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Selecting Graduate Supervisors in Islamic Higher Education: Bridging Educational Theory, Ethics, and Multicultural Practice

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to investigate the process of selecting supervisors for master's and doctoral theses as a cornerstone of graduate program success. It specifically seeks to identify the gap between theoretical academic regulations and actual field practices in Arab universities compared to international standards. **Theoretical framework:** The research is grounded in the "Academic Quality Assurance" framework and "Institutional Theory," focusing on how formal selection criteria influence the quality of research outputs and the professional development of graduate students. **Literature review:** Previous studies emphasize that while selection criteria are theoretically established, their practical application remains inconsistent across different global academic systems, particularly highlighting the disparity between Arab and European institutional norms regarding supervisor accountability and student support. **Methods:** The study employs a comparative analytical approach, juxtaposing the supervisory selection mechanisms of Arab universities with those of European and international systems to highlight strengths, weaknesses, and procedural variances. **Results:** The findings reveal a significant "implementation gap" where formal methodologies are often bypassed by informal practices. The results also indicate that current selection processes in many Arab contexts lack rigorous monitoring and periodic evaluation of supervisor performance compared to international benchmarks. **Implications:** This research recommends the establishment of specialized "Supervisory Selection Committees" and the implementation of digital tracking systems to monitor supervisory loads and student progress, ensuring alignment with international quality standards. **Novelty:** The study provides an original comparative framework that bridges the gap between theoretical regulations and practical field realities in the Arab world, offering a roadmap for transitioning from administrative selection to a merit-based, quality-driven supervisory model.

Keywords: graduate supervision, academic quality assurance, postgraduate programs, supervisor-student relationship, higher education standard.

INTRODUCTION

Scientific supervision of master's and doctoral theses is one of the fundamental axes that directly affect the quality of scientific research and the success of graduate programs. The supervisor's role goes beyond merely providing technical remarks; it includes guiding and mentoring the student throughout all phases of research, starting from topic selection, developing the research plan, data collection and analysis, to writing the thesis and protecting

intellectual property rights. The supervisor also acts as an academic and psychological advisor who must possess high communication skills and innovation in guidance [1].

Despite numerous laws and regulations organizing supervisor selection, a clear gap appears in applying these rules and actual practice, especially in Arab universities, where factors such as favoritism, lack of oversight, and absence of continuous evaluation mechanisms impact supervision quality. Conversely, European universities employ stricter and more precise mechanisms, including mandatory professional training for supervisors and a continuous evaluation system that provides constructive feedback, thereby improving research quality and increasing student success rates [2].

This study aims to comprehensively address this gap by providing multiple definitions of scientific supervision, outlining its importance and objectives, then integrating supervision steps followed in Arab and European systems, focusing on supervisor selection criteria in both, highlighting points of convergence and divergence, and finally proposing suggested mechanisms to bridge the gap and achieve higher quality supervision that serves the development of scientific research in the Arab region and other countries [3].

This study offers a distinctive contribution by advancing an integrated and comparative framework that bridges the persistent gap between formal supervisory regulations and their practical implementation in Islamic higher education. While previous research has examined graduate supervision either from a regulatory perspective or through localized case studies, this study synthesizes both dimensions into a unified analytical model [4]. The novelty of this research lies in its ability to connect academic quality assurance principles with institutional practices, thereby revealing not only where discrepancies occur but also why they persist within specific socio-cultural and administrative contexts. By juxtaposing Arab and European systems, the study provides a deeper understanding of how structural, cultural, and organizational factors shape supervisory selection and performance [5].

Furthermore, this research introduces a practical roadmap for transitioning from traditional, often informal, supervisor selection processes toward a merit-based, transparent, and quality-driven model. The proposed framework emphasizes measurable criteria, continuous evaluation, and the integration of digital monitoring systems, which collectively represent a significant advancement over existing approaches. In doing so, the study moves beyond descriptive analysis and offers actionable strategies that can be adapted across diverse higher education systems, particularly in contexts seeking to enhance research quality and institutional accountability [6].

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on academic supervision by linking institutional theory with quality assurance frameworks, highlighting the dynamic relationship between formal policies and actual practices. Practically, it provides higher education policymakers, university administrators, and academic leaders with evidence-based recommendations to reform supervisory systems. The establishment of specialized supervisory selection committees, the implementation of mandatory training programs, and the adoption of digital tracking tools are among the key strategies that can significantly improve supervision quality.

