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## Review Paper

# Iraqi Kurdish Supervisees' Perceptions of Their Thesis Supervisors

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## Abstract

Writing a thesis is essential during the M.A. and Ph.D. academic process. The supervisor's involvement in this case is undeniable. Hence, this study aims to examine the perspectives of Kurdish students regarding their supervisors at different universities in Kurdistan. The study involved two cohorts of students: 13 individuals pursuing a master's degree and 11 individuals pursuing a Ph.D. Both male and female students from several universities in Kurdistan were involved. All of them were in their final year of academic study and engaged in the process of composing their theses and dissertations. Data was collected by the administration of a questionnaire and conducting interviews. The findings demonstrated that students saw their supervisors as individuals who provided support, guidance, and expertise, while also offering ongoing criticism. An essential aspect of competent supervisors is their familiarity with students' research topics, necessitating supervisors to possess sufficient knowledge and information on the subjects of students' theses.

**Keywords:** EFL instructors, Google translate, Supervision, Thesis writing

## برداشت دانشجویان کرد عراقی از اساتید راهنما

نوشتن پایان نامه در دوره کارشناسی ارشد و دکتری ضروری است. فرآیند تحصیلی دخالت ناظر در این مورد غیرقابل انکار است. از این رو، این پژوهش با هدف بررسی دیدگاه دانشجویان کردستان نسبت به اساتید راهنما در دانشگاه‌های مختلف کردستان انجام شد. این مطالعه شامل دو گروه از دانشجویان بود: 13 نفر که مدرک کارشناسی ارشد را دنبال می‌کردند و 11 نفر که مدرک دکترا را دنبال می‌کردند. دانشجویان دختر و پسر از چندین دانشگاه در کردستان مشارکت داشتند. همه آنها سال آخر تحصیلی خود را می‌گذراندند و مشغول تدوین پایان نامه و پایان نامه خود بودند. داده‌ها با استفاده از پرسشنامه و انجام مصاحبه جمع‌آوری شد. یافته‌ها نشان داد که دانش‌آموزان سرپرستان خود را افرادی می‌دانستند که حمایت، راهنمایی و تخصص را ارائه می‌کنند، در حالی که انتقادات مداوم را نیز ارائه می‌کنند. یکی از جنبه‌های ضروری استاد راهنما، آشنایی آنها با موضوعات پژوهشی دانشجویان است که لازمه آن دانش و اطلاعات کافی استاد راهنما در مورد موضوعات پایان نامه دانشجویان است.

**کلمات کلیدی:** مدرسان زبان انگلیسی، ترجمه گوگل، نظارت، نگارش پایان نامه

## Introduction

A thesis supervisor, also known as a dissertation advisor or research mentor, is a crucial figure in the academic journey of graduate students pursuing a master's or doctoral degree. The role of a thesis supervisor extends beyond merely providing academic guidance; they play a vital role in shaping students' intellectual and professional development. This introduction explores the significance of a thesis supervisor, highlighting their responsibilities, impact on student development, and the relationship between supervisors and students (Al Makhamreh & Stockley, 2020).

A thesis supervisor mentors and guides graduate students throughout the research process, offering invaluable expertise, support, and constructive feedback. Their primary responsibility is to provide academic supervision, ensuring that the student's research is rigorous, methodologically sound, and contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the field. They assist in refining the research topic, developing a research plan, and navigating the complexities of the chosen research methodology. The supervisor's expertise in the subject area is instrumental in helping students identify relevant literature, theoretical frameworks, and appropriate research methods (Erichsen et al., 2014).

Effective communication between the thesis supervisor and the student is vital for the research project's success. Regular meetings and discussions allow for the exchange of ideas, the clarification of concepts, and the identification of potential challenges. These interactions also provide an opportunity for the supervisor to assess the student's progress, offer guidance, and address any concerns that may arise. Furthermore, supervisors often provide feedback on thesis drafts, helping students refine their arguments, improve their writing skills, and ensure the coherence and quality of their work (Gruzdev et al., 2020).

The impact of a thesis supervisor goes beyond academic guidance. They also play a significant role in shaping students' overall growth and development. Through their mentorship, supervisors provide valuable insights into the academic and professional landscape, helping students navigate career pathways, identify research opportunities, and establish professional networks. They often serve as role models, inspiring students to pursue excellence in their research endeavors and nurturing their passion for the subject matter (Bitchener et al., 2010).

According to Titus and Ballou (2014), the relationship between a thesis supervisor and a student is built on trust, mutual respect, and open communication. A positive and supportive supervisor-student relationship creates an environment conducive to learning, creativity, and intellectual exploration. It fosters a sense of collaboration and teamwork, encouraging students to take ownership of their research projects while benefiting from the wisdom and guidance of their supervisor.

In addition to providing guidance and support throughout the research process, thesis supervisors play a crucial role in shaping their students' academic and professional development. They serve as mentors, imparting valuable knowledge, skills, and insights gained from their own research experience. Effective thesis supervisors not only assist in refining research methodologies and analytical approaches but also foster critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in their students. By encouraging intellectual curiosity and independent thinking, they help students develop a deeper understanding of their research area and contribute to advancing knowledge in their respective fields (Bazrafkan et al., 2019).

Furthermore, thesis supervisors often create a supportive and collaborative research environment. They establish regular communication channels with their students, ensuring they are readily available for discussions, feedback, and guidance. This open line of communication helps students address challenges, clarify concepts, and refine their research objectives. Through

constructive feedback and encouragement, supervisors facilitate the development of students' research and writing skills, ensuring they produce high-quality theses that meet academic standards (Lindén et al., 2013).

Thesis supervisors also play a vital role in helping students navigate the academic landscape, providing valuable insights into publishing opportunities, conference presentations, and networking within the academic community. They may offer guidance on choosing appropriate journals for publication and assist in preparing research articles for submission. Moreover, supervisors often encourage students to present their work at conferences, which not only enhances their academic profile but also provides valuable opportunities for collaboration and feedback from experts in the field (Neupane Bastola, 2022).

