

Enhancing Educational Quality: Reforming Mentorship Practices in Private Higher Education

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Abstract

This research investigates faculty mentorship as a pivotal factor influencing educational quality in private universities in Oman, highlighting the tension between academic rigor and financial imperatives. The study underscores the need to address how mentoring practices are increasingly shaped by profit-driven pressures, a topic largely overlooked in the Quality Education framework. Using in-depth interviews, observations, and secondary data analysis, the research examines the extent to which financial constraints and mentorship practices affect academic standards and student outcomes. The findings reveal that mentorship programs, originally intended to support faculty development, have been repurposed to align with revenue generation goals. This shift prioritizes financial objectives, such as student retention and satisfaction, over academic integrity. Informal mentoring further exacerbates the issue, reinforcing profit-focused policies and fostering practices like lenient grading and reduced rigor. These trends contribute to grade inflation, diminished academic standards, and devalued degrees, which undermine student success and institutional credibility. Additionally, the profit-oriented approach displaces academic priorities, leading to ethical conflicts, job dissatisfaction, and reduced faculty morale. The study calls for a critical reassessment of mentorship roles in private universities, advocating for transparent and accountable policies that balance financial sustainability with academic excellence. By preserving the integrity of higher education, such reforms can enhance faculty development, support student success, and uphold the fundamental values of academia.

Keywords:

Private Universities, Faculty Mentorship, Quality of Education, Financial Motives, UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), Institutional Control.

Introduction

The United Nations has designated this decade as a critical period for advancing quality education. Education is recognized as a fundamental right for all individuals, irrespective of their social backgrounds or demographic characteristics, including gender, race, and geographical location. It is imperative to provide equitable opportunities for everyone, particularly marginalized groups, without compromising educational quality. Faculty mentorship is expected to play a pivotal role in upholding and enhancing these educational standards. However, the rapid growth of universities, along with increasing student enrollment and faculty numbers, presents significant challenges for managing academic programs, especially in the profit-driven private university sector (Qureshi & Khawaja 2021). This surge in educational institutions has led to various issues, particularly with a diverse student population from urban areas, rural communities, and Bedouin backgrounds (Awashreh & Al Ghunaimi 2025). Unfortunately, many private universities seem to prioritize financial gains over their commitment to academic integrity and quality (Awashreh 2025 a) .

In Oman, approximately 50% of higher education students are enrolled in 27 private institutions (Awashreh 2024). Most, if not all, of these students receive government funding, especially those in undergraduate programs. This highlights the necessity of faculty mentorship, which directly impacts the quality of higher education and the skill outcomes of graduates. A concerning trend has emerged where these institutions shift their focus from genuine academic development to financial sustainability. The profit motive can erode academic standards, leading institutions

to compromise academic requirements in order to maintain enrollment and revenue. This often results in degrees that do not accurately reflect students' knowledge or competencies, diminishing the overall value of higher education (Al-Kharusi & Murthy 2017). Moreover, faculty mentorship, which is traditionally intended to support faculty development, is increasingly being repurposed to enforce profit-driven policies in some private universities. This shift raises critical questions about the implications for educational standards and student outcomes. Rather than enhancing educational quality, faculty mentorship—both formal and informal—has become a means to reinforce practices that serve institutional profit motives (Wang & Shibayama 2021).

Connecting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No. 4, which emphasizes Quality Education, with faculty mentorship in higher education is crucial for addressing gaps in existing literature (Buerkle et al. 2023). This analysis aims to explore the dual role of faculty mentorship in private universities in Oman, specifically investigating how financial imperatives and institutional strategies may compromise academic rigor and affect student success. The research will assess the impact of both formal and informal mentorship practices on educational quality, highlighting the broader implications of prioritizing revenue generation over authentic academic advancement. The central question of this article is: How do financial imperatives and institutional strategies in private universities in Oman influence the role of faculty mentorship in maintaining or compromising educational quality and student success? The structure of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature and theoretical frameworks related to mentorship in higher education. Section 3 outlines the methodology employed in this study. Section 4 presents the findings and results, while Section 5 offers a discussion and analysis of these results.