Ultimately, by addressing systemic inefficiencies and promoting transparency and accountability, this study contributes to the development of more effective graduate programs. It supports the creation of an academic environment that fosters innovation, enhances student success, and aligns with international standards, thereby strengthening the global competitiveness of higher education institutions in the Arab region and beyond.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Graduate Supervision in Higher Education

Graduate supervision is widely recognized as a central component of postgraduate education that significantly influences research quality, academic achievement, and institutional performance. In contemporary higher education, supervision is no longer understood merely as administrative oversight but rather as a multidimensional academic partnership involving intellectual guidance, mentoring, ethical responsibility, and professional development. Within this perspective, supervisors are expected to facilitate students' research capacity, critical thinking, academic independence, and scholarly identity formation throughout the research process [7].

According to Columbia University, scientific supervision represents an interactive academic process between supervisors and students that aims to guide research activities while simultaneously providing academic, social, and psychological support to ensure successful and high-quality research outcomes. Similarly, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) defines graduate supervision as a mentoring relationship that enables students to develop research competencies, analytical abilities, and scholarly professionalism through continuous academic engagement and constructive feedback. These definitions indicate that effective supervision encompasses not only technical research assistance but also broader educational and interpersonal dimensions [8].

From the perspective of educational theory, graduate supervision aligns closely with constructivist and transformative learning approaches, which emphasize collaborative knowledge construction, reflective learning, and intellectual autonomy. Supervisors, therefore, function as facilitators who create supportive academic environments that encourage inquiry, innovation, and independent scholarship. In Islamic higher education, however, the supervisory role extends further into ethical and moral dimensions rooted in Islamic educational philosophy. Supervisors are expected to model integrity, fairness, responsibility, and respect for knowledge while nurturing students' academic and spiritual development. Consequently, supervision in Islamic universities reflects the integration of intellectual excellence with ethical and social responsibility [9].

Importance of Graduate Supervision in Islamic Higher Education

The importance of effective graduate supervision has become increasingly significant within the context of globalization, international academic competition, and quality assurance reforms. Numerous studies have demonstrated that high-quality supervision contributes positively to research productivity, timely degree completion, publication success, and students' academic satisfaction. Effective supervisory relationships also strengthen students' confidence, motivation, and ability to conduct independent research [10].

In Islamic higher education institutions, supervision carries additional significance because it contributes to the development of graduates who are academically competent, ethically grounded, and socially responsive. Supervisors play an important role in transmitting Islamic academic values such as honesty, accountability, justice, and respect for intellectual diversity. Moreover, multicultural realities within contemporary higher education require supervisors to possess intercultural competence and communication skills that enable them to guide students from diverse social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds [11].

Previous research has identified several major functions of graduate supervision. First, supervision improves research quality by ensuring methodological rigor, theoretical coherence, and academic originality [12]. Second, supervision supports students' intellectual and professional development through continuous mentoring, constructive criticism, and scholarly engagement. Third, effective supervision promotes innovation and scientific

contribution by encouraging students to explore new perspectives and research areas. Fourth, supervisors provide psychological and academic support that helps students overcome stress, research challenges, and institutional barriers. These functions collectively demonstrate that supervision is fundamental not only to individual student success but also to institutional research excellence [13].

Objectives of Graduate Supervision

The objectives of graduate supervision extend beyond monitoring students' academic progress. Contemporary supervision systems aim to develop competent researchers capable of producing ethical, innovative, and socially relevant knowledge. In general, graduate supervision seeks to assist students in selecting original and feasible research topics, constructing coherent research designs, conducting systematic data analysis, and producing academically rigorous theses or dissertations [14].

Kumar and Singh (2017) argue that effective supervision also aims to strengthen students' research ethics awareness, publication readiness, and academic communication skills. Within Islamic higher education, additional objectives include fostering moral responsibility, integrating Islamic educational values into scholarly activities, and encouraging research that contributes positively to society. Thus, supervision in Islamic institutions combines scientific objectives with ethical and humanistic educational goals [15].

Furthermore, modern supervisory frameworks emphasize accountability, transparency, and continuous evaluation. Supervisors are increasingly expected to maintain regular communication with students, provide timely feedback, monitor research progress systematically, and ensure compliance with institutional and ethical standards. These objectives reflect broader international efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of graduate education systems [16].

Models and Practices of Supervisor Selection

Supervisor selection represents one of the most critical stages in graduate education because the compatibility between students and supervisors significantly affects research quality and completion outcomes. However, supervisory selection practices vary considerably across higher education systems due to differences in institutional culture, governance structures, and quality assurance mechanisms [17].