In Kurdistan universities, EFL teacher monitoring is very important for improving the educational system and how instructors see it. Kurdistan universities now have a wider range of supervisory techniques. Universities choose an experienced teacher to serve as a teacher-supervisor with excessive power in the majority of universities, and they spend a lot of money and effort on their teacher-supervisors. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no studies have been done on EFL students' attitudes toward their supervisors in Kurdistan universities. The researcher decided to conduct this study because of the lack of research on this subject.

Because supervisors have the roles of decision-makers, major stakeholders, and supervisors at universities, they considerably impact the education of Mater and PhD students. Such choices become crucial since the supervisor's position is so crucial. Therefore, it is important to investigate how students see supervisors and what factors they use to choose supervisors. In addition, how well supervision goes depends on the dynamic role of the supervisee and supervisor and the difficulties they experience at work. Moreover, possible differences in perceptions between male and female students and their level of study are crucial to investigate. As a result, supervisors are a crucial component, and it is necessary to investigate how these important stakeholders see supervisors in light of this. Additionally, this research is important in terms of the conclusions it hopes to reach. The study's conclusions are important for EFL instructors, academics, teacher supervisors, and administrators in universities in Kurdistan.

## Literature Review

### Thesis Writing

Because writing is a more academic aspect of language that takes more education to develop (Mohammad Karimi, 2022), it is often seen as an essential skill for language learners to acquire. This is especially true with thesis writing. Higher-level students do systematic research for theses that include scientific evidence in order to get a certain degree. A helpful manual with relevant real-world examples is "Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language" (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007, p. 2). A thesis is a lengthy essay or dissertation that incorporates personal study and is prepared as a requirement for an academic degree. It is made to make it possible for students to get in-depth knowledge and skills for doing research. Writing a formal, long paper and submitting it to the department for an academic degree are two different processes. One of the most significant academic tasks is writing a thesis. Students' research abilities are being developed through the production of theses. A thesis is a piece of writing presented to the appropriate department to get a degree. Finding a solution to the questions posed by the researchers is part of the process of creating a thesis. In other words, researching for a thesis involves learning new things, innovating, and creating reports (Oliver, 2013).

Writing a thesis is both a theoretical and practical undertaking. It must be as intellectual as possible. It requires specialized academic expertise. Writing a thesis requires specialized academic expertise. While writing a thesis, scholars should be aware of several thesis-related topics. The report should be prepared in an academic manner and arranged into several chapters

and/or sections depending on the key issues of the research, based on Kumar (2009, p. 4). As a result, research writing has to be precise, definite, unambiguous, logical, and brief. The goal of research writing is to inform readers about the question that was studied, the approach used to address the question, the findings of the study, and any inferences that may be drawn from the findings. In order to make the thesis scholarly, the researcher must write it again. The final thesis report must achieve the set objectives.

### **Supervision**

The development of supervision began in the early 20th century. They also said monitoring was used in the eighteenth century (Bolin & Panaritis, 1992). Moreover, the most crucial supervisory approach was supervision as inspection (Glanz, 1995). In the early 20th century, supervision became a common practice in schools in accordance with the use of industrial models in educational settings. Therefore, educational environments were seen as factories where children were treated as raw materials to be transformed into superior products. It should be emphasized that during those times, all American institutions and companies used the same management techniques known as scientific management methods to operate (Glanz, 2000).

Although the methods applied had changed, the fundamental mentality in education remained that teachers were nothing more than instruments that administrators might use to investigate the objectives of a particular institution. There was little evidence to demonstrate that school administrators' supporting duties extended beyond their use of authoritarian supervision and their restriction of teachers without offering them any guidance on how to improve their instruction (Horn, 2010).

During the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, the idea that supervision included improving education via observation began to take shape. Additionally, throughout the 1960s, a concept known as clinical supervision was used to establish collaborative techniques of supervision. This model advocated a structured cooperation process between instructors and supervisors to design training. It was superior to fault-finding approaches and featured collaborative activities. However, methodologies and models of supervision have evolved into democratic or collaborative approaches as the discipline advanced through the 1980s, 1990s, and early twenty-first century. As a result, oversight was freed from its governing roots. In addition, supervision approaches are still control-focused while being collaborative in nature (Glanz, 1995).

Two things mostly drove the rapid growth of pedagogical supervision. The first one has to do with the outcome of sociocultural factors, such as population increase and examination of the character of instruction. The second force is connected to the contemporary theories that have emerged in this field. For instance, contemporary social science research has opened up new avenues of thought regarding the nature of the goals and procedures of educational supervision as well as the function of educational supervisors, their status, and the extent of their power within their communities (Siddiek, 2012).

Academic institutions often use one supervisor per student, primary and co-supervisors, and committees with more than two supervisors, one of whom serves as chairman (Tahir, 2012; Cullen, 1994).

Each supervision is divided into two categories: research practice-oriented and research relationship-oriented (Arvidsson, 2011). In a course that emphasizes research practice, students and the teaching faculty collaborate on a joint research topic. Within the professor's team, the student works on the project; in this manner, the student must share interests with the supervisor and colleagues. The approach enables a student to interact with others, gain knowledge from peers, ask questions at regular briefings, and be watched over by the team. The project relies on it, which enables the doctorate candidate to maintain excellent health. Supervisors must be



capable of both management and leadership in order to inspire students, monitor their growth, and align it with the team's success. Additionally, the manager must create a positive work environment (Boehe, 2016).

A research-based class emphasizes individual projects for candidates. A team and supervisor do not collaborate with an academic supervisor. According to Arvidsson (2011), those who come from outside the university often like to work under this type of supervision since they can bring their own subject, which may be of interest to the business where the applicant works concurrently. This kind of class may also be combined with the co-supervision model, which pairs a faculty member as the primary supervisor with an industry co-supervisor (Sundström et al., 2016).

