence of immediate recognition. Some participants pointed out that their prior experiences and academic upbringing influenced their professional outlook. As one junior faculty member explained: *“I had a professor during my studies who was a model of dedication; this has shaped how I work today”* (P13). Others emphasized that traits such as personal discipline and organizational skills enabled them to balance teaching, research, and supervision, while weak time-management skills led to feelings of stress and imbalance between status and responsibility (Bakker et al., 2023). These findings suggest that individual factors are necessary but insufficient on their own, as they require a supportive environment to translate into effective performance.

5.4.2. Institutional and Contextual Factors

Institutional factors emerged as both constraining and enabling. Several participants reported struggling with student overcrowding and limited human resources, which burdened teaching workloads and reduced opportunities for research or developmental projects. Institutional support for research—through funding, grants, and opportunities for

conference participation—was described as a decisive determinant of academic status, directly linked to the professor’s ability to produce scholarship that enhances the university’s reputation and secures broader recognition (Altbach, 2015).

The culture of departments and faculties was also highlighted as an indirect yet influential factor. In highly competitive departments, professors tended to focus narrowly on publishing to reinforce individual status, sometimes at the expense of teaching quality. By contrast, departments characterized by collaborative and collegial atmospheres encouraged workload sharing and reduced stress, thereby strengthening professors’ capacity to balance multiple responsibilities.

5.4.3. National Higher Education Policies

National policies were also identified as an overarching framework shaping how status and responsibility are defined. The current promotion system, which relies primarily on scientific publishing, privileges research over teaching and community service. This orientation led some professors to feel that their pedagogical and educational commitments were insufficiently recognized institutionally, generating a gap between what they considered their academic duty and what official policies rewarded.

Moreover, the broader public and media discourse about professors’ image was said to influence their sense of responsibility. When professors’ social standing is elevated, they tend to show stronger ethical and professional commitment toward their students and society. Conversely, the erosion of this image—whether due to negative practices or weak formal recognition—was perceived as undermining their status and reducing motivation (Bourdieu, 1988).

5.4.4. Global and Student-Related Factors

Global pressures were also seen as increasingly significant, particularly with the rise of international university rankings and the expansion of the digital space. Some professors noted that students now compare their performance with that of international academics whose lectures are available on platforms such as YouTube. One participant described: *“My students compare me to professors they watch on YouTube from global universities. This new challenge makes me feel even more responsible to improve myself”* (P16). These new benchmarks compel professors to continuously update their pedagogical and technological skills in order to maintain status.

In addition, student characteristics and expectations play a critical role in shaping both status and responsibility. High-achieving and ambitious students motivate professors to intensify their efforts, whereas weak performance or lack of motivation among students can negatively affect professors’ enthusiasm and willingness to invest in additional roles.

In sum, professors' academic status and responsibility are shaped by the interplay of individual factors (traits and motivation), institutional dynamics (resources, support, departmental culture), national policies, and global as well as student-related influences. This interaction underscores the complexity of academic life and highlights the need for fairer and more balanced policies. Such policies should enable professors to fulfill their teaching, research, educational, and societal roles without sacrificing their status, while simultaneously reinforcing their standing within both the university and society.

Figure 2 illustrates the network of relationships linking the study's main themes. Academic status and responsibility appear as two interdependent nodes: status is nourished by research productivity and effective teaching, while responsibility derives meaning from ethical and pedagogical commitment. The figure also shows that tensions between the two dimensions are partly driven by institutional policies and publishing pressures, whereas academic integrity acts as a bridge connecting status and responsibility.

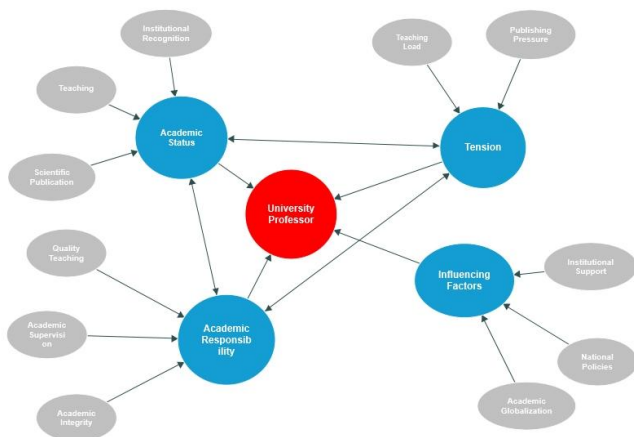


Figure 2. Network of relationships between academic status and responsibility (conceptual map from NVivo analysis).

6. DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore the complex relationship between academic status and responsibility from the perspective of Moroccan university professors, situating the findings within relevant theoretical frameworks and comparative approaches. The analysis revealed that this relationship is characterized by a continuous dialectic between symbolic, institutional, and ethical considerations, in line with international literature while simultaneously reflecting the specificities of the Moroccan context.