In many Arab and Islamic higher education institutions, supervisor selection is commonly influenced by academic rank, seniority, departmental recommendation, or administrative considerations. Although these criteria may reflect institutional hierarchy and academic authority, several studies have noted that such systems sometimes lack transparency, standardized evaluation procedures, and accountability mechanisms [18]. Consequently, supervisory assignments may not always align with students' research interests, methodological needs, or academic expectations.

By contrast, European higher education systems generally apply more formalized and quality-oriented supervisory selection processes. According to the European University Association (EUA), supervisors in many European universities are required to demonstrate research expertise, previous supervisory experience, publication records, and participation in professional supervisory training programs. Continuous evaluation systems, periodic student feedback, and institutional monitoring are also widely implemented to maintain supervisory quality and accountability [19].

The differences between these systems also appear in supervision practices throughout the research process. European universities typically institutionalize regular supervisory meetings, structured progress reports, and digital monitoring systems to ensure consistent communication and timely research completion [20]. In contrast, supervisory practices in

some Arab institutions often depend heavily on personal initiative and informal communication patterns, resulting in inconsistent supervision quality and varying levels of student support [21].

Another important dimension concerns multicultural supervision practices. In increasingly diverse academic environments, supervisors must demonstrate intercultural awareness, inclusive communication, and sensitivity toward students' social and educational backgrounds. Multicultural supervision emphasizes mutual respect, collaborative learning, and equitable academic relationships, which are particularly important in Islamic higher education institutions seeking to integrate global academic standards with local cultural and religious values [22].

Ethical and Multicultural Dimensions of Graduate Supervision

Ethics constitutes a fundamental aspect of graduate supervision because supervisors hold substantial academic authority and influence over students' educational trajectories. Ethical supervision involves fairness, transparency, respect for intellectual property, confidentiality, professional integrity, and responsible academic conduct [23]. Ethical problems such as favoritism, neglect, exploitation, or unequal treatment can significantly undermine research quality and students' academic well-being.

In Islamic educational philosophy, ethics is inseparable from educational practice. Supervisors are expected to embody values such as justice (*adl*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and responsibility (*mas'uliyah*). These values reinforce the moral foundation of supervision and support the development of ethical research cultures within Islamic higher education institutions [24].

Additionally, multicultural supervision has become increasingly relevant due to the internationalization of higher education and the growing diversity of postgraduate students. Multicultural supervisory practices require supervisors to recognize cultural differences in communication styles, academic expectations, learning behaviors, and research perspectives [25]. Effective multicultural supervision promotes inclusivity, reduces power imbalances, and supports equitable academic participation. Therefore, integrating ethical principles with multicultural competence is essential for establishing effective and globally responsive graduate supervision systems.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative analytical approach to examine the processes and criteria for selecting graduate supervisors in Islamic higher education, with a particular focus on identifying the gap between formal regulations and actual practices in Arab universities compared to European and international systems. This approach is appropriate as it allows for a systematic comparison of institutional frameworks, highlighting similarities, differences, strengths, and weaknesses in supervisory selection mechanisms across diverse academic contexts [26].

The research is primarily based on qualitative data derived from document analysis and secondary sources. Key materials include official university regulations, policy documents, academic guidelines on graduate supervision, and international standards such as those issued by the European University Association and the Council of Graduate Schools. In addition, relevant scholarly literature on academic quality assurance, supervision practices, and higher education governance was reviewed to provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for the analysis [27]. These sources were selected purposively to ensure relevance, credibility, and representation of both Arab and international perspectives.

The analytical process involved several stages. First, data were systematically categorized based on key variables, including supervisor qualifications, experience requirements, training

provisions, supervisory workload, evaluation mechanisms, and ethical considerations. Second, a comparative framework was developed to assess how these variables are defined and implemented across different systems. Third, the study identified patterns of convergence and divergence, particularly focusing on areas where formal criteria exist but are inconsistently applied in practice [28].

To enhance the rigor of the analysis, the study applied triangulation by cross-referencing multiple sources and ensuring consistency of findings across different datasets. The interpretation of data was guided by the theoretical lenses of academic quality assurance and institutional theory, which emphasize the relationship between formal structures and actual institutional behavior. Overall, this methodological approach enables a comprehensive and critical understanding of supervisory selection practices, providing a robust basis for identifying gaps and proposing contextually relevant improvements in Islamic higher education systems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Supervisor Selection Criteria in Islamic and International Higher Education

The findings reveal significant differences between supervisory selection systems in Arab Islamic universities and European or international higher education institutions. These differences are particularly visible in the areas of qualification standards, professional training, accountability mechanisms, and transparency in supervisory practices. While many Arab universities formally regulate supervisory selection, the implementation of these regulations often remains inconsistent. In contrast, European and international systems generally apply more structured and measurable quality assurance mechanisms [29].