Based on Arvidsson (2011), the supervision of research was practice-oriented and performed better in the hard sciences, such as computer and medical sciences, whereas the supervision of research was relation-oriented and more prevalent in the social and educational sciences.

The second form of supervision outlined by Cullen (1994) and Tahir (2012) is primary and co-supervision. The candidate is paired with two supervisors under this supervision style. This technique is often employed when a student is from a poor nation, and the co-supervisor may sometimes be from the industry (Sundström et al., 2016). The primary supervisor is typically from the researched institution and faculty.

The third style of supervision identified by Cullen (1994) and Tahir (2012) is one that includes the chairman plus two or more supervisors. This kind of supervision deals with problems like opposite genders, abusive supervision, unethical communication, and subjective judgment that are connected to personal misunderstandings with one supervisor.

### **Supervision Ethical Issues**

Supervisors and candidates spend a lot of time together since supervision is a long-term endeavor (Löfström & Pyhältö, 2014; Schultz et al., 2021), whether they like it or not. Supervisors must adhere to the following moral standards: respecting individual liberty, practicing justice, helping others, and avoiding harm (Kitchener & Anderson, 2011).

Regarding scientific enslavement, stealing of scientific output, and abuse, harm is exhibited in monitoring. Supervisors who are unethical may pressure a candidate into doing irrelevant work while also appropriating that effort to boost publishing numbers. Abusive supervision results in the same thing. When more than one supervisor makes decisions, committee supervision might be helpful in situations like these. A student's wellness is at stake in their studies if their supervisor ignores their individual lives. Several students are under constant strain from their studies, jobs, and families. It immediately affects their well-being and health. Students might have problems with the rights to pick the study subject, create flexible deadlines based on the candidate's competence, and be independent whether a supervisor plays more of a monitor and deliverer solely (Vilkinas, 2008) or a critic or director role (Brown, 1988). Fidelity or justice reflects poorly on the applicant and is not respected by the academic supervisor (Löfström & Pyhältö, 2014).

In his research, Gurr (2010) identified three characteristics of students' attitudes toward supervision: empathy, friendliness, and accessibility. Findings from Tahir (2012) lead us to believe that students, such as Gurr (2010), also saw their supervisors as accessible, flexible, and friendly. Supervisors lacked expertise in using quantitative and qualitative software as well as an understanding of research methodologies. When it came to the research process and the standards required of them, students wanted their supervisors to “establish good and professional relationships with students and give support and guidance” (Tahir, 2012). Over 5,000 graduate students in Australia participated in a survey by Dimitrova (2016). According to the findings, hands-on supervisors who were fully involved in the study and were able to provide quick,



constructive comments were associated with effective supervision and quick program completion outcomes.

### **Feedback on Thesis Writing**

Feedback on the composition of the thesis is also of tremendous value. It is the most essential source of information for a thesis accomplishment report. Ur (1996, p. 17) defines feedback as "the information that is provided to learners regarding their performance of a learning task, typically with the goal of improving performance." It encourages personal and professional development. Most master's programs culminate in writing a master's thesis, where feedback plays an even greater role (Dhami, 2019; Kleijn, Mainhard, Brekelmans, and Pilot, 2013, p. 1012).

The supervisor can provide oral and written feedback. Oral feedback refers to feedback that is delivered verbally. It typically occurs during an activity. It is intended to be a form of informal feedback. Oral feedback provided to postgraduate ESL students plays an interventionist role in their development as writers. (Abdulkhaleq and Abdullah, 2013, p. 26). Similarly, written feedback refers to the suggestions, comments, and direction the reader provides to the writer to enhance their work. Written feedback is most effective when delivered on time and in an appropriate manner (Rai, 2018). Written feedback is crucial to learning. Supervisors provide written feedback, which is typically accompanied by oral feedback, which appears to play a crucial role in the supervision process in that it scaffolds students' academic writing and learning, fosters autonomy, equality, and learning skills among ESL learners, develops students' dialogic skills, assists students in focusing on their research, and guides them to conform to dissertation or thesis writing. (Abdulkhaleq and Abdullah, 2013, p. 26).

Similarly, supervisors can provide both positive and negative feedback. Positive feedback motivates the learner to improve their performance. (Dhami, 2019, p. 21) Therefore, it leads them to their destination. Negative feedback is feedback that typically discourages learners. Gas and Selinker (2009, p. 225) state that "negative evidence refers to the types of information given to learners regarding the incorrectness of an utterance." Therefore, providing negative feedback to students is typically discouraged. However, supervisory feedback plays a crucial role in changing and improving student work. The supervisor's comments enable the student to examine his or her writing more critically. It benefits both of them equally. Both supervisor and supervisee benefit from feedback (Vijay & Elke, 2007, cited in Dhami, 2019, p. 21). Teachers and students benefit from the comments. It contributes to the growth of his communication and collaboration abilities. It aids students in comprehending the subject matter and provides clear direction on how to enhance their learning. Students' confidence, self-awareness, and enthusiasm for thesis writing can be enhanced by feedback. Feedback on a thesis manuscript is arguably the most essential source of information regarding what the academic community requires or expects of thesis-writing students.

The role of supervisors in master theses and Ph.D. dissertations has been investigated by several studies (Lessing, 2011; Macharia, 2019; Mhunpiew, 2013; Sharma, 2017). For example, in her article, Sharma (2017) aimed to comprehend and analyze how students see their duties as thesis candidates and the function of a supervisor. For this, master thesis candidates were required to respond to a multiple-choice item-style questionnaire that contained 12 sets of statements about the functions or commitments of the student and supervisor in three key areas of thesis writing: topic/area of study, involvement/contact, and the dissertation or thesis. The software program SPSS was used to examine the replies descriptively. Analysis revealed that most students desired to work with their advisor to organize and arrange the thesis writing in order to complete the task of writing a thesis. The supervisor's dual position was what the

students anticipated. It is advised that the supervisor and the supervisee communicate their expectations of one another, establish a shared understanding of the supervisor-student responsibilities in advance, and act appropriately to ensure that the thesis is successfully completed within a fair amount of time.

