

Supervising Teaching Practice: Role Perceptions And Challenges

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Abstract

The goal of this study was to examine how faculty members of a preservice teacher education programme perceived their role as a supervisor in teaching practice and the challenges they encountered in this process. All the supervisors believed their primary role was to facilitate theory-practice connections in their interns' teaching. To develop a deeper understanding of their learners and becoming a better human being in the process along with developing their pedagogical skills was the larger purpose of a supervision. Their role went beyond just providing academic support, they had to be their interns' emotional support system. Helping interns cope with the pressures of work, and socialising them into the community of practitioners was an important role that they had to fulfil even though it was not delineated in the official document of the programme. Among the several challenges faced during supervision, they considered providing individual attention to interns while dealing with a large group, intern diversity and assessment related issues as some of the important challenging of their task.

Introduction:

It is well established within educational research that teaching practice is central to professional development of student teachers. Most teacher education programmes (TEP) have an extended teaching practice component often referred to as the internship programme. It is usually conducted in the final year of a TEP wherein student-teachers or interns are placed in a school and are expected to perform the duties of a full-time teacher. During this period, interns are engaged in a variety of activities – lesson planning, preparing teaching learning materials, interacting with school teachers and college supervisors and most importantly, teaching their pupils. Internship involves intense engagement with school activities and is therefore believed to be the most crucial aspect of learning to teach. The multi-faceted responsibilities provide interns opportunities to experience classrooms, develop their pedagogical skills and socialize within the community of professionals (Hasher et. al., Chu, 2020). Interns' practice teaching is supported by supervisors who guide them during planning of lessons, provide feedback and function as role models for teaching (Clarke, Triggs and Nielson, 2014; Russel and Russel, 2011). Since theory and practice converge during teaching practice, it can be viewed as a space where teacher education and field experience interact, and where interns and supervisors enter a mutual space from two different contextual

viewpoints (Anspal, Leijen and Lofstrom, 2019; Ivanova and Skara-Mincane, 2016).

The quality of supervision is the cornerstone of teaching practice in a TEP (Mouhu, 2014). During their internship, interns are supervised by university supervisors and, in many institutions, by school teachers or cooperating teachers. The interns along with university supervisors and school teachers form the supervisory triad (Rogers and Keil, 2007; Wang and Ha, 2012; Allen et. al., 2014). Studies have established that supervisors have a crucial role in professional development of interns. Butler and Cuenca (2012) view supervision as a socially constructed practice where supervisors play multiple roles, that of an instructional coach, an emotional support system and an agent of socialization. Professional engagement and a supportive environment are perceived as a crucial aspect of professional development by both, supervisors and teachers (Ulvik and Smith, 2011). Research on novice teachers highlights the importance of developing interpersonal ties and providing emotional and professional support as the two most important dimensions in mentoring responsibilities (Schatz- Oppenheimer 2017). Such a support requires student teachers and supervisors to work together in a manner that enables interns to make necessary connections between theory and practice while also optimising interns' learning. However, supervisory role also involves evaluation of interns' performance and this makes their task more complex than it appears. Many studies have

highlighted the challenges and tensions that arise due to evaluative role of the supervisors (Mieusset, 2013; Zinguinan and Andre, 2017). These tensions are experienced by supervisors when they are called upon to switch from supportive to evaluative stance and provide judgement on interns' performance.

Supervision being a vital aspect of teacher learning during internship, the current study attempts to understand how supervisors perceive their role as supervisors and challenges they face in carrying out supervisory practice. In the context of the four-year Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed.) Programme of the University of Delhi, the supervisor is the faculty member who has the disciplinary expertise. They are required to go and observe the student teachers or interns and evaluate them on their teaching in school classrooms. Since they do not receive any formal training in supervision, they conduct it in the way they find effective and manageable in their context. This, however, is not without problems. They encounter several difficulties on day-to-day basis which they try and resolve according to their understanding of their role as a supervisor. This study, therefore, is based on the following research questions:

- 1) How do faculty members of college construe their role as a supervisor during internship?
- 2) What are the challenges encountered by supervisors in the process of supervision?

The results from this study can be implemented in preparing teachers for supervisory roles and ensuring high-quality supervision of teaching practice.