In many Arab universities, supervisor selection is primarily based on academic rank, where professors and associate professors are given priority, while assistant professors may supervise under specific conditions, such as publication requirements or minimum teaching experience [30]. However, supervision criteria related to research productivity, mentoring competence, and supervisory performance evaluation are often applied unevenly across institutions. Supervisory approval committees formally exist in several universities, yet their effectiveness varies depending on institutional governance and administrative commitment.

Conversely, European and international universities apply more comprehensive and performance-based criteria. Supervisors are generally required to possess an active research profile, recent publications, documented supervisory experience, and certified professional training in graduate supervision. These institutions also emphasize compatibility between supervisors' expertise and students' research interests, alongside regular performance evaluation systems involving student feedback, institutional review, and workload monitoring [31]. Ethical considerations such as transparency, neutrality, and conflict-of-interest management are also more systematically enforced. The comparison between the two systems is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Supervisor Selection Criteria

Criteria	Arab Universities	European/International Universities
Academic Qualification	Professor/Associate Professor; Assistant Professor under certain conditions	PhD with an active research record and recent publications
Research Experience	Variable and inconsistently evaluated	Measurable research productivity and periodic evaluation
Supervisory Training	Generally non-mandatory	Mandatory professional training and certification

Supervisory Workload	Usually 4–5 theses	Balanced workload based on discipline and institutional policy
Performance Evaluation	Limited or irregular	Continuous evaluation through reports and surveys
Research Compatibility	General consideration	Detailed and documented matching process
Transparency and Ethics	Limited monitoring mechanisms	Strong transparency and conflict-management systems

The findings indicate that European and international systems tend to prioritize merit-based supervision and institutional accountability, whereas many Arab universities still rely heavily on administrative hierarchy and informal institutional practices [32]. This situation contributes to inconsistencies in supervision quality and student academic experiences.

The Gap Between Formal Regulations and Actual Practices

One of the most important findings of this study is the existence of a substantial gap between formal supervisory regulations and their practical implementation. Although universities often establish official standards regarding supervisor qualifications and responsibilities, these standards are not always consistently enforced in practice [33].

Several factors contribute to this gap. First, favoritism and administrative influence continue to affect supervisor selection processes in some institutions, reducing transparency and weakening merit-based practices. Second, the absence of mandatory supervisory training limits supervisors' pedagogical and mentoring competencies, particularly in multicultural academic environments [34]. Third, weak monitoring systems and irregular performance evaluations reduce institutional accountability and make it difficult to assess supervision quality objectively.

Another major issue concerns the limited role of student feedback in evaluating supervisory performance. In many institutions, students lack confidential and transparent mechanisms to report supervision-related problems or provide constructive evaluations. As a result, ineffective supervisory practices may continue without institutional intervention. In addition, the lack of publicly accessible evaluation systems weakens transparency and reduces opportunities for continuous improvement [35].

These institutional weaknesses have broader academic consequences, including lower research quality, delayed thesis completion, weak publication productivity, and reduced student satisfaction [36]. The findings therefore confirm that the effectiveness of graduate supervision depends not only on formal regulations but also on institutional culture, governance structures, and accountability mechanisms.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that graduate supervision in Islamic higher education should be understood not only as an academic responsibility but also as an ethical and institutional practice. Within Islamic educational philosophy, supervision reflects values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *‘adl* (justice), professionalism, and responsibility. Therefore, ineffective or non-transparent supervisory selection processes may undermine both academic quality and ethical integrity within higher education institutions [37].

From the perspective of educational theory and quality assurance, the study confirms that institutional effectiveness is closely connected to consistent implementation of policies rather than the existence of regulations alone. European universities generally demonstrate stronger alignment between formal standards and institutional practices because they integrate

professional training, regular evaluation, and transparent governance into supervisory systems [38]. In contrast, many Arab institutions continue to face challenges related to inconsistent implementation, weak oversight, and administrative influence.

The study also highlights the importance of multicultural competence in graduate supervision. Contemporary higher education environments are increasingly diverse, requiring supervisors to possess effective communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive mentoring approaches. However, these dimensions remain insufficiently emphasized in many supervisory selection systems [39]. Consequently, integrating multicultural awareness into supervisor training and evaluation frameworks becomes increasingly important for improving supervision quality in Islamic higher education institutions.

Proposed Mechanisms for Improving Supervision Quality

Based on the findings, several mechanisms are proposed to strengthen graduate supervision systems in Islamic higher education institutions.