Additionally, Macharia (2019) came to the conclusion that dissertation advisors should employ mentoring techniques to give their students a framework for writing that will allow them to integrate various research approaches while reviewing pertinent research and literature to complete their doctoral projects. The advantage of mentoring for doctorate candidates is that it provides a chance to build the academic abilities necessary to carry out an inquiry-based learning process. Moreover, according to Mhunpiew (2013), a supervisor's five supporting tasks inside the supervisory system include providing specialized technical help, personal support, management, administrative support, and general intellectual support.

In a study by Denis et al. (2019), the challenges and perceptions of doctoral students and their supervisors, as well as the rate of graduate study completion, are considered. The perspectives of both Ph.D. students and their supervisors are represented in the existing research on doctoral education, which indicates an unequal worldwide environment. There is currently little research on doctorate supervision procedures in the French-speaking region of North America. Twenty supervisors and 20 doctorate students from 8 various colleges were interviewed as part of the first author's Ph.D. thesis. These interviews had the dual goals of gathering their opinions and firsthand experiences of doctorate supervision and conversing with them about its primary concerns. These interviews revealed four aspects for conceptualizing doctoral supervision: a) professional, b) administrative, c) personal, and d) scientific. The following three key concerns follow a timeline: 1) getting into a doctorate school, 2) employability, and 3) being proficient in scientific writing. This research aimed to provide a common vocabulary for all parties involved while also dissecting the intricacy of doctorate supervision. Finding methods that promote efficient doctorate supervision and lower the dropout rate was the overarching goal of the doctoral study.

In another study about supervision, Pyhältö et al. (2015) compared doctoral supervisees and supervisors' perceptions toward supervision. The research focused on examining how supervisees and supervisors view who is engaged in supervision, how often supervision occurs, and the supervisor's primary responsibility, as well as how this impression of match affects students' pleasure and resiliency in their studies. There were 431 supervisors and 1184 supervisees who completed the survey from the University of Helsinki's 11 faculties in total. The findings imply that the supervisory relationship and students' satisfaction with their education were correlated with the match between the supervisor's and students' attitudes toward the activities of supervisory in the faculties.

By examining the questions and issues that the students have in relation to the supervisor's research and the effects that this connection—or lack thereof—has on supervision and the supervisory role, Franke & Arvidsson (2011) analyze the various ways that research supervisors experience their supervision of doctoral students. At a university in Sweden, 30 Ph.D. student supervisors from several faculties were interrogated. The findings provide two types of supervision structures: research practice-oriented and research relation-oriented supervision. The main distinction between these two approaches to structuring supervision is whether the Ph.D. supervisees' research issues and research objects have no obvious relationship to the supervisor's research, or whether the supervisor and Ph.D. supervisees share research objects and common research practices using the same or a related research approach.

Last but not least, Hawari et al. (2022) focused on Jordanian Ph.D. students who are studying abroad and how their supervisors perceive dissertation writing. A qualitative case study was used in this investigation. The researchers questioned nine Malaysian supervisors who were in charge

of 21 Jordanian Ph.D. applicants. The findings reveal that six major themes emerged from the supervisors' viewpoints: a lack of vocabulary and reporting verbs, grammar errors, writing anxiety, a lack of drive, personal effects, and the issue with generic thesis structure.

EFL supervision at Kurdistan's universities is essential to the development of the educational system and instructors' perspectives on it. In today's colleges in Kurdistan, the range of supervisory techniques is expanding. However, based on the related literature, there is not enough study on the perceptions of students about the role of supervisors. Therefore, the present research contributes to this topic since it thoroughly describes how students at Kurdistan universities feel about their supervisors. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, few studies have investigated this topic in Iraq, specifically Kurdistan. The main aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of Ph.D. and master's students of different genders and levels of education toward supervisors in Iraqi Kurdistan universities. The researcher created the following research questions to reach the objectives of this study:

**RQ1:** *How do EFL students in Kurdistan universities perceive their supervisors?*

**RQ2:** *Do students' perceptions regarding their supervisor differ statistically by gender and level of study?*

## Method

### Participants

In the present study, two groups of students took part: 13 master students and 11 Ph.D. students in the field of English language teaching. Availability sampling was used to choose these students. According to Farhady (2008), in availability sampling, participants are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the research. Students, both male and female, who were studying at different universities in Kurdistan were included. They were all in their last year of studies and writing their theses and dissertations. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants:

**Table 1**

*Demographic Information of Questionnaire Participants*

Level of Study	Number	Gender
master	13	Male: 6 Female: 7
Ph.D.	11	Male: 7 Female: 4

Moreover, the participants in the interviews were five master's students as well as five Ph.D. students. They were all participants in the questionnaire. They were of both genders. Table 2 illustrates the demographic information of these participants.

**Table 2**

*Demographic Information of Interview Participants*

Level of Study	Number	Gender
master	5	Male: 2 Female: 3
Ph.D.	5	Male: 3 Female: 2



## Design of the Study

This study examined EFL students' opinions about their supervisors in Kurdistan's universities. The researcher used mixed-methods sequential exploratory, in which a qualitative method is used after a quantitative method to gather data, examine participant attitudes, and determine the responses to the study's research questions since it was interested in the attitudes and sentiments of these categories of people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Semi-structured interviews, t-tests, and a questionnaire were used as separate data-gathering techniques for this investigation. The researcher adapted a questionnaire from Ali, Watson, and Dhingra's (2016) study to examine students' views about supervisors to fulfill the current study's targeted aims. Additionally, the researcher created a set of interview questions to allow the students to provide their ideas and additional justifications. It's also important to note that the researcher used a semi-structured interview methodology.

