

ARTICLE

Enhancing Arab University Governance through Multi-Criteria Decision-Making

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Abstract

Arab higher education institutions increasingly prioritize surface-level achievements such as rankings, accreditation documentation, and publicized accomplishments, while often neglecting substantive improvements in teaching, learning, and academic integrity. This study examines how such “illusory achievements” are reinforced by weak governance structures and limited use of structured decision-making tools. It argues that many institutional decisions are driven by bureaucratic pressures and external ranking expectations rather than evidence-based evaluation of educational quality. As a result, curriculum design, assessment practices, and quality assurance systems frequently emphasize compliance and appearance over genuine educational outcomes. The study proposes Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) as a structured framework to improve transparency, accountability, and rigor in higher education decision-making. MCDM enables the integration of qualitative and quantitative criteria, supports trade-off analysis, and helps distinguish authentic indicators of educational quality from symbolic performance measures. By applying MCDM principles, universities can shift toward more systematic, participatory, and evidence-based governance practices. A qualitative research design was adopted, drawing on secondary literature, policy documents, and the author’s professional experience in higher education governance and quality assurance. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns related to symbolic achievement, decision-making weaknesses, and opportunities for structured reform. Findings indicate that hierarchical governance structures, limited stakeholder participation, and documentation-driven quality assurance systems contribute significantly to the persistence of superficial performance indicators. At the same time, evidence from global applications demonstrates that MCDM can enhance decision quality in areas such as curriculum design, faculty evaluation, and resource allocation. The study concludes that MCDM offers a viable pathway for transforming higher education governance in Arab contexts by promoting evidence-based decision-making and reducing reliance on symbolic indicators. Its adoption can strengthen institutional accountability, improve educational quality, and support sustainable academic development.

Keywords: Arab higher education, multi-criteria Decision-Making, governance, symbolic achievements, educational quality

1. INTRODUCTION

Arab higher education institutions increasingly focus on surface-level achievements, such as rankings, documentation, and minor publicized accomplishments, rather than substantive educational improvements. These “illusory victories” can obscure persistent challenges, including declining academic integrity, widespread cheating, low student engagement, weak language proficiency, and misalignment between instructional methods and learning outcomes [1]. A key underlying problem is the lack of robust, transparent, and evidence-based decision-making frameworks. Decisions are often guided by bureaucratic pressures, short-term motives, or external ranking expectations, rather than by considerations of educational quality. Consequently, curriculum design, assessment practices, faculty evaluation, pedagogical methods, and quality assurance processes may prioritize administrative convenience over long-term institutional goals [2].

Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) offers a structured approach to address these challenges. By integrating multiple qualitative and quantitative criteria, balancing competing priorities, and revealing trade-offs, MCDM can help institutions distinguish genuine educational quality from symbolic accomplishments [3]. Teaching administrators and faculty to apply MCDM techniques can shift institutional culture from reactive, appearance-driven decisions toward proactive, analytical, and participatory governance [4].

The research problem centers on the reliance of Arab universities on hierarchical and bureaucratic decision-making structures that often prioritize symbolic achievements over authentic educational quality. Currently, structured tools such as Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) are rarely used to guide transparent, evidence-based governance [5]. In response, this study aims to develop an MCDM-based framework to help universities identify genuine quality indicators, enhance decision-making processes, and strengthen governance and accountability. Specifically, the research addresses two questions: how can MCDM enhance the accuracy, transparency, and robustness of quality-related decision-making in universities, and which criteria most effectively distinguish genuine educational quality from superficial achievements in Arab higher education institutions? The objectives of the study are to identify and analyze key indicators of authentic educational quality, develop a tailored MCDM framework for evaluating and improving decision-making processes, and propose evidence-based recommendations for strengthening governance and quality assurance in universities. By linking the problem, purpose, research questions, and objectives, this study provides a systematic approach to improving decision-making and accountability in Arab higher education.