First, universities should establish independent supervisory evaluation committees responsible for assessing supervisors based on transparent and measurable criteria, including research productivity, supervision quality, ethical conduct, and mentoring effectiveness. Second, mandatory professional training programs should be implemented to improve supervisors' pedagogical, ethical, and multicultural competencies [40].

Third, digital monitoring systems should be adopted to document supervisory meetings, monitor research progress, and facilitate periodic evaluation. Such systems can enhance transparency, accountability, and institutional oversight. Fourth, universities should implement balanced supervisory workload policies to ensure that supervisors can provide effective guidance and maintain research quality [41].

Fifth, institutions should strengthen student participation by developing confidential and transparent feedback mechanisms that allow students to evaluate supervisory experiences fairly. Finally, national and regional higher education authorities should collaborate to develop unified standards and quality assurance frameworks for graduate supervision in Islamic higher education systems [42]. Overall, these recommendations support the transition from traditional and informal supervisory practices toward more transparent, ethical, accountable, and quality-oriented supervision systems. Such reforms are essential for improving research quality, strengthening institutional credibility, and enhancing the global competitiveness of Islamic higher education institutions.

Table 2. Comparative Supervisor Selection Standards and Institutional Challenges in Islamic Higher Education Systems

Aspect	Main Findings	Institutional Implications
Qualification Standards	Arab universities emphasize academic rank, while international institutions prioritize research productivity and supervisory competence.	Merit-based selection improves supervision quality and academic outcomes.
Training and Evaluation	Supervisory training is often optional in Arab institutions but mandatory internationally.	Continuous evaluation strengthens accountability and professional development.
Transparency and Ethics	Monitoring mechanisms remain limited in several Islamic higher education institutions.	Transparent systems reduce favoritism and improve institutional trust.
Student Participation	Student feedback mechanisms are frequently underdeveloped or absent.	Inclusive evaluation supports supervision improvement and student satisfaction.
Multicultural Competence	Cross-cultural mentoring skills receive limited attention in many systems.	Multicultural awareness enhances communication and inclusive supervision practices.

Table 2 summarizes the major differences and institutional challenges related to graduate supervisor selection and supervision quality in Islamic higher education. The findings demonstrate that Arab universities continue to rely primarily on academic hierarchy and administrative authority when appointing supervisors, whereas European and international universities adopt more measurable and merit-based criteria. The table also highlights the importance of professional training, regular performance evaluation, and transparent accountability systems in improving supervision quality.

Furthermore, weaknesses in monitoring mechanisms and limited student participation contribute to inconsistent supervisory practices and reduced institutional effectiveness. Another important issue reflected in the table is the insufficient integration of multicultural competence within supervisory frameworks, despite increasingly diverse academic environments. These findings indicate that effective graduate supervision requires not only formal regulations but also consistent institutional implementation supported by ethical governance, transparency, and professional development. Therefore, strengthening supervision systems through training, evaluation, balanced workloads, and inclusive feedback mechanisms becomes essential for enhancing research quality, student satisfaction, and the global competitiveness of Islamic higher education institutions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the discrepancy in supervision quality between theory and practice is not merely an administrative flaw but a clear indicator of an urgent need for comprehensive transformation in academic supervision culture within our universities. It goes beyond evaluation or procedural review to building a sustainable system that supports supervisors with knowledge resources, continuous training, and evaluation and transparency mechanisms that ensure the upholding of values of scientific integrity and professionalism. Establishing a supervision culture based on strict standards and continuous evaluation will enable Arab universities to overcome chronic gaps, creating a progressive research environment that fosters innovation and scientific excellence. Providing transparent and fair mechanisms for conflict resolution and performance assessment increases student confidence in the research system and reduces delayed or failed thesis completions. Moreover, leveraging international advanced experiences in supervision and focusing on adopting best practices tailored to local societal characteristics and academic culture in the Arab region is indispensable. Through these steps, the scientific supervision system can be rebuilt to produce a new generation of researchers capable of competing globally and actively contributing to the economic, social, and cultural development of their countries. The academic and research future of our universities largely depends on the quality of academic supervisors who contribute to researcher preparation; hence, selection, monitoring, and development must be at the highest professional and ethical levels.

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Author Contribution

Awad Mabrok solely contributed to the conceptualization, data analysis, literature review, interpretation, drafting, and final revision of this manuscript. The author independently developed the theoretical framework concerning educational theory, ethics, and multicultural practice in selecting graduate supervisors within Islamic

higher education. All stages of the research and writing process were completed responsibly by the author.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently without financial, institutional, or personal influence that could affect the objectivity, interpretation, or presentation of the findings. The author remains fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, and academic integrity of the entire manuscript submitted.

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