2. Mentorship in Higher Education

Mentorship in academic settings is essential for faculty growth, encompassing peer mentoring and faculty research mentoring. Peer mentoring offers structured support through one-on-one interactions with trained mentors, focusing on guidance and self-help resources (Muscat College 2024). Faculty research mentoring is vital for new researchers, providing collegial support and feedback (Zahra et al. 2023). Despite its importance, literature on formal mentorship programs in the subcontinent is limited, leading to inconsistent outcomes. An observational study at Aga Khan University Medical College (AKU-MC) highlighted the need for supportive mentors and institutional backing (Zahra et al. 2023). Participants suggested developing junior faculty mentors through capacity-building activities to enhance mentorship culture.

Traditional mentoring typically involves senior-junior faculty relationships, but newer models promote flexible, faculty-driven approaches that encourage multiple, goal-oriented mentoring relationships (Drexel University 2024). Mentoring is recognized as crucial for faculty development and institutional growth, relying on the mutual commitment of mentors and mentees, supported by institutional leadership (Awashreh 2025 b, University of Pennsylvania 2024). This dynamic enhances professional competencies and aids in faculty retention (University of California 2024). Effective mentoring improves performance, job satisfaction, and reduces turnover rates. To address the needs of underrepresented groups, mentoring programs, such as New York University's Faculty Mentoring Program, provide culturally relevant support (New York University 2024).

The evolution of academic mentorship dates back to early 20th-century faculty clubs, initially exclusive and male-dominated, which have since become more diverse (Brown-Nagin 2016; Hill et al. 2022). In the 1990s, formalized mentorship programs emerged to facilitate knowledge transfer from experienced faculty to newcomers, reflecting Plato's concept of collaborative learning (Hoffman 2014). As mentorship practices evolve, fostering inclusive environments is crucial for empowering diverse perspectives, enhancing faculty development, and improving student education quality. Supported faculty are more likely to innovate in teaching and research (Pandey & Sharma 2022). Kram's (1988) typology of mentorship functions distinguishes between career functions (skill development) and psychological functions (role modeling). Mentorship can be formal, with defined expectations, or informal, through natural relationships (Rehman et al. 2024). Both forms offer advantages, though informal mentoring may not always meet specific goals.

The benefits of effective mentoring are significant and well-established. Research shows that strong mentoring is a vital strategy for faculty development, enhancing critical competencies, fostering positive relationships, and promoting retention. Successful mentoring programs share key characteristics, including clear objectives, commitment from faculty and administration, continuous evaluation, and adequate resources (Bean et al. 2014; Bland et al. 2009; Gardiner et al. 2007; Lumpkin, 2011; Zeind et al. 2005). Mentorship helps mentees navigate academic complexities,

improves research capabilities, and fosters belonging, while also benefiting mentors by enhancing their own skills (Seery et al. 2021).

However, challenges such as time constraints, unclear expectations, and inadequate resources can create stress for both mentors and mentees. This is particularly true for adjunct faculty and online instructors who often work in isolation without sufficient support (Awashreh 2024). Additionally, gender and racial imbalances can slow the career advancement of women and minority faculty, further complicating mentorship dynamics (Llorens et al. 2021). Studies indicate that White male faculty tend to engage in career-focused mentoring, while women and underrepresented faculty often receive mentorship emphasizing psychological support (O'Neill 2002; Portillo 2007). Recognizing and addressing systemic barriers is crucial for effective mentorship. Institutions must foster inclusive practices that consider diverse faculty backgrounds and needs (Harris 2024). While women's representation in academia has improved, they remain underrepresented in senior roles, as do minority faculty, restricting access to professional networks and underscoring the importance of mentorship for career advancement (van Veelen & Derks, 2022).