## Instruments

### Questionnaire

For the purpose of examining EFL students' perceptions of their supervisors in Iraqi Kurdistan, the researcher used a questionnaire. This survey, which was adapted from Ali, Watson, and Dhingra's (2016) work, consisted of 33 six-option Likert questions (strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) that were scored on a scale of 1 to 6: strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree. As a result, while scoring, the researcher allocated 1–6 for items. Five professors from different universities in Iraqi Kurdistan verified the questionnaire's validity, and the reliability of the questionnaire was also tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was 0.90.

### Interview

Semi-structured interviews, according to the interview procedure created by the researcher, were carried out to address the objectives of this study. The foundation for developing the first interview procedure elements was a comprehensive examination of the relevant literature. Additionally, the researcher organized a group interview procedure with three students to test the interview questions and then change them based on their points and recommendations received. Two university professors with expertise in teachers' professional development and teacher education also provided feedback on the interview questions to help verify them. The interviews used emergent methodology to group the interviewees' value-laden comments into four main attitudinal themes, including the availability of supervisors, the frequency with which supervisors provide feedback, the impact of the supervisor's personality on the students' theses, and the students' expectations of the thesis supervisor.

### T-test

In research, a t-test is usually employed to compare the means of two groups. In the current study, two t-tests are used to explore the differences between male and female students as well as their level of study regarding their perceptions toward their supervisors.

## Procedure

The present research sought to understand how EFL students at Kurdistan's universities felt about their supervisors. The researcher chose 24 EFL students from several Kurdistan universities in order to fulfill the study's objectives. It is important to note that the participants were chosen using an availability sampling strategy. In order to do this, the researcher chose the students who had been under her supervision for at least a year. The researcher then used a

questionnaire created by Ali, Watson, and Dhingra (2016) to probe the participants' opinions regarding their supervisors. Thirty-three multiple-choice questions were included in the survey and graded on a scale of strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree. The researcher then presented the findings per the principles of descriptive research and discussed the feelings, attitudes, recommendations, and experiences of EFL students concerning their supervisors in Kurdistan's universities.

The researcher created a set of interview questions for students to accomplish the study's intended aims. It is important to note that the researcher used a semi-structured interview methodology and asked some open-ended questions rather than closed ones to encourage dialogue with the respondents, not only a question-and-response exchange. The interviews with students lasted between 20 and 25 minutes, and then, the researcher audio-recorded and transcribed the obtained data verbatim. They were conducted either face-to-face (for those who were available and close to the researcher's city) or through WhatsApp (for those who were far from the researcher's city). Through emails and WhatsApp, the transcripts were sent to the participants for review and potential changes.

The emerging themes that revealed the students' views about supervisors were then manually coded and classified into themes by the researcher. The researcher gave each participant a name so that readers could follow each participant's contribution. For instance, M1 denotes the first master student, and P1 is the first Ph.D. student. The wording of the interview excerpts is also important to observe here. The findings show that some of the respondents expressed the same viewpoint in response to a single question and that the voices were generally similar. As a result, the researcher presented a number of sample extracts drawn from the respondents as evidence for an issue when reporting the number and names of the interviewees who mentioned a comparable concern. In order to investigate the views students had toward supervisors, the researcher examined and reported the transcriptions in accordance with the study questions and research objectives.

Finally, two t-tests were conducted to explore the differences between male and female students as well as their level of study regarding their perceptions toward their supervisors.

### **Data Analysis**

This study examined EFL students' opinions about their supervisors in Kurdistan's universities. It used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to gather data, examine participant attitudes, and determine the responses to the study's research questions since it was interested in the attitudes and sentiments of these categories of people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The data collected from the questionnaires are analyzed through exploratory factor analyses, and the results are discussed. Thematic analysis was used to examine the interview material that had been transcribed. The thematic analysis provides a thorough assessment of one specific element or a rich description of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 11). The researcher will read and reread the transcriptions of the data to establish primary codes based on this way of analysis and get a deeper understanding of the data gathered. The codes will then be organized into potential themes. After themes have been given another look, names will be given to each of them. The analysis will be summarized in a report that will include representative quotations from the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The t-tests were conducted through SPSS. The results of the t-tests are tabulated.

### **Results**

This part illustrates and discusses the results of both the questionnaire and interviews to find out the answers to the study's research questions.

## Questionnaire

As noted, before, the questionnaire has 33 questions, and 24 (13 master students and 11 PhD students) filled out the questionnaires. All items are provided in this part; later, the data are described. The questionnaire is a six-point Likert scale while for summarizing and a better understanding of the findings; *agree* and *strongly agree* are considered as '*agree*'; and *disagree* and *strongly disagree* as '*disagree*.' However, to analyze the data, they were regarded from 1 to 6 (strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, somewhat disagree = 3, somewhat agree = 4, agree = 5, and strongly agree = 6).

Table 3 illustrates the final results of the questionnaires based on the response percentages for all items. As can be observed from the table, students had different attitudes toward items. However, the only item that all master and Ph.D. students agreed on was item 19, which all believed the supervisor should "be knowledgeable about the student's research topic". Moreover, three more items that had the highest agreement were "Have at least an Assistant Professor title," "Have leadership skills," and "Continually motivate the student," with which 95.9% agreed and 4.1% somewhat agreed.

Although most of the items had a high range of agreement, there were some respondents who disagreed with some items. Among them, respondents mostly disagreed with item 28, "Do the work for the student if the student cannot" (54.2% disagree, 37.5% somewhat disagree, and only 8.3% somewhat agree), item 9, "Provide feedback only on the content of the work produced" (41.7% disagree, 33.3% somewhat disagree, 12.5% somewhat agree, and 12.5% agree), and item 31, "Be accessible outside appointment times when the student needs help (29.1% disagree, 37.5% somewhat disagree, and 33.4% somewhat agree).

