

# What drives thesis advisor selection in the post-pandemic context? Evidence from a quantitative study

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## ABSTRACT

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The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted thesis advising practices in an English Language Education program at a private university, limiting interaction and communication between students and advisors. However, limited research has examined how these disruptions have reshaped students' preferences in selecting thesis advisors in the post-pandemic context. Addressing this gap, this study aims to identify the key factors that drive students' choices of thesis advisors and provide insights for improving advising practices. Data from 75 students were collected via an online survey and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (correlation and ANOVA). The analysis focuses on five dimensions: subject matter expertise, access to academic resources, publication record and research productivity, teaching and supervisory experience, and communication quality. The findings indicate that subject matter expertise and access to relevant academic resources are the primary drivers of advisor selection. Publication record and research productivity also emerge as significant indicators of academic credibility, while supervisory experience in English Language Teaching (ELT) remains important. The findings suggest a shift toward prioritizing academic competence and research support, reflecting students' adaptation to more independent and resource-driven learning environments. These results highlight the need for universities to strengthen research capacity, improve access to academic resources, and develop more responsive hybrid advising strategies.



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## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally reshaped higher education practices, particularly in the domain of thesis supervision and academic advising. The rapid transition from face-to-face interaction to online and hybrid learning environments (Nasri et al., 2020; Sheen et al., 2020; Wijayati et al., 2022) disrupted established supervisory practices, often reducing the quality, frequency, and immediacy of communication between students and thesis advisors (Choi & Kim, 2024; dos Santos & Cechinel, 2019; Kuhfeld et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2021). These changes have highlighted the central role of advisor-student interaction in supporting research development, academic engagement, and successful thesis completion.

Existing studies on thesis advising emphasize that effective supervision is shaped by multiple factors, including clear communication, advisor expertise, and mutual understanding (Broussine & Watts, 2015; Franke & Arvidsson, 2011; James & Crawford, 2015; Roberts et al., 2018; Rowley, 2000). Clear communication helps students receive timely guidance and feedback, while advisor expertise supports students in handling research challenges. In addition, mutual understanding contributes to a more supportive and productive advising relationship. Research in online and distance learning contexts further indicates that limited interaction and reduced immediacy can negatively affect students' motivation, engagement, and academic progress (Barkhuizen, 2019; Brannan, 2015; Broussine et al., 2015; dos Santos & Cechinel, 2019). In the post-pandemic era, however, thesis advising has inevitably extended beyond traditional models, increasingly incorporating hybrid and flexible approaches that combine digital and face-to-face interaction (Hasan et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, academic supervision can be understood through frameworks such as self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1999; Code, 2012), which highlights the role of guidance (Kemmis et al., 2014; Musaeva, 2015; Salehi & Yaghtin, 2015; Zhou, 2013), feedback (Wu & Schunn, 2023), and academic support in shaping students' confidence and research performance (Humairoh, 2021). In this regard, advisor characteristics—such as subject matter expertise, research productivity, and accessibility—are critical in influencing students' academic experiences and outcomes (Rowley, 2000; Rowley & Slack, 2004).

Despite a growing body of research on online supervision during the pandemic, limited attention has been given to how these changes have reshaped students' preferences in selecting thesis advisors in the post-pandemic context. Most existing studies focus on advising effectiveness (Todd et al., 2006; Wisker, 2012) rather than on the decision-making processes that drive advisor selection. This represents a critical gap, particularly as hybrid learning environments may lead students to prioritize academic competence and research support over traditional relational factors.

This issue is particularly relevant within the context of private universities, where students are often required to make independent decisions regarding their academic pathways. The selection of a thesis advisor is a crucial process (Roberts et al., 2018; Roberts & Seaman, 2018) that can significantly influence students' research experience, academic performance, and overall satisfaction (Brannan, 2015; Clarke & Knights, 2015). Understanding the factors that drive this decision-making process is therefore essential for students on completing their academic journey in higher education. Therefore, to achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What factors that drive students' selection of thesis advisors in the post-pandemic context?
2. Which advisor characteristics are considered most important by students?
3. To what extent do students prioritize academic, research, and supervisory attributes when selecting advisors?

Accordingly, this study aims to identify the key factors that drive students' selection of thesis advisors in the post-pandemic era. By examining students' preferences, this study provides empirical insights into how advisor characteristics are evaluated and prioritized in contemporary academic contexts, particularly in relation to academic competence, research support, and supervisory experience.