The article structured as follow, Section 2 reviews literature and develops a theoretical framework, highlighting superficial achievements, governance and decision-making challenges, and quality assurance limitations in Arab higher education. Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) is introduced as a structured tool to enhance transparency, evidence-based decisions, and participatory governance. Section 3 outlines a qualitative methodology using secondary data, professional experience, and observational evidence to analyze institutional practices. Section 4 presents findings, identifying symbolic achievements, weaknesses in decision-making structures, and the potential of MCDM to strengthen governance and quality. Section 5 discusses implications, linking results to theory, emphasizing participatory, evidence-driven reforms. Section 6 concludes by recommending MCDM adoption to shift universities from superficial indicators toward authentic, sustainable educational quality.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The quality of higher education in many Arab countries has increasingly come under scrutiny, particularly due to the growing gap between official institutional narratives and the actual educational experiences of students and instructors [6]. While universities frequently publicize rankings, accreditation certificates, and seemingly exceptional achievements, research shows that these symbolic indicators often mask weaknesses in academic integrity, student preparedness, faculty development, and institutional governance [7]. This literature review synthesizes research on superficial achievements in higher education, decision-making challenges, quality assurance limitations, and the role of Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) as a tool to strengthen institutional decisions, drawing on governance theory, institutional isomorphism, decision theory, and quality assurance studies to build the theoretical foundation [8].

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual structure guiding this study. It synthesizes the major strands of literature, governance challenges, superficial performance indicators, and quality assurance limitations, and links them to the proposed use of Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) as an analytical and reform tool. The figure provides a visual map of how these themes interact to shape the study's theoretical foundation and inform the analysis that follows.



Figure 1. Integrated Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Source: Author's own work

2.1. Superficial Achievements and “Illusory Quality” in Higher Education

A growing body of literature suggests that universities, particularly in developing regions, increasingly engage in symbolic performance to project an image of excellence. Such performance involves actions aimed at appearance rather than substantive improvement, including accumulating documentation, emphasizing formal compliance, and publicizing minor achievements [9]. Studies from Arab countries indicate that institutions often prioritize promotional campaigns, ranking visibility, and strategic communication over pedagogical reform or academic capacity-building. This phenomenon, known as “illusory achievements,” constructs success through media narratives rather than genuine enhancements in learning outcomes [10]. Quality assurance systems frequently become bureaucratic exercises focused on producing documents instead of evaluating learning. Researchers describe “document inflation,” in which institutions overproduce exam samples, teaching portfolios, student evaluations, lesson plans, and teacher reflections to satisfy accreditation requirements [11]. Although these documents aim to support continuous improvement, they

often detach from the actual educational process, with faculty spending more time on administrative compliance than on teaching, mentoring, or research. Moreover, regional studies highlight systemic academic integrity issues, including cheating, plagiarism, and grade inflation, driven by overcrowded classrooms, insufficient examination monitoring, weak student English proficiency, inconsistent assessment policies, and faculty pressure to maintain high pass rates. These issues directly contradict the public image of excellence promoted through rankings and accreditation [9].

2.2. Governance and Decision-Making in Arab Higher Education

Research consistently describes Arab higher education systems as hierarchical, bureaucratic, and centrally controlled, with decision-making concentrated in top administrative positions and limited faculty participation [13]. Decisions regarding curriculum, research priorities, faculty evaluation, and quality processes tend to be reactive and influenced by external pressures, such as accreditation standards and ranking metrics. DiMaggio and Powell's theory of institutional isomorphism explains why universities mimic "successful" institutions even when these practices poorly align with internal capacities [14]. Mimetic isomorphism drives institutions to copy prestigious universities' ranking strategies or documentation practices without establishing substantive educational foundations. Governance research also highlights that universities often lack structured processes for problem definition, criteria selection, and alternative evaluation [15]. Consequently, reforms are frequently fragmented or superficial, emphasizing the need for systematic approaches incorporating multiple perspectives and criteria, which is precisely where MCDM can provide significant advantages [16].