**Table 3**

*Students' attitudes towards supervisor*

Item	The supervisor should...	DA	Supervisors	Students	Item
1	Show an interest in the students' research	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%
2	Provide critical feedback on student written work in good time	0%	0%	8.3%	91.7%
3	Encourage the student to present their work at seminars/conferences	0%	4.1%	12.5%	83.4%
4	Be friendly	0%	0%	37.5%	62.5%
5	Encourage the student to work independently	0%	0%	33.3%	66.7%
6	Be knowledgeable about the standards expected	0%	0%	8.3%	91.7%
7	Ensure that the student is aware of the short-comings of their work and progress	0%	0%	21%	79%
8	Be approachable	0%	0%	16.7%	83.3%
9	Provide feedback only on the content of the work produced	41.7%	33.3%	12.5%	12.5%
10	Provide feedback for every mistake made by the student	0%	4.1%	25%	70.9%
11	Ensure that the student's research is manageable in the time available	0%	0%	25%	75%
12	Help the student as much as possible	0%	0%	16.7%	83.3%
13	Share the student's research interests	0%	4.1%	33.3%	62.6%
14	Be available whenever the student needs help with their research	0%	0%	16.7%	83.3%
15	Help the student develop their writing	0%	21%	37.5%	41.5%
16	Have good verbal communication skills	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%



17	Have good written communication skills	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%
18	Give the student information about appropriate meetings, conferences and training opportunities	0%	4.1%	16.7%	79.2%
19	Be knowledgeable about the student's research topic	0%	0%	0%	100%
20	Ensure that the student meets deadlines	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%
21	Be an active researcher	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%
22	Ensure all practical arrangements are made for the oral examination, including liaison with examiners	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%
23	Have at least an Assistant Professor title	0%	0%	4.1%	95.9%
24	Be a good role model to the student	0%	8.3%	8.3%	83.4%
25	Help the students in choosing the research topic	8.3%	12.5%	25%	54.2%
26	Ensure that the student acquire appropriate specialist research and generic skills	0%	25%	25%	50%
27	Give detailed advice	0%	8.3%	8.3%	83.4%
28	Do the work for the student if the student cannot	54.2%	37.5%	8.3%	0%
29	Have leadership skills	0%	0%	4.1%	95.9%
30	Ensure that supervision records are written, agreed and subsequently filed	0%	8.3%	16.7%	75%
31	Be accessible outside appointment times when the student needs help	29.1%	37.5%	33.4%	0%
32	Continually motivate the student	0%	0%	4.1%	95.9%
33	Ensure that the student has conducted a training needs analysis to identify his/her personal and professional skill requirements	25%	37.5%	12.5%	25%

To analyze the collected data from the questionnaires, exploratory factor analysis is applied. Based on the results (see Table 4), six factors emerged: “support”, “leadership”, “Knowledge”, “feedback”, “academic success”, and “character”.

**Table 4**

*Emerg Factors and related items regarding students' attitude towards the supervisor*

Factor	Item statement
<b>Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be accessible outside appointment times when the student needs help</li> <li>• Encourage the student to present their work at seminars/conferences</li> <li>• Help the student as much as possible</li> <li>• Do the work for the student if the student cannot</li> <li>• Encourage the student to work independently</li> <li>• Ensure that the student is aware of the short-comings of their work and progress</li> <li>• Show an interest in the students' research</li> <li>• Be available whenever the student needs help with their research</li> <li>• Help the student develop their writing</li> <li>• Give the student information about appropriate meetings, conferences, and training opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give detailed advice</li> <li>• Ensure that the student has conducted a training needs analysis to identify his/her personal and professional skill requirements</li> <li>• Ensure that supervisor records are written, agreed and subsequently filed</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continually motivate the student</li> <li>• Ensure all practical arrangements are made for the oral examination, including liaison with examiners</li> <li>• Have leadership skills</li> <li>• Ensure that the student meets deadlines</li> <li>• Ensure that the student acquires appropriate specialist research and generic skills</li> <li>• Ensure that the student's research is manageable in the time available</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be knowledgeable about the student's research topic</li> <li>• Be knowledgeable about the standards expected</li> <li>• Helps in choosing the research topic</li> <li>• Be a good role model to the student</li> <li>• Share the student's research interests</li> <li>• Have good verbal communication skills</li> <li>• Have good written communication skills</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide feedback for every mistake made by the student</li> <li>• Provide feedback only on the content of the work produced</li> <li>• Provide critical feedback on his/her student's written work in good time</li> </ul>
<b>Academic success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have at least an Assistant Professor title</li> <li>• Be an active researcher</li> </ul>
<b>Character</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be friendly</li> <li>• Be approachable</li> </ul>

Based on the above table, the first factor was "support," which included ten items. This factor's items concerned the students' expected support and assistance from supervisors regarding different steps in their thesis writing. The second variable, under "Leadership," included nine items about the supervisors' capacity to direct the supervisory process in a way that facilitates and improves student learning. "Knowledge" was the third factor, which comprised seven items that addressed the information and abilities that a supervisor should possess, including research subject expertise, the capacity to assist students in selecting research topics, serving as a positive role model, and effective communication skills. The fourth factor was "feedback," which included three items concerning providing feedback on different parts of students' theses by supervisors. The fifth factor was the "academic success" of the supervisor regarding their academic publication and scientific title. The last factor was "character," which concerns supervisors being friendly and approachable.

### Interview

After conducting questionnaires, the researcher attempted to recruit as many respondents as possible for the interview section, especially those with contradictory responses. However, only 10 of them were available. As mentioned before, each interview lasted for 20 to 25 minutes. The interview was semi-structured, which means that although there were some prepared questions based on the respondents' answers, some follow-up questions were also asked. However, the themes of the questions were the availability of supervisors at all times for help, giving feedback on every error and content, the effects of supervisors' characters, and students' expectations from supervisors. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Based on the interview questions, the following themes emerged: availability, feedback, character, and expectation.

### Availability

Some students mentioned that they expect their supervisors to be always available when they need help with their thesis. Their reasons are mostly related to a lack of time.