Various mentorship models have been developed to address these challenges:

Dyadic Mentoring involves one-on-one relationships between senior and junior faculty (Wolfe Poel et al. 2006).

Group Mentoring has a single mentor working with multiple mentees, useful when mentor availability is limited (Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Kwan et al. 2015).

Peer Mentoring consists of colleagues at similar levels enhancing each other's skills (Driscoll et al. 2009; Van Emmerik, 2004).

Mentoring Consortia facilitate mentoring across institutions, promoting collaboration (Füger et al. 2008).

Each model has strengths and weaknesses that can impact different faculty groups (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero 2004; Van Emmerik, 2004). While formal mentoring programs have been widely studied, more research is needed on informal mentoring and its effects on diverse faculty groups. Existing studies have touched on mentor and mentee selection criteria but further exploration is warranted. This study aims to investigate how formal and informal mentorship influences faculty productivity and career growth across various gender and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

In summary, mentoring is critical for faculty development, institutional performance, and promoting equity and diversity. Effective programs should offer structured mentor training, address the needs of underrepresented groups, and establish clear selection criteria (Phillips-Jones 2003). Future research should focus on mentorship types and outcomes at different career stages to foster a more supportive and inclusive academic environment.

Despite recognizing the benefits of mentorship, research examining the relationship between financial imperatives, institutional strategies, and mentorship in Omani private universities is limited. Most studies generalize findings or focus on public institutions, highlighting the need for context-specific analysis. Few studies explicitly connect mentorship quality to educational outcomes and student success in Oman, and cultural factors influencing mentorship dynamics and faculty-student relationships also require further exploration. Additionally, the lack of comparative studies between public and private institutions in Oman restricts best practice insights, while longitudinal research is needed to evaluate how financial strategy changes affect mentorship and educational quality over time. Addressing these gaps could enhance faculty mentorship and improve educational outcomes in Oman's private universities.

Theoretical Framework

Several theories explain the connection between effective mentorship and quality education. Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that mentorship through observation and modeling enhances learning by providing role models and feedback that improve mentees' skills. Transformational Leadership Theory, proposed by Bass, indicates that transformational mentors can elevate mentee performance, leading to greater educational benefits (Awashreh & Hamid 2024). Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory sees mentorship as scaffolding that supports mentees' cognitive and professional development, enhancing teaching practices and educational quality (Amiruddin, Sunardi & Setialaksana, 2022; Taylor & Hamdy 2013). These theories inform the analysis presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Theoretical Framework for Mentorship in Education

Input	Process	Output
Mentorship Quality: Mentor experience, mentorship models, frequency of interaction.	Mentoring Activities: One-on-one meetings, workshops, collaborative projects, peer observations.	Teaching Effectiveness: Improved instructional methods, student engagement.
Faculty Characteristics: Teaching experience, educational background, willingness to engage in mentorship.	Professional Development: Training programs, research opportunities, pedagogical improvements.	Educational Outcomes: Enhanced student learning, higher academic performance, better course evaluations.
Sources: Author consulate (Gillis, 2024; Ali & Adel, 2020; Habbas Et al., 2024)		

However, in reality, mentorship in higher education institutions has shifted from a tool for enhancing the quality of education to one that perpetuates manipulative practices among faculty members. The following table (2) illustrates this model.

Table 2. Impact of Management Decisions on Mentorship and Educational Quality

Input		Output
Top management decisions and direction	-Collegueship concern based on Keeping personal relationship	Teaching Effectiveness: Going down
Faculty characteristics -willing to accept all directions	-protecting the financial interest by keeping all students	Educational Outcomes: weak
Sources: Author consulate (Zhang, Wang & Galinsky, 2023;		

Table (2) illustrates a concerning reality in higher education, where top management decisions and personal relationships can compromise mentorship's integrity. The emphasis on maintaining collegial ties and financial interests undermines the potential for genuine professional development, leading to decreased teaching effectiveness and weak educational outcomes. This shift calls for a critical reevaluation of mentorship practices to realign them with their original purpose of fostering quality education.