2.3. Quality Assurance: Strengths, Limitations, and Critiques

Many Arab universities adopt Western accreditation models to gain legitimacy, funding, or international partnerships. However, in highly bureaucratic or resource-limited environments, these frameworks often produce compliance-focused behavior rather than genuine quality improvements [17]. The gap between stated standards, such as learning outcomes, assessment validity, and student engagement, and actual classroom practices remains significant. Institutions continue to face absenteeism, overreliance on lectures, weak feedback mechanisms, and insufficient faculty digital literacy [18]. When documentation is prioritized over teaching practices, quality assurance loses its formative purpose. Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has been promoted to improve learning outcomes, yet its implementation often becomes mechanical [19]. Universities treat learning outcomes as checklists without ensuring alignment between teaching strategies and assessments, reinforcing the illusion of quality and the research problem identified in the introduction [18].

2.4. Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) in Higher Education

Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) comprises analytical methods that evaluate alternatives based on multiple, often conflicting criteria, integrating qualitative and quantitative inputs, making it particularly suited for the complexity of higher education [20]. Globally, MCDM has been applied to faculty selection, curriculum optimization, student performance evaluation, strategic prioritization, resource allocation, and quality assurance improvement [21]. However, its adoption in Arab higher education remains limited, with decisions largely guided by intuition, informal practices, or ranking metrics, which reinforces superficial achievements [22]. MCDM addresses this by managing complexity, balancing conflicting interests, enhancing transparency, and supporting robust decisions under changing conditions, promoting structured, evidence-based, and participatory governance [23].

2.5. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in four complementary theoretical perspectives: Decision Theory, Institutional Theory, Quality Assurance Theory, and Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) Theory, which collectively form the conceptual backbone of the analysis [24]. Decision theory examines how choices are made under uncertainty, how alternatives are evaluated, and how preferences shape outcomes, highlighting challenges in higher education such as poorly defined problems, inadequate data, bureaucratic constraints, and cognitive

biases. MCDM emerges from decision theory by providing structured tools to address these weaknesses [25]. Institutional theory explains how social, cultural, and political pressures drive Arab universities toward symbolic practices, fueled by the desire for legitimacy, imitation of prestigious institutions, and state expectations for rapid modernization, all of which sustain illusory achievements [26]. Quality assurance theory emphasizes continuous improvement, assessment validity, curriculum alignment, and evidence-based evaluation; however, these principles often become bureaucratized and reduced to documentation. Integrating MCDM restores analytical rigor to quality assurance by providing systematic criteria and transparent evaluation processes [27]. Together, these theories inform the conceptual model, in which institutional pressures generate superficial achievements, weak decision structures prevent the identification of authentic quality indicators, quality assurance becomes documentation-driven, and MCDM serves as a corrective mechanism that enhances decision robustness and realigns governance practices with the core educational mission [28].

The literature highlights three key insights: Arab universities increasingly rely on symbolic achievements that undermine genuine educational quality; decision-making processes are often unstructured, bureaucratic, or externally pressured; and MCDM offers a theoretically and methodologically appropriate tool to improve transparency, structure, and prioritization of authentic quality indicators. This review thus provides a strong theoretical foundation for analyzing how MCDM can transform decision-making in higher education and reduce reliance on illusory achievements.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine how Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) can enhance decision quality in Arab higher education institutions. The qualitative approach is appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research and the need to understand complex institutional behaviors, informal practices, and decision structures that cannot be captured through quantitative indicators alone [29].

3.1. Data Sources

The study relies primarily on secondary data, including peer-reviewed articles, research reports, policy documents, accreditation guidelines, and scholarly literature on higher education governance, quality assurance, and decision-making frameworks. These sources provide a theoretical and empirical foundation that supports the development of an MCDM-based conceptual framework for educational decision-making.

3.2. Researcher Experience as Data

A key component of this methodology is the integration of the author's professional experience. The author is an instructor and higher education consultant with extensive expertise in university governance, strategy development, learning and development, and instructional quality across various institutions. These experiences offer rich, practice-based insights into the challenges, contradictions, and decision practices that shape university behavior. Drawing on the author's background provides two advantages: Contextual understanding of informal institutional dynamics that are not captured in official documents., and Interpretive depth, supported by long-term engagement with academic environments, quality assurance processes, and decision-making roles.