## 2. Method

This study employed a quantitative design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Johnson & Christensen, 2019) to investigate the factors that drive students' selection of thesis advisors in the post-pandemic context. Data were collected using an online questionnaire designed to capture students' perceptions of key advisor attributes. The participants consisted of 75 undergraduate students enrolled in an English Language Education program at a private university. All participants had either completed or were currently undertaking their thesis, ensuring their familiarity with thesis advising processes.

In terms of gender distribution, female students constituted 74.7% (n = 56), while male students accounted for 25.3% (n = 19), indicating a female-dominated sample.

Data were collected through online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) (Biber & Brandenburg, 2020; Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). The instrument measured five key dimensions of advisor selection, they are; subject matter expertise, access to relevant literature, publication record and research productivity, teaching and supervisory experience, communication and feedback quality (Wu & Schunn, 2023). The questionnaire items were developed based on existing literature on academic supervision and adapted to reflect post-pandemic advising conditions.

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (means and percentages) were used to identify the relative importance and ranking of each factor. Inferential analyses, including Pearson correlation and one-way ANOVA, were conducted to examine relationships between variables and differences in students' preferences based on academic level (Okuhara et al., 2020; White et al., 2019). Therefore, this study ensured participant confidentiality and anonymity by delivering informed consent to all participants, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Kuhfeld et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2021).

**Table 1.** Key Dimensions of Factors Influencing Advisor Selection

Dimension	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Subject Matter Expertise	Demonstrates extensive knowledge and provides clear academic guidance	Has good knowledge and provides appropriate guidance	Shows moderate knowledge with limited guidance	Shows limited expertise and insufficient guidance	Lacks expertise and cannot provide academic support
Access to Relevant Literature	Provides consistent access to relevant academic resources	Often provides useful resources	Provides limited guidance on literature access	Rarely provides resources	Does not provide academic resources
Publication Record & Research Productivity	Has strong publication record and active research involvement	Has good publication record	Has moderate research output	Has limited research productivity	Has no significant research output
Teaching & Supervisory Experience	Has extensive experience in supervising theses	Has sufficient supervisory experience	Has moderate experience	Has limited experience	Has no supervisory experience
Communication & Feedback Quality	Provides clear, timely, and constructive feedback	Provides generally helpful feedback	Feedback is inconsistent	Communication is limited	Rarely communicates or provides feedback

### 3. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the factors that influence students' selection of thesis advisors in the post-COVID-19 context. It specifically highlights the quantitative interrelationships among the identified influencing factors and examines how these factors contribute to students' decision-making processes. The discussion also provides an interpretation of the statistical results to better understand the changing preferences and considerations of students in selecting thesis advisors following the educational disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 3.1. Descriptive statistics

This first finding related to the factors influencing students' selection of thesis advisors after the COVID-19 pandemic (RQ 1). Specifically, the analysis examines the relative importance of advisor characteristics and the extent to which students prioritize academic, research-related, and supervisory

attributes when selecting advisors. Table 2. presents the ranking of key factors influencing thesis advisor selection based on mean scores.

**Table 2.** The key factors of thesis advisors' selection

No	Factor	Mean	Rank
1	Subject matter expertise	4.72	1
2	Access to relevant literature	4.65	2
3	Publication records and research output	4.51	3
4	Teaching and supervisory experience	4.43	4
5	Quality of feedback and communication	4.35	5

The findings reveal that five key factors drive students' selection of thesis advisors in the post-pandemic context: subject matter expertise, access to relevant literature, publication record and research productivity, teaching and supervisory experience, and communication quality. These findings directly address the first research question concerning the factors influencing advisor selection.

Regarding to the second research question (RQ 2), the results indicate that subject matter expertise ( $M = 4.72$ ) is considered the most important advisor characteristic by students. This finding suggests that students strongly value advisors who possess deep knowledge in their research area (Roberts et al., 2018; Roberts & Seaman, 2018; Rowley & Slack, 2004). The result also reflects students' increasing expectation that advisors should be capable of providing not only administrative supervision but also substantial academic guidance throughout the thesis process.

Similarly, access to relevant literature ( $M = 4.65$ ) is highly prioritized, indicating that students expect advisors to facilitate access to academic resources and guide them in navigating scholarly materials effectively (Kuhfeld et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2021). This finding may reflect the growing dependence on digital databases and online academic resources in post-pandemic learning environments, where students increasingly rely on independent and technology-supported research practices. Additionally, publication records and research productivity ( $M = 4.51$ ) are perceived as important indicators of academic credibility. Students tend to view advisors with strong research outputs as more capable of supporting research development effectively (Humairoh, 2021; Kemmis et al., 2014; Musaeva, 2015; Salehi & Yaghtin, 2015; Song & Zhou, 2020; Sun et al., 2015). This finding suggests that students associate research-active advisors with updated academic knowledge, stronger scholarly networks, and greater familiarity with research trends.