3. Methodology

This chapter adopts a qualitative research approach, involving approximately 12 participants. Key stakeholders—including faculty members, mentees, academic administrators, and program coordinators from private institutions—were interviewed, with strict confidentiality regarding their names and affiliations. The methodology outlines the process of data collection and analysis, focusing on gathering in-depth insights into participants' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of mentoring programs. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select a diverse group of participants from various institutions and locations. The interview guide was designed around key themes such as program objectives, relationship dynamics, and outcomes. Semi-structured interviews, lasting 45-60 minutes, were conducted either in person or virtually, with participants' consent obtained for voice recording. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, confidentiality was emphasized to encourage candid responses.

The interviews were conducted between May and August 2024, informed by the researcher's observations and consultations with colleagues at various private universities. In the context of Oman and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, where a culture of censorship may discourage open discussions, faculty members were cautious about speaking openly regarding the realities of private universities. Along with interviews, the data collection process included personal observations and secondary data analysis. Secondary data were gathered through a critical review of relevant literature, including peer-reviewed articles and institutional reports. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and patterns, with triangulation enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly followed throughout the study. This integrated approach provides rich qualitative insights into mentoring programs within higher education institutions in Oman.

4. Results

Results from semi-structured interviews with faculty at private universities reveal that profit motives and market pressures have led to the exploitation of faculty mentorship. As a result, this shift prioritizes revenue generation over educational quality, reflecting a broader issue where financial imperatives overshadow the core educational mission (interview with faculty 2024). Specifically, faculty reported that both formal and informal mentoring are employed to enforce compliance with profit-driven policies, often at the expense of educational standards and student outcomes. For instance, formal mentorship programs link faculty performance to financial targets, creating pressure to prioritize revenue generation over effective teaching, which can compromise academic integrity (interview with faculty 2024). In addition, informal mentoring further reinforces these practices.

Faculty seeking guidance from colleagues familiar with the institution's profit-focused culture may adopt policies that prioritize financial stability, fostering an environment where profit takes precedence over education. Thus, this dual approach—formal and informal mentorship—amplifies the pressure to meet financial objectives, leading to concerns about declining academic standards and their impact on educational quality and the student experience (interview with faculty and staff 2024). Moreover, mentorship in these institutions serves dual purposes: professional development and institutional control. While mentorship traditionally supports faculty integration and career advancement, in revenue-driven environments, it is often used to enforce compliance with profit-oriented policies (interview with faculty 2024). Consequently, formal mentorship programs, though designed for faculty development, frequently carry profit motives. Mentors may guide mentees toward goals focused on student retention and income generation, pressuring faculty to prioritize financial stability over academic rigor (interview with faculty 2024).

Similarly, this concern is echoed by faculty who observe that mentorship often includes performance metrics tied to financial outcomes. Specifically, these metrics prioritize retention and satisfaction over instructional quality or research contributions, leading to short-term student advancement at the expense of long-term educational development and academic standards (interview with faculty 2024). Furthermore, some private universities hold official meetings through the Academic Guidance Unit, ostensibly aimed at improving student outcomes and educational quality. However, faculty and administrative officials noted that the primary goal of these meetings is often to avoid scrutiny from students and funders, thereby maximizing financial revenues. This suggests that such initiatives prioritize financial goals over genuine educational commitments. Additionally, faculty report that academic guidance and peer review often feel like bureaucratic exercises for “self-protection,” rather than genuine efforts to enhance education. For example, some peer reviews may marginalize dissenting faculty, exposing them to administrative pressures like non-renewal of contracts (interview with faculty 2024). Similarly, informal mentorship reinforces profit-driven policies, encouraging lenient grading and overlooking shortcomings to maintain enrollment, compromising academic integrity (interview with faculty 2024).