3.3. Observational Evidence

The methodology also incorporates non-systematic observations made by the author during years of academic work. These observations include patterns of superficial achievements, documentation-driven quality assurance processes, classroom practices, student engagement issues, and the internal dynamics of accreditation. Such observations function as qualitative evidence, triangulated with secondary data to strengthen the validity of findings.

3.4. Analytical Approach

Data analysis follows a thematic qualitative approach, consisting of:

1. Document analysis of secondary sources to identify themes related to quality, decision-making, governance deficiencies, and MCDM applications.
2. Experience-based reflection, in which the author's professional insights are coded and categorized to highlight recurring institutional problems.
3. Synthesis of findings into a structured MCDM-informed framework, aligning real-world institutional challenges with decision-analysis principles such as problem structuring and multi-objective evaluation.

3.5. Rationale for Qualitative Design

A qualitative methodology is essential for: Capturing the depth of institutional behaviors that quantitative metrics fail to reveal. Understanding the symbolic practices and “illusory achievements” that shape decision-making. Developing an analytically informed, context-sensitive framework for applying MCDM in higher education.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of secondary data, peer-reviewed literature, and the author's professional observations revealed three major findings aligned with the research problem, objectives, and questions. These findings illuminate the widespread presence of symbolic achievements in Arab higher education, expose weaknesses in decision-making structures, and demonstrate the potential of Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) to enhance governance and institutional quality [30]. Together, they show how current practices undermine authentic educational outcomes and how structured, evidence-based approaches can support sustainable improvement. Figure 2 provides a visual summary of the study's key findings, highlighting the dominance of symbolic achievements, weaknesses in decision-making structures, and the potential of MCDM to enhance governance and educational quality.

Prevalence of Symbolic Achievements	Weaknesses in Decision-Making Structures	Potential of MCDM to Improve Governance and Quality
Institutional documents, accreditation records and media reports consistently show that universities prioritize ranking, certificates, and publicized accomplishments over meaningful pedagogical development. Common practices include excessive documentation, attendance sheets, exam samples, copying portfolios	In hierarchical, bureaucratic, and centralized nature of decision processes in many Arab universities, with limited faculty input, Decisions regarding curricula, research priorities, faculty evaluation, and quality assurance often respond to accreditation deadlines, ranking pressures, or ministerial directives rather than systematic institutional analysis	MCDM restructured techniques for evaluating alternatives based on clearly defined criteria, enabling institutions to balance competing priorities and enhance decision transparency. This approach is suited to the complex governance environment of higher education, where decisions must consider quality, resources, accreditation requirements and student needs

Figure 2. Summarize the Result of the Study

Source: Author's own work

4.1. Prevalence of Symbolic Achievements

The first finding confirms the dominance of symbolic achievements across Arab universities. Institutional documents, accreditation records, and media reports consistently show that universities prioritize rankings, certificates, and publicized accomplishments over meaningful pedagogical development [31]. Common practices include excessive documentation (attendance sheets, exam samples, teaching portfolios),

elaborate presentations, and the archiving of student work for compliance purposes. While framed as quality assurance, these actions often aim to impress external stakeholders rather than strengthen learning outcomes.

The literature labels such practices as “illusory achievements,” in which institutions project success without substantive academic improvement [32]. This pattern reflects institutional isomorphism; universities imitate prestigious counterparts to gain legitimacy regardless of internal capacity [33]. Professional observations support these findings. Faculty frequently spend more time preparing accreditation evidence than designing pedagogically rich courses, while students encounter a disconnect between documented standards and classroom reality. Academic misconduct, cheating, plagiarism, and grade inflation, was common, especially in large classes where assessments rewarded memorization rather than learning [34]. These findings address research question 1 by showing how symbolic indicators dominate institutional priorities and validates the objective of examining how external pressures shape decision-making and perceived quality. While these practices create an appearance of excellence, they undermine graduate competence and reduce institutional credibility.