Meanwhile, teaching and supervisory experience ( $M = 4.43$ ) also plays a significant role, reflecting students' preference for experienced mentors familiar with the thesis process. Experienced advisors are perceived as more capable of providing systematic guidance, anticipating research difficulties, and helping students complete their theses more efficiently (Grisoni & Broussine, 2015; James & Crawford, 2015; Pillay et al., 2019). Interestingly, although communication and feedback quality ( $M = 4.35$ ) remain important, they are ranked lower than research-related attributes. This finding suggests a shift in students' priorities toward academic competence and research support in post-pandemic learning environments. Unlike earlier studies emphasizing interpersonal relationships and emotional support in supervision, the present findings indicate that students increasingly value advisors' ability to support research productivity and academic achievement.

To further address the third research question, the identified factors were categorized into three broader domains, as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Categorization of Advisor Attributes

Category	Attributes
Academic attributes	Subject matter expertise
Research-related attributes	Access to relevant literature; publication record and research productivity
Supervisory attributes	Teaching and supervisory experience; communication and feedback quality

The identified factors can be broadly categorized into academic attributes, research-related attributes, and supervisory attributes. The categorization indicates that students place greater emphasis on academic and research-related attributes than on supervisory attributes. This suggests that students in hybrid learning environments (Nasri et al., 2020; Sheen et al., 2020; Wijayati et al., 2022) increasingly prioritize advisors' academic competence, research productivity, and ability to provide access to scholarly resources over purely interpersonal aspects of supervision.

This result is consistent with prior studies emphasizing the central role of academic competence in effective supervision (Hasan et al., 2024; Rowley, 2000; Rowley & Slack, 2004). However, the present study extends existing literature by demonstrating that, in the post-pandemic context, students place relatively greater emphasis on research-related support than on relational dimensions of advising. This finding reflects broader transformations in higher education, where students are increasingly expected to become independent researchers capable of navigating digital and resource-intensive learning environments.

### 3.2. Inferential Analysis

To further examine the relationships among the key dimensions of advisor selection and identify potential differences in students' preferences, inferential statistical analyses were conducted using Pearson correlation and one-way ANOVA. The correlation analysis aimed to determine the extent to which the variables were associated with one another, while the ANOVA analysis was used to examine whether students' preferences varied based on academic experience. The inferential findings complement the descriptive results by providing deeper insights into the interconnected nature of advisor selection criteria presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Subject Expertise	1.00				
2. Access to Literature	0.68**	1.00			
3. Publication Record	0.61**	0.65**	1.00		
4. Experience	0.55**	0.58**	0.63**	1.00	
5. Communication	0.49**	0.52**	0.47**	0.59**	1.00

Note.  $p < .01$ .

The results show significant positive correlations among all variables, particularly between subject expertise and access to literature ( $r = .68$ ) and publication record and experience ( $r = .63$ ). These findings suggest that students perceive advisor competence as a multidimensional construct in which academic expertise, research productivity, and supervisory experience are closely interconnected (Broussine & Watts, 2015; dos Santos & Cechinel, 2019; Roberts & Seaman, 2018).

The strong relationship between subject expertise and access to literature indicates that students tend to associate knowledgeable advisors with the ability to provide broader academic resources and research support (Broussine & Watts, 2015; dos Santos & Cechinel, 2019; Franke & Arvidsson, 2011; James & Crawford, 2015; Roberts et al., 2018; Rowley, 2000). Similarly, the correlation between publication record and experience suggests that research-active advisors are also perceived as more experienced and capable of guiding students effectively.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the view that advisor effectiveness is not determined by a single characteristic but by the integration of multiple competencies. In post-pandemic learning environments, where students increasingly engage in self-directed and digitally mediated learning, advisors are expected to function simultaneously as academic experts, research facilitators, and experienced mentors.

The ANOVA results (Table 5.) indicate significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) in how students prioritize subject expertise and access to literature. This suggests that students' preferences vary according to their academic experience and research needs.