As a consequence, mentorship focused on financial goals undermines standards, with faculty passing students to meet revenue targets, leading to grade inflation and reduced rigor. Although this is profitable in the short term, it harms student success and institutional credibility (interview with faculty 2024; Taylor & Moore 2022). Ultimately, these trends create ethical dilemmas, turning mentorship into transactional relationships aligned with financial objectives. Faculty often experience dissatisfaction and ethical conflicts, reducing morale and commitment to excellence (Green & Roberts 2021; interview with faculty, 2024). To address these issues, institutions must balance financial goals with educational integrity. Transparent mentorship practices, ethical guidelines, and regular assessments can ensure alignment with academic missions while supporting faculty and students. Indeed, accountability safeguards the values of higher education, fostering integrity and growth (interview with faculty, 2024). In short, profit-driven mentorship risks prioritizing revenue over merit, diminishing educational quality and faculty morale. Therefore, institutions must critically review these practices to preserve academic standards and ensure mentorship promotes genuine student success and professional development (interview with faculty 2024).

5. Discussion

The relationship between institutional goals and educational quality is complex. Analyzing this through Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Bass's Transformational Leadership Theory, and Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory reveals challenges in private higher education institutions (Friedman 2022). Bandura's theory suggests mentorship facilitates learning through observation and modeling, with mentors traditionally serving as role models. However, this study indicates mentorship in private universities increasingly prioritizes profit-driven policies over academic excellence, contradicting its original intent. According to Bass's Transformational Leadership Theory, effective mentors inspire professional growth and enhance educational outcomes. Yet, findings show that private universities often prioritize revenue over teaching effectiveness, leading to practices that maximize profit at the expense of instructional quality (Mu, Bayrak & Ufer 2022). Similarly, Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory views mentorship as a scaffold for cognitive development, enriching teaching practices (Mokoena & van Tonder 2024).

However, interviews reveal mentorship is increasingly manipulated to prioritize metrics like student retention and satisfaction, undermining its supportive role. This relentless focus on financial targets has severe implications. Pressures to meet retention rates result in grade inflation and lenient grading, diluting academic standards and compromising degree integrity. Faculty report job dissatisfaction and ethical conflicts, feeling pressured to uphold profit-driven policies that harm student learning. To address these issues, private universities must reform mentorship and assessment practices to align with educational objectives. Implementing checks and balances can restore mentorship's role in academic growth and uphold integrity. Currently, mentorship practices in private universities are misaligned, emphasizing income generation over teaching effectiveness. Findings highlight a troubling trend where mentorship serves profit-driven objectives at the expense of traditional educational values. Only through critical review and reform can private universities prioritize academic standards and student success, effectively improving educational quality.

The dual role of mentorship—supporting faculty development while enforcing institutional control—has serious implications for academic ethics. Ideally, mentorship should foster professional growth and academic integration. However, findings reveal that it often reinforces revenue-centered imperatives, corporatizing this academic relationship. Formal mentoring programs, intended to develop faculty through structured activities, are dominated by business interests, compromising academic integrity. Many institutions prioritize student retention and satisfaction metrics over educational quality, leading to lenient grading practices and grade inflation, further undermining educational standards (Lee & Hsu 2020; Smith & Johnson 2018; Brown & Harris 2021).

Informal mentorship also perpetuates profit motives. Junior faculty seeking guidance may find themselves subtly indoctrinated into revenue-oriented behaviors due to financial pressures, resulting in compromised academic rigor and integrity. Aligning mentorship with profit-making policies lowers academic standards, devalues degrees, and threatens the educational system's stability. Allowing students to pass courses without meeting necessary standards adversely impacts their future academic and professional success, with long-term consequences outweighing any short-term financial benefits. Additionally, prioritizing financial goals over educational objectives erodes faculty morale and leads to job dissatisfaction and ethical conflicts. Private universities must critically reassess their mentorship and financial management policies. Reforms that prioritize academic imperatives over financial goals are essential to maintaining educational integrity and quality, as emphasized by Williams & Lee (2020). Transparent and accountable practices are needed to ensure mentorship aligns with academic excellence and student success. Findings indicate a troubling trend of leveraging mentorship to advance financial interests at the cost of academic standards. To preserve the value of higher education, private universities must commit to authentic academic standards and prioritize student success, fostering trust among students, faculty, and the broader academic community.