4.2. Weaknesses in Decision-Making Structures

The second finding centers on governance and decision-making. Analysis reveals that decision processes in many Arab universities are hierarchical, bureaucratic, and centralized, with limited faculty input. Decisions regarding curricula, research priorities, faculty evaluation, and quality assurance often respond to accreditation deadlines, ranking pressures, or ministerial directives rather than systematic institutional analysis [35]. The literature identifies similar gaps, noting the absence of frameworks for problem structuring, criteria selection, and alternative evaluation. Many universities lack transparent processes for prioritizing initiatives or balancing academic quality, financial constraints, and student needs [41]. Consequently, reforms are fragmented, short-term, and focused on easily measurable outputs.

This aligns with broader research showing that centralized governance suppresses innovation, restricts faculty agency, and reduces institutional adaptability [42]. Professional observations corroborate these patterns. Policy decisions were often made informally by senior administrators with minimal consultation, leading to low implementation fidelity and limited impact on teaching or student performance. This environment contributes to the persistence of symbolic achievements, as faculty prioritize administrative compliance over academic improvement [37]. This finding addresses Research Question 2, demonstrating that unclear criteria, weak problem diagnosis, and hierarchical control hinder authentic quality development. Without structured, transparent, and participatory decision processes, universities will continue prioritizing form over substance [43].

4.3. Potential of MCDM to Improve Governance and Quality

The third finding highlights the strong potential of Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) to address the challenges identified above. MCDM offers structured techniques for evaluating alternatives based on clearly defined criteria, enabling institutions to balance competing priorities and enhance decision transparency [38]. This makes it well suited to the complex governance environment of higher education, where decisions must consider quality, resources, accreditation requirements, and student needs simultaneously.

Global evidence demonstrates successful MCDM applications in faculty selection, curriculum development, strategic planning, resource allocation, and quality assurance [39]. By establishing explicit criteria, assigning weights, and systematically evaluating options, MCDM enables universities to move beyond intuition, informal practices, and ranking-driven decisions [23]. Professional observations suggest that adopting MCDM would allow universities to prioritize initiatives based on measurable impact, align budgeting with strategic goals, and connect quality assurance activities to actual educational improvements. This directly supports all three research objectives by enhancing transparency, encouraging participatory governance, and shifting institutional culture toward authentic quality [44].

Practical examples from secondary data indicate that MCDM could:

- support faculty selection that balances teaching, research, and student feedback;
- optimize curriculum design by weighing learning outcomes, engagement, and content coverage;
- strengthen quality assurance by linking documentation requirements to demonstrated improvements.

4.4. Summary of Findings

Overall, the results reveal a consistent pattern: Arab universities operate within hierarchical systems that encourage symbolic achievements while lacking structured decision-making frameworks. Documentation, ranking-oriented communication, and accreditation-driven practices dominate institutional behavior, masking weaknesses in teaching, learning, and research. This aligns with findings by Awashreh [45], who notes the persistence of superficial quality indicators across the region. Decision-making deficiencies, limited faculty involvement, unclear problem definitions, and reactive governance, further reinforce these symbolic practices. MCDM emerges as a theoretically sound and practically applicable solution. By introducing systematic evaluation criteria and transparent processes, MCDM can strengthen governance, align institutional goals with educational priorities, and shift universities toward genuine, sustainable quality. In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that symbolic achievements, weak decision processes, and limited use of evidence-based tools are interconnected challenges in Arab higher education. Adopting MCDM can help institutions move from superficial performance toward authentic educational quality, strengthen accountability, and support long-term reforms [30]. These results directly address the research questions, meet the study objectives, and establish a foundation for practical recommendations on improving governance and quality assurance.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer important insights into governance, quality assurance, and decision-making in Arab higher education. Evidence from secondary data, literature, and professional observations shows that symbolic or superficial achievements dominate institutional practices. This reflects earlier work on illusory quality and institutional isomorphism, where universities prioritize documentation, marketing, and rankings over substantive educational improvement [32]. Practices such as exam samples, teaching portfolios, and attendance documentation illustrate ongoing “document inflation,” driven by legitimacy pressures and mimetic behavior rather than pedagogical needs. Observations confirm that administrative demands consume faculty time, contributing to weak instructional quality, low engagement, academic misconduct, and limited learning outcomes [34]. These patterns validate the first research objective by showing how institutional pressures shape decision-making and perceived quality.