Supervisors and the supervision process

The Colleges of education supervisors are entrusted with the responsibility of professional development of interns and their general welfare. They act as a bridge between the University/ Education College and the schools which are assigned to interns for teaching. Supervisors work closely with both, the interns and the schools, to ensure that teaching practice is conducted smoothly and the objectives of field experience are achieved. Theoretically, supervisors provide support and guided assistance to interns during their internship. They are also referred to as 'boundary spanners' (Sandholtz & Finn, 1998), bridging the gap between theory and practical knowledge that emerges from field experience. They also have the responsibility of maintaining the programme standard along with assuming the role of a coach or a critical friend (Freese, 2005). Supervisors are tasked with the job of providing

feedback on various aspects of teaching practice so that interns can improve upon them. They use different types of supervision depending upon the situation and purpose. The different types of supervision styles are:

- **Critical friend:** the supervisor is a critical friend and a guide for the intern.
- **Mentoring:** the supervisor acts like a role model for the intern.
- **Monitoring:** the supervisor constantly checks on the progress, issues that may have arisen and providing solutions to problems.
- **Advisory:** the supervisor is an authority figure having more knowledge and skills than the interns.
- **Clinical supervision:** the interns and supervisor engage in face-to-face interaction around observation of the intern's performance, in the spirit of collegiality.
- **Hard accountability:** the supervisor assumes the traditional role of an inspector with strict control and focus on accountability from the intern.

(Martin & Evans, 2021)

The most common type of supervision in pre-service teacher education programmes is the clinical supervision where the supervisors follow the supervision protocols laid by the University to evaluate interns' performance of various aspects of teaching practice.

The socio-dynamic approach views supervision as a reflective process which occurs as result of interaction between the supervisor and an intern (Butler and Cuenca, 2012; Clarke, Triggs and Nielson, 2014). The socio-dynamic approach draws from the constructivist viewpoint where learning takes place through human interaction (Peavy, 2000). In the context of teaching practice, supervisor-intern interaction takes place within the social dimension. their relationship is dynamic in nature as they both learn from each other. This approach is similar to the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and the Communities of Practice (CoP) which assume that learning is essentially a socio-cultural activity, situated within the context in which it takes place. According to Vygotsky's basic mediated action triangle, learning is a process of constant interaction with the environment and others. This human interaction is not direct but mediated through tools/artefacts, signs and social others. Individuals engage as active participants in these interactions, initiate meaning-making processes as they modify and create activities that leads to transformation of artifacts and tools and people in their environment (Scribner, 1997). Another complimentary

approach is the Lave and Wenger's notion of Communities of Practice (1991) which views learning as a two-way process, located not in the mind but in relationship between the person and the world.

Supervision is also seen as a pedagogic process where goals of teaching practice are created in collaboration between the intern and the supervisor through discussion on aspects such as goal-orientation and value of process, responsibilities and division of labour, and boundaries and resources (Vehvilainen and Lofstrom, 2016). The goal for teaching practice is often not very clear to interns. Clearer goals and learning outcomes are necessary for a more holistic and coherent teaching practice experience for both supervisors and interns (Vehvilainen and Lofstrom, 2016). Awareness regarding expectations and values that each participant associates with the supervisory process is important since it is directly related to supervisors' beliefs and experiences about the role of supervisors (Byrd and Fogleman, 2012). Supervisory role also involves socialisation of interns into the school community (Clarks, Triggs and Nielsen, 2014). Supervisors not only guide interns' pedagogy, they are also a source of emotional support (Butler & Cuence, 2012).

Supervisor- intern relationship is characterised by collaboration, constructive atmosphere, active listening and sharing of experiences (Clarks, Triggs and Nielsen, 2014). Sensitivity, interpersonal skills, empathy, respect, encouragement are key elements of supervisor-intern relationship (Martikainen, 2014). An accepting atmosphere is facilitated by appreciating and accepting professional, cultural and individual diversity (Vehvilainen & Souto, 2021). These elements constitute the supportive orientation of supervision which emphasises relationship and emotional support for interns during teaching practice.

The inquiry-oriented supervision involves conscious investigation and reflection on experiences, thoughts and emotions through dialogue and constructive interaction (Peeavy, 2000). Listening, asking questions and interpreting experiences can trigger learning processes necessary for learning. In addition, providing constructive feedback and advice are also tools for dealing with challenging situations independently (Vehvilainen & Souto, 2021). Research proves that interns appreciate supervision that includes constructive and encouraging feedback and an interaction which is open and supports professional development (Pihko et. al., 2014).