6.1. Academic Status and Scientific Capital

The findings show that professors' academic status is primarily constructed through the accumulation of scientific and intellectual capital: publishing in peer-reviewed journals, supervising doctoral dissertations, and engaging in prestigious

research networks. This is consistent with Bourdieu's (1988) analysis of the academic field as an arena of struggle over symbolic resources, as well as his argument that academic status is inseparable from relational networks and symbolic forces that determine an actor's position within the field (Bourdieu, 1994).

Yet the Moroccan context highlights the limitations of this model: status is not solely contingent on scholarly output, but also shaped by moral and social recognition. This ethical dimension, often overlooked in Bourdieu's approach, emerged here as a central condition for establishing academic legitimacy. Recent studies confirm that academic reputation in Arab and African contexts is increasingly tied to ethical values and social responsibility, in addition to research productivity (Al-Kurdi et al., 2022; Mohamedbhai, 2020).

6.2. Academic Responsibility and the Societal Dimension

The data further reveal that professors conceptualize academic responsibility as multidimensional, encompassing effective teaching, research integrity, committed student supervision, and societal engagement. This understanding resonates with Castells' (2001) vision of the university as a central actor in the knowledge society.

Nevertheless, the analysis revealed a gap between discourse and practice, primarily due to structural constraints such as insufficient funding, bureaucratic hurdles, and student overcrowding. Recent scholarship underscores that these challenges are not unique to Morocco, but rather a global feature of higher education, where academics are pressured to reconcile quantitative performance metrics with broader social missions (Marginson, 2020; Hazelkorn, 2022).

6.3. The Tension Between Research and Teaching

The study also identified a structural tension between the demands of research and publication on the one hand, and the burdens of teaching and supervision on the other. This finding aligns with Tight's (2019) observations on the dual roles of academics. In Morocco, however, this tension is exacerbated by limited resources and institutional pressure to publish.

Recent studies have shown that this duality negatively impacts professors' psychological well-being and overall performance, highlighting the need for institutional policies that better balance research expectations with teaching quality (Kinman & Johnson, 2019; Bakker et al., 2023).

6.4. Moroccan Specificities and International Comparisons

A comparison with Western and African literature indicates that Moroccan professors face similar pressures—academic globalization, international rankings, and resource constraints. Yet the distinctiveness of the Moroccan context lies in the centrality of the ethical dimension. While Western literature emphasizes global competition (Altbach, 2015; Marginson,

2020) and African scholarship stresses development and resource scarcity (Teferra, 2017), Moroccan perspectives underscore that integrity and value-based commitment constitute a dual condition for both status and responsibility.

This finding echoes El-'Asri's (2020) argument that academic integrity has become a fundamental determinant of professors' legitimacy in Morocco, particularly amid growing public debate about research ethics and higher education governance. Recent scholarship also suggests that ethical accountability is becoming an increasingly salient social criterion for evaluating academics in Arab societies (Benali, 2022; Said & Jalloh, 2021).

In sum, the relationship between status and responsibility among Moroccan professors is marked by a central paradox: status confers symbolic authority and capital, but remains conditional upon exercising that authority responsibly in the service of knowledge, students, and society. Thus, while the findings support the theoretical perspectives of Bourdieu, Weber, and Castells, they add a Moroccan specificity that places ethics at the heart of the sociological understanding of academic status and responsibility.

7. CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the relationship between academic status and professional responsibility among Moroccan university professors is not linear but shaped by the interplay of symbolic, ethical, and institutional dimensions. Academic status is constructed through the accumulation of scientific and symbolic capital, as emphasized by Bourdieu (1988), yet its legitimacy depends on the fulfillment of professional and ethical responsibilities, echoing Weber's view of science as a vocation.

Findings reveal that Moroccan professors perceive teaching, supervision, and ethical integrity as core pillars of their role, while also recognizing the growing importance of societal engagement, in line with Castells' (2000) conception of the university as a driver of knowledge and development. However, this engagement remains constrained by institutional and bureaucratic barriers.

Ultimately, the Moroccan context demonstrates a dual specificity: while reflecting global dynamics of the academic field, it is also marked by structural challenges such as limited resources and weak infrastructure. To secure legitimacy, professors must combine scientific excellence, ethical integrity, and societal commitment. Academic status thus emerges not as a fixed title but as a dynamic construction continuously reinforced through responsible practice.

Future research should further examine how institutional reforms, funding mechanisms, and ethical governance in Moroccan universities could foster a more balanced integration between academic excellence and societal

engagement, thereby strengthening both the legitimacy of professors and the credibility of the university within society.

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