The study also highlights hierarchical and bureaucratic decision-making structures that are reactive, accreditation-driven, and poorly participatory. These findings align with prior research documenting limited faculty agency, opaque procedures, and fragmented reforms in Arab universities [36]. Without structured problem diagnosis, clear evaluation criteria, or inclusive consultation, institutions continue to prioritize symbolic achievements. Faculty compliance centers on fulfilling administrative directives rather than contributing to pedagogical or research innovation [37]. This reinforces the second research objective by showing how governance weaknesses perpetuate illusory quality and hinder sustainable improvement.

Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) emerges as a strong corrective tool, offering structured techniques to evaluate alternatives across multiple criteria, integrate qualitative and quantitative evidence, and enhance transparency [38]. By formalizing criteria, aligning objectives with quality assurance processes, and supporting participatory input, MCDM reduces centralization-driven distortions and strengthens accountability. Global applications in faculty selection, curriculum optimization, and resource allocation demonstrate its practical value [39]. In the Arab context, observations suggest that applying MCDM could shift priorities from symbolic indicators toward evidence-based improvements in teaching, learning, and research. This aligns with decision theory and quality assurance theory, emphasizing systematic evaluation and continuous improvement [40]. The findings carry several theoretical and practical implications. Institutional pressures, hierarchical governance, and bureaucratic compliance explain the persistence of

symbolic achievements, confirming themes in institutional theory and governance literature [26]. Weak decision structures further demonstrate the role of decision theory in understanding poor institutional choices. MCDM offers a theoretically grounded and operational solution by strengthening transparency, structuring decision criteria, and aligning priorities with genuine educational quality [46]. These insights directly address the study's research questions and objectives by providing a practical pathway for improving governance and quality assurance.

Based on these findings, universities should reduce reliance on symbolic indicators by linking documentation to measurable learning and research outcomes. More participatory decision-making structures are needed to engage faculty, students, and stakeholders in curriculum development, assessment, and planning. Implementing MCDM frameworks would allow institutions to systematically evaluate alternatives and justify decisions. Training faculty and administrators in decision analysis is essential to embedding evidence-based practices. Together, these reforms can improve transparency, reduce superficial compliance, and enhance quality-focused governance. Figure 3 presents the proposed MCDM framework for evaluating and enhancing Arab university governance.