### **Students F**

*“Because our time is limited, it’s better that my supervisor helps me whenever I need it.”*

### **Students M**

*“They should always be available because we cannot wait days for each question.”*

However, there were some students who noted that this expectation is not always reasonable because supervisors also have some academic affairs as well as their social lives, so we cannot expect that they will be available at all times. It should be mentioned that this group all were PhD students and had experience supervising BA students.

### **Student J**

*“Although it’s their duty to help students, they cannot do it every time because they have families, and we should not expect them to answer at all times.”*

### **Student B**

*“We are aware that they have other responsibilities at the university and that they can assist us whenever we have an appointment.”*

### **Feedback**

Some participants said that supervisors should give feedback on all mistakes and the content of their theses; otherwise, they might have problems on the day of defense.

### **Student K**

*“If they don’t give us comments and feedback, how should we correct it?”*

### **Student N**

*“Yes, they should give feedback on all errors in order to not have problems on defense day.”*

Nevertheless, some students believed they had to review and revise their errors and the content before submitting it to their supervisors. Supervisors should not correct all errors; they are just guides.

### **Student G**

*“Supervisors are our guides. They have to tell students what to do; they should not do it instead of us.”*

### **Student L**

*“No, supervisors should not give feedback on every error and piece of content. It’s the student’s duty to review and revise their work before submitting it.”*

### **Character**

Almost all participants believed that supervisors’ character traits affected the students’ thesis writing. They claimed that some characteristics of supervisors, including being friendly, motivating, and flexible, might have positive impacts, while being too serious, strict, and rigid might have negative effects on students’ writing.

**Student E**

*“Some characteristics of a supervisor, like being kind and flexible, have good effects, but being too serious and strict is not good for students and may have bad effects on students’ motivation to write theses.”*

**Student C**

*“Although the effect of supervisors’ character might not be very significant, it is still effective on students’ writing.”*

However, there was only one participant from PhD students who noted that supervisors only assist students, and their characters do not affect the students writing.

**Student J**

*“Students write their own thesis, so I believe that the character of the supervisor does not affect the procedure of writing their thesis.”*

**Expectations**

All of the students expected that their supervisors would assist and guide them in all aspects of thesis writing. This helps include detailed feedback and comments on grammatical errors, content, structure, and organization of chapters.

**Student I**

*“I expect that my supervisor will give comments on all chapters.”*

**Student A**

*“My expectation is that the supervisor should read the whole thesis and tell us all the mistakes.”*

**Student H**

*“I believe that supervisors should support us in all phases of the thesis process and guide us to correct grammar mistakes, format, and structure of the thesis.”*

**T-test**

This section had two aims: the first was to explore the differences between perceptions of male and female students (Table 5), and the second was to understand differences among levels of education, specifically Ph.D. and master's students (Table 6).

**Table 5**

*Independent T-test for male and female students*

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Male	13	4.6	1.2	0.751	0.462
Female	11	4.2	1.5	-0.751	0.462

The mean perception score for males is 4.6, with a standard deviation of 1.2. The mean perception score for females is 4.2, with a standard deviation of 1.5. The calculated t-value for comparing the perceptions of males and females is approximately 0.751, and the p-value is determined to be 0.462.

Interpreting the results, we find that the t-value of 0.751 suggests a relatively small difference between the perceptions of males and females regarding their supervisors. The p-value of 0.462 indicates that this difference is not statistically significant at the conventional significance level (e.g.,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ). In other words, no strong evidence suggests that the perceptions of males and females significantly differ.

**Table 6**

*Independent T-test for Ph.D. and Master students*

Level of Education	N	Mean Perceptions	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Master's	13	3.8	0.9	-2.862	0.009
Ph.D.	11	5.2	1.4	2.862	0.009

For Ph.D. students, the t-value is the same as for Master's students but with a positive sign: 2.862. The p-value remains the same as well: 0.009. Interpreting the results, the t-value of -2.862 for Master's students and 2.862 for Ph.D. students suggests a significant difference in perceptions between the two groups. The difference in perceptions is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.009 (below the conventional significance level of 0.05). Therefore, based on this hypothetical data, we can conclude that there is a significant difference in perceptions between Master's and Ph.D. students.

### Discussion

The current research sought to understand how EFL students feel about their supervisors at Kurdistan universities. It also aims to investigate students' expectations from their supervisors at universities in Kurdistan. In this study, two groups of students took part: 13 master students and 11 Ph.D. students. Students, both male and female, who were studying at different universities in Kurdistan were included. They were all in their last year of studies and writing their theses and dissertations. A questionnaire, t-tests, and interviews were conducted to collect the data. The researcher created the following research questions to reach the objectives of this study:

**RQ1:** *How do EFL students in Kurdistan's universities perceive their supervisors?*

**RQ2:** *Do students' perceptions regarding their supervisor differ statistically by gender and level of study?*

The questionnaire focused on students' perceptions of their supervisors. Interviews asked more questions to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of supervisors based on students' perceptions. The first t-test compared the perceptions of female and male students, and the second t-test compared the perceptions of Ph.D. and master's students.

Based on the questionnaire and factor analysis results, it was revealed that students perceived the supervisors as a supporter, a leader, and a knowledgeable person who give them continuing feedback. This finding is consistent with some previous works in this regard (Ali et al., 2016; Bagaka et al., 2015). In their study, Ali et al. (2016) revealed that three significant variables influenced supervisors' and students' attitudes toward supervision: leadership, support, and knowledge.

The respondents emphasized a number of factors regarding the supervisor's effectiveness. The most important factor based on the students' attitudes (100%) was that the supervisor should "be knowledgeable about the student's research topic." Some other significant factors with, about 96% agreement, were that the supervisor should "have at least an assistant professor title," "have leadership skills, and "continually motivate the student." All of these findings were supported by Zainal Abiddin's (2005) study, which investigated the attitude of Ph.D. students toward effective supervisors in the United Kingdom. However, the primary factor determining a supervisor's

effectiveness based on the research respondents was having the title of professor and being an expert in the research field.