To align mentorship practices in private higher education institutions with educational quality, several key recommendations are proposed. First, mentorship programs should prioritize academic development by focusing on teaching effectiveness and faculty growth instead of financial metrics. Comprehensive mentor training and structured activities can promote pedagogical excellence and a culture of academic integrity. Accountability measures are crucial, with mentor evaluations emphasizing their impact on educational quality and incorporating feedback from mentees and students. Clear mentorship objectives should reinforce institutional commitments to academic standards and student success. Institutions must balance financial sustainability with academic rigor by integrating educational goals into financial planning and regularly assessing mentorship practices. Promoting ethical standards and addressing potential conflicts can enhance faculty morale and integrity.

Encouraging informal mentorship with an educational focus can further support faculty development. Informal networks allow for sharing best practices free from profit-driven constraints, fostering a supportive peer environment. Recognizing faculty efforts to uphold academic integrity and student success will reinforce these values institution-wide. Shifting focus from retention rates to learning outcomes and rigorous grading policies will uphold academic standards and discourage leniency driven by financial pressures. Engaging stakeholders, including faculty and students, in developing mentorship and educational policies ensures diverse perspectives and stronger policy alignment.

Ongoing feedback channels will enable continuous assessment and improvement of mentorship practices. By implementing these recommendations, private universities can prioritize educational integrity and professional development, ensuring mentorship advances their core mission while balancing financial considerations with academic excellence.

6. Conclusion

The analysis reveals a concerning trend in private universities, where mentorship, traditionally aimed at professional development, has shifted toward supporting profit-driven agendas. This shift compromises the foundational mission of higher education, as financial motives overshadow educational values. Mentorship now serves a dual purpose: fostering faculty development and enforcing institutional profit priorities, raising serious concerns about academic quality and ethics. By prioritizing revenue over robust mentorship strategies, institutions risk eroding academic integrity, diminishing faculty credibility, and undermining student success.

The consequences are far-reaching. Profit-driven mentorship compromises academic standards, devaluing degrees and threatening the credibility of private universities. Grade inflation and declining student outcomes reflect a dilution of academic rigor, damaging institutional reputation. Faculty morale also suffers, as pressures to conform to financial goals lead to job dissatisfaction and ethical dilemmas, creating a toxic academic environment. To address this, mentorship programs must prioritize academic excellence over financial metrics. Institutions should redesign mentorship structures to balance financial sustainability with educational quality, focusing on academic rigor and student success rather than retention rates. Implementing organizational checks and clear evaluation mechanisms for mentorship's impact on faculty and students is essential.

However, this analysis has limitations. It focuses on private universities and relies on existing literature, which may not fully capture the complexities of informal mentorship dynamics or broader contextual influences. Future research should examine mentorship practices across diverse institutional types, including public and nonprofit universities, and explore their impact on different faculty demographics. Empirical studies are needed to assess the relationship between mentorship and student success, providing insights into the broader effects of profit-driven policies. Private universities must reshape mentorship programs to uphold educational values. Clear expectations centered on academic integrity should guide mentorship, supported by regular evaluations to ensure alignment with institutional goals. Transparency regarding how financial priorities influence mentorship and academic policies is critical, helping mitigate negative impacts on faculty and students. Continued research into mentorship's role in diverse academic contexts can generate evidence-based recommendations to enhance educational quality. By aligning financial imperatives with a commitment to academic excellence, private universities can strengthen their academic communities, maintain credibility, and ensure meaningful educational outcomes.

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