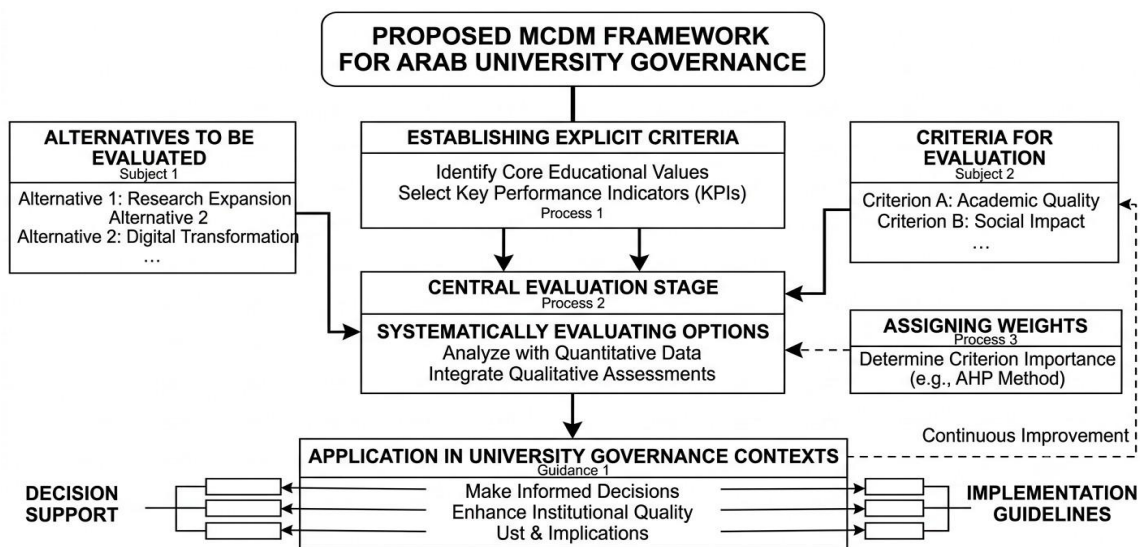


Figure 3. Proposed MCDM Framework for Arab University Governance.

Source: Author's own work

In conclusion, Arab higher education institutions face interconnected challenges—symbolic achievements, weak decision-making, and limited use of evidence-based tools. These issues sustain illusory quality and restrict improvements in learning and research. MCDM provides a structured, transparent, and participatory approach capable of addressing these challenges and supporting sustainable, authentic institutional development.

6. CONCLUSION

Across many Arab higher education systems, universities have increasingly shifted their focus from meaningful teaching, rigorous learning, and authentic academic development to the pursuit of surface-level achievements. Symbolic accomplishments, such as inflated rankings, excessive documentation, and publicly displayed minor successes, create an illusion of institutional progress while masking persistent structural weaknesses, including declining academic integrity, low student engagement, weak language proficiency, and poor alignment between instructional methods and learning outcomes. These superficial indicators reflect deeper governance and decision-making deficiencies, as universities often operate without robust, transparent, or evidence-based frameworks to evaluate and prioritize criteria that genuinely represent educational quality. Decisions are frequently reactive, influenced by bureaucratic pressures and external expectations,

emphasizing appearances rather than substantive improvements in teaching, learning, or research. This systemic tendency limits institutional capacity for long-term development.

Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) emerges as a promising solution to these challenges. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, evaluating multiple competing objectives, and revealing trade-offs, MCDM enables universities to distinguish authentic educational quality from symbolic success and to enhance decision transparency, robustness, and accountability. It allows decision-makers to prioritize factors such as student learning outcomes, faculty development, engagement, and classroom practices over administrative convenience or superficial compliance. Equipping faculty, administrators, and quality assurance professionals with MCDM skills can foster a shift from reactive, hierarchical governance toward evidence-based, participatory, and analytically informed institutional practices.

Despite its potential, MCDM adoption faces challenges. It requires training, resources, and cultural shifts, which may be difficult in highly centralized or resource-constrained institutions. Applications may also vary across disciplines, governance models, and institutional contexts, limiting generalizability. Furthermore, empirical validation is necessary, as current insights rely primarily on qualitative analysis. Future research should test MCDM frameworks across diverse Arab universities, examining their impact on student outcomes, faculty engagement, and institutional performance. Comparative studies between institutions using MCDM and those following traditional decision-making processes could provide insights into practical benefits, challenges, and best practices.

In conclusion, MCDM offers a pathway for Arab higher education to move from illusory success toward authentic academic excellence. By promoting evidence-based, transparent, and participatory governance, it can strengthen student learning, faculty engagement, and sustainable institutional development, providing a foundation for long-term resilience and meaningful progress. As both a practical and theoretical tool, MCDM supports data-informed, strategic, and participatory governance, addressing complex institutional trade-offs while fostering accountability and alignment of priorities with educational quality. Future studies that empirically evaluate MCDM implementations will be critical for refining its methodology and providing actionable guidance to policymakers, university leaders, and educators committed to achieving sustainable, high-quality educational outcomes.

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