The context: Internship and Supervision in the B.El.Ed. Programme

As mentioned earlier, the B.El.Ed Programme of Delhi University is a four year integrated professional degree programme of Elementary Teacher Education offered after class 12 or equivalent. Field-based experiences form a major component in the B.El.Ed. Programme. The student teachers are required to engage intensively with school for 17 weeks during internship in the fourth year. During this period, interns work as regular teachers in the school and participate in all the school activities. They develop theme-based unit plans, design activities, prepare materials and teaching aids and transact their planned activities in the classroom. They also maintain a daily reflective journal. Interns receive systematic supervisory support and feedback from the faculty supervisors during internship. Supervision in B.El.Ed. is provided at two levels:

- A) General supervision with regard to teaching-learning processes, classroom organisation and management and planning.
- B) Subject specific supervision in terms of language, mathematics and environmental studies at the primary level and required subjects at the middle school level.

(The B.El.Ed. Programme of Study, 2001. P. 244)

Interns discuss their teaching plans before transacting them in the class and engage in pre-lesson and post-lesson discussions with their supervisors. As an intern, they are expected to perform all the tasks expected of a regular teacher – maintain attendance, scholarship records, distribute books and uniforms, monitor distribution of mid-day meals, organise morning assembly, organise various co-curricular activities from time to time and so forth. School is a busy workplace and interns have to complete all the responsibilities assigned to them. Supervisors help interns translate their ideas into practice and facilitate their professional growth as a teacher. They observe interns' teaching, provide feedback, help in planning lessons and guide them on various aspects of teaching-learning throughout their internship period.

A B.El.Ed intern works with four supervisors - three subject supervisors (one each for language, Mathematics and Environmental Studies) and one regular supervisor. In the college where this study was conducted, interns' performance is evaluated by college supervisors only and school teachers are not involved in the assessment process. Supervisors write their feedback in interns'

'feedback diary' during their classroom observations. They have post-lesson discussions and feedback sessions with interns in college and during their school visits. There are periodic meetings with interns during internship to discuss their overall progress. The supervisors discuss interns' performance with each other, both formally as well as informally, especially cases where an intern's performance is below expected level. It is important to note that these discussions are usually around interns' performance and rarely on supervisor's own practices or their role in enhancing teacher learning. Both, interns and supervisors are believed to work in collaboration to facilitate interns' learning, however, the overall impact of supervision may be quite different from what is expected. There are inherent tensions and differences that arise as a result of multiplicity of orientations, beliefs, values and approaches towards the subjects, pedagogy and the idea of "good" teaching by both, the supervisors and interns. Also, it has been observed that each intern responds differently to supervision; some are more receptive, some show remarkable improvement while others do not incorporate suggestions, some show lack of enthusiasm or blame their school circumstances. Supervisors find themselves struggling to understand the reasons and remedies for such behaviours.

The review of literature reveals that colleges of education do not have a clearly outlined role definition of the faculty members as supervisors and therefore, their role is rather unstructured in the teaching practice context (Buchberger et al., 2000; Lunenberg & Hamilton, 2008). Very less is known about what they think about their role as a supervisor (Grobgeld et. al., 2022) and the challenges they are confronted with while performing this undefined task. Thus, this research sought to explore college supervisors' perceptions of their professional role as supervisors of interns' teaching practice and the problems in discharging their duties from their own perspective. This knowledge is necessary for teacher educators so as to enable them to know what is expected of them and their own development as professionals.

Method

This is a qualitative study using case study methodology. Case study is an interpretivist approach which allows the researcher to examine a phenomenon within a specific context. To understand supervisors' perspective, detailed interaction with participants was required; an interpretivist approach was likely to offer deeper insights and greater understanding. The study was

carried out in the Department of Elementary Education of a college of the University of Delhi. The participants were four faculty members- two regular and two subject supervisors- involved in the formal supervision of student teachers placed in government schools of Delhi. In this University, the faculty members do not receive any formal training in supervision. The participants had been performing supervisory function since at least 10 years and therefore, had relevant experience in the field. Participation in the study was voluntary and based on informed consent. Data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with participating supervisors. They were interviewed twice – before and at the end of internship. The first interview was more about general issues aimed at exploring their perception about supervisor's role and responsibilities during internship. The second interview focussed on their expectations from interns, how they handled tensions and disagreements and the challenges they encountered in enacting their role as a supervisor. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed and detailed notes were taken. Data was analysed using thematic analysis done through rigorous process of coding and recoding. As a researcher, I adhered as closely as possible to procedures that would ensure quality, rigour and trustworthiness of findings.