Table 5. ANOVA Analysis

Variable	F-value	Sig.
Subject Expertise	4.12	0.021
Access to Literature	3.87	0.026
Publication Record	2.45	0.071
Experience	1.98	0.118

One possible explanation is that students with greater academic exposure tend to recognize the importance of advisors who can provide deeper disciplinary knowledge and stronger research support (Brighouse et al., 2018; Hasan et al., 2024; Rowley, 2000; Rowley & Slack, 2004). As student progress through the thesis-writing process, they may become more aware of the challenges associated with accessing credible literature, developing theoretical frameworks, and conducting academic research.

However, no statistically significant differences were found for publication record and supervisory experience. This may indicate that these attributes are perceived as generally important regardless of students' academic level. In other words, while students' emphasis on expertise and resource accessibility may vary, the value placed on experienced and research-active advisors remains relatively stable.

Overall, the inferential findings reinforce the descriptive results by demonstrating that students' advisor selection preferences are not isolated factors but interconnected dimensions shaped by academic and research-oriented considerations in post-pandemic learning environments. In summary, the inferential findings reinforce the descriptive results by demonstrating that students' advisor selection preferences are not isolated factors but interconnected dimensions shaped by academic and research-oriented considerations in the post-pandemic learning environment.

The findings of this study reveal a clear shift in students' preferences toward academic and research-oriented attributes when selecting thesis advisors in the post-pandemic context. This result supports previous studies emphasizing the importance of advisor expertise and academic guidance in successful supervision (Brighouse et al., 2018; dos Santos & Cechinel, 2019; Hasan et al., 2024; Rowley, 2000; Rowley & Slack, 2004). However, the present study extends this literature by demonstrating that access to research resources and publication productivity have become equally critical factors, reflecting changes in learning environments after the pandemic.

Unlike earlier studies that highlight the importance of communication and interpersonal relationships in supervision (Hagenauer et al., 2015; Stigler & Hiebert, 2004). This study shows that these factors are relatively less prioritized. This does not suggest that communication is unimportant, but rather that students in hybrid learning environments increasingly value instrumental academic support over relational aspects.

This shift can be explained through the lens of independent and resource-driven learning, where students rely more on digital databases, academic networks, and self-directed research. In such contexts, advisors are expected not only to guide but also to provide access to knowledge and research opportunities. This aligns with the concept of academic capital, where advisors' expertise and research productivity enhance students' academic success.

Furthermore, the strong correlations among variables indicate that students perceive advisor competence holistically. Advisors who are knowledgeable are also expected to be research-active and experienced, suggesting that students evaluate advisors based on an integrated model of academic credibility rather than isolated attributes.

The ANOVA results further suggest that students' preferences are not uniform, indicating that academic maturity influences decision-making. More advanced students are likely to place greater emphasis on research-related attributes, as they are more deeply engaged in thesis writing and academic inquiry.

In conclusion, this study contributes theoretically to the existing literature by proposing a reconceptualization of thesis advisor selection in the post-pandemic era, in which academic competence, research support, and resource accessibility emerge as the core dimensions shaping students' preferences. The findings indicate that students increasingly prioritize advisors who are not only knowledgeable in their field but also capable of facilitating research development and providing access to relevant academic resources within hybrid learning environments.

From a practical perspective, the study highlights the need for universities to strengthen faculty research productivity, improve access to academic databases and scholarly resources, and develop more adaptive hybrid advising systems. In addition, institutions should consider aligning advisor assignment processes more closely with students' academic interests and research needs to enhance the effectiveness and quality of thesis supervision in the evolving post-pandemic educational landscape.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study investigated the factors influencing students' selection of thesis advisors in the post-pandemic context within an English Language Education program at a private university. The findings reveal that subject matter expertise, access to relevant literature, publication record, and supervisory experience are the primary considerations in advisor selection, with academic competence and research support emerging as the most influential dimensions. The study demonstrates that students in post-pandemic learning environments increasingly prioritize advisors who can support independent and research-oriented learning. These findings reflect broader transformations in higher education, where hybrid learning systems and digital academic resources have reshaped students' expectations regarding effective thesis supervision. In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing literature on post-pandemic academic advising by highlighting the importance of academic credibility, research facilitation, and resource accessibility in shaping students' advisor preferences. Future research may expand this study by involving multiple institutions, larger participant groups, or mixed-method approaches to provide broader perspectives on thesis advising practices in higher education.

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- Author contribution** : RDW initiated the research ideas, instrument construction, data collection, analysis, and draft writing. NT revised the research ideas, literature review, data presentation and analysis, and the final draft.
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