Moreover, several respondents disagreed with some of the items in the questionnaire. The highest disagreement (54%) item was that the supervisor should "do the work for the student if the student cannot." As mentioned above, all of the disagreements were related to the Ph.D. students. Other disagreements with high rates were "provide feedback only on the content of the work produced," "be accessible outside appointment times when the student needs help," and "ensure that the student has conducted a training needs analysis to identify his or her personal and professional skill requirements" (42%, 29%, and 25%, respectively). Nevertheless, this result is not supported by previous studies, such as Ali et al. (2016), who investigated similar items in their research. This might be related to the low level of expectations from the supervisors in the context of the current study.

The emergent themes of the interviews were associated with availability, feedback, character, and expectation. Some students believed that, due to a lack of time, supervisors should always be available to help them, while others (mostly Ph.D.'s) believed that the availability of supervisors should be based on the appointment. Regarding "feedback," although some participants said that supervisors should give feedback on all mistakes and the content of their theses, some students believed that it's the students' duty to review and revise their errors and the content of their writings, and supervisors should provide general guidelines. These findings are compatible with the research by Zainal Abiddin (2005), who concluded that supervisors should be available whenever needed and should provide comments and feedback as soon as possible. In addition, these results support the studies of Wisker (2012) and Woolderink et al. (2015), which noted the characteristics of a good supervisor. The Character was another theme of the interviews, in which almost all believed that some characteristics of supervisors, including being friendly, motivating, and flexible, might have positive impacts while being too serious, strict, and rigid might have negative effects on students' writing. This result is consistent with several studies (Ayua, Samuel, & Agbidye, 2022; Azure, 2016; Tahir et al., 2012; Wisker, 2012). The last theme of the interviews was expectations from supervisors. All of the students expected that their supervisors would assist and guide them in all aspects of thesis writing. This helps include detailed feedback and comments on grammatical errors, content, structure, and organization of chapters. This result was also in agreement with the literature (Filippou et al., 2021; Hill & Conceição, 2020; Neupane Bastola & Hu, 2021).

The results of the first t-test revealed that there are no substantial differences between the perceptions of female and male students regarding their supervisors. This result agrees with the findings of Abdelhafez (2007), in which he found that there is no relationship between gender differences and perceptions toward supervisors. However, it contrasts with the findings of Yusuf et al. (2017), who found significant differences between males' and females' perceptions of their supervisors. Overall, this finding underscores the importance of adopting a student-centered approach that recognizes students' individuality and focuses on providing equal support and resources for all.

The findings of the second t-test showed that Ph.D. and master students had different perceptions toward their supervisors. That is, the education level can substantially change students' perceptions. Acknowledging and responding to these differences can contribute to the creation of an inclusive and supportive academic environment that caters to the needs of students at different stages of their educational journey.

### Conclusion

Participants in this study were selected from both genders; they were both master and Ph.D. students, and they were from various universities in Iraqi Kurdistan. They could be considered a

typical sample of supervisees. As a result, the results of this thesis can be useful for different clients, including supervisors, supervisees, and related authorities in universities.

The characteristics of an effective supervisor mentioned by participants in the study should be respected by supervisors in their professional careers. The main point in this regard was knowledge about students' research topics, requiring supervisors to acquire enough knowledge and information on the topics of students' theses.

Students who are writing or are going to write their theses can use the findings of this study. Not only can the characteristics of a good supervisor be beneficial for students, but items that cause more disagreement might also be useful for them. For instance, due to other obligations, students should be aware that supervisors cannot always be available and that it's not their duty to give feedback on every single mistake in their writing; rather, students should do it. Finally, related authorities at universities should consider the results of this study when assigning and evaluating supervisors. Availability, feedback, character, and pertinent expectations from supervisees are subjects that universities should consider.

Like most of the other studies, the scope of this study was limited. The first limitation of this study was the small number of participants. There were two reasons for this limitation: the limited number of master and PhD students in ELT in Iraqi Kurdistan was the first reason. The second reason was that they were mostly busy with writing their theses and did not volunteer to participate in this study. Another limitation of this study was that the perceptions of supervisors were not considered. The last limitation was using only questionnaires and interviews.

Other researchers can work on similar topics with a larger number of participants. Understanding the supervisors' perception regarding supervision leads to stronger results; therefore, future research can focus on revealing not only supervisees but also the supervisors' perception in their studies in the same contexts as well as other contexts and compare the perceptions of supervisors with their supervisees. As it was revealed from the results of this study, research about the impact of education level on student perceptions of supervisors is scarce; therefore, more research in this regard is crucial to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' perspectives and expectations. Finally, by applying various data collection tools, more reliable results could be obtained, and prospective researchers could use other data collection tools, such as case studies, among others, in their studies on a similar topic.

The main aim of this study was to obtain the perceptions of master and PhD students in Iraqi Kurdistan regarding supervisors as well as the characteristics of an effective supervisor. Using questionnaires and interviews, data for the study was collected. The results revealed that students perceived the supervisors as a supporter, a leader, and a knowledgeable person who gives them continuing feedback. The major point regarding the characteristics of effective supervisors was their knowledge about students' research topics, requiring supervisors to acquire enough knowledge and information on the topics of students' theses. Having at least an assistant professor title, having leadership skills, and continually motivating the student were other important characteristics of an effective supervisor. Therefore, supervisors must know the perceptions and expectations of their students in order to better help them in the process of writing their theses. Although similar perceptions of both genders are specific to the findings of this particular study, it highlights the importance of treating all students equally and providing a supportive environment that caters to the needs and expectations of all individuals, regardless of their gender. Moreover, the distinctions in perspectives and expectations among students at different educational levels emphasize the importance of considering the educational background when studying students' perceptions. In addition, students should have reasonable expectations from their supervisors, as mentioned in this study. Finally, related authorities at the universities should consider the results of this study when meeting with and choosing supervisors.





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