Results

The present study examined the ways in which faculty members of TEP perceived their role as a supervisor and the challenges they encountered in performing their supervisory roles. The results are structured around the research questions of the present study. The findings are illustrated with excerpts from the transcripts of supervisor's interviews.

1) Research Q 1: How do faculty members of college construe their role as a supervisor during internship?

The Programme mandates a minimum of two supervisions per week though it offers flexibility to colleges to prepare their own supervision model. The weekly time-table of each faculty member has one day designated especially as the school-visit day. Both regular and subject supervisors evaluate interns' teaching and planning on the basis of a pre-decided criteria. The handbook of the B.El.Ed Programme describes the role of supervisors during internship as:

- Act as mediator between the intern and the B.El.Ed vision curriculum.

- Help liaise between the intern and the cooperating (regular) teacher of the school.
- Facilitate the intern to reflect on her classroom practices, her struggles with unconventional practices, matters of classroom discipline, translating ideas/plans into effective practice and clarifying concepts to be taught.

(The B.El.Ed. Programme of Study, 2001, p.244)

The subject supervisors describe the internship phase of teaching practice as one of the most important unique aspects of this TEP:

Internship is the real test of what one has internalised in terms of theory and practicum. Unless you actually go to the classroom, face the students and transact your plan, you cannot know where you stand.

(Subject Supervisor 1, First interview)

She believed that although theories have an important place in the curriculum, it is during teaching practice that students learn to teach. Teaching in true sense happened when interns work like full-time members of the school. Her job, she said, was that of a facilitator, one who will help interns make this necessary transfer from theory to practice. She constantly drew their attention to various theories they had studied in their course work during their lesson planning and post-observation discussions. To what extent they could successfully make these connections, however, varied from intern to intern.

The second subject supervisor felt that although, the curriculum was designed in a manner to facilitate integration of theory and practice, but this usually did not happen automatically:

Unfortunately, it does not happen unless the supervisors engage with the student teachers, make them consciously link their teaching with theory... they have to be given a little push...

(Subject supervisor 2, First interview)

The regular supervisors also agreed that internship phase exposed interns to real classrooms and gave interns an opportunity to test themselves, enhance their abilities in terms of pedagogy and interaction with learners. For one supervisor, it was also about their development into a better person:

Internship is not just about making a good teacher. It is about reflecting on their pupils and their own behaviour. It will make them a better person in the process and a good teacher too.

(Regular supervisor 1, First interview)

They also believed that a lot more than just teaching happened during internship. These multifarious activities enabled them to understand the child in the larger context of her social, economic and cultural background. One supervisor described

her role as:

As a supervisor my job is to first make them understand who a child is, what they already know about the child and what more they need to know. (Regular supervisor 2, First interview)

During her discussions, this supervisor emphasized on identifying the child as the most important stakeholder and thus her job was to help interns understand the child holistically. She encouraged her interns to implement theories of 'child development', combine them with their observations in classroom to further develop their understanding of children. She conceptualised the primary role of a supervisor as one who helped interns to discover and define themselves as a person, find solutions to problems they face during classroom interactions and understand school as a system.

Both the regular supervisors felt that subject supervisors were in a better position to say if the interns were making linkages with studied theories or not. For them it was more important to see how they moved beyond just teaching of a specific subject and developed as a professional who were not only sensitive towards her learners but was also aware of their academic and emotional needs. All the supervisors held that the most important task of a supervisor was to prepare interns for teaching. The subject supervisors had a greater responsibility of doing this as learning pedagogy requires a very intense engagement with interns. To achieve this, a detailed discussion on various aspects of a lesson is required. As a supervisor for language teaching, one of them said she emphasised on use of good children's literature in class, prepare relevant teaching learning materials and integrate language teaching with other content-based subjects:

I have seen amazing success of an intern who used poetry charts in her class and changed it every week. Even during the break time, students would gather around the chart and recite the poem on their own. It helped them develop their reading-writing skills. I don't want them to prepare artificial materials just for the sake of it... only materials that really help children learn...

(Subject supervisor 1, first interview)

All four supervisors were of the opinion that college supervisors were the strongest influence on interns during teaching practice. They relied on their supervisors for guidance on various aspects including academic as well as emotional: *Internship is a very demanding phase of their learning. They go through so many emotions. In my discussions, I go beyond just planning a lesson or preparing materials. They discuss their family, their health, sometimes even their emotional state... every intern deals with the pressure of*

teaching in her own way. A supervisor's support goes a long way in helping them cope with these... (Subject supervisor 1, first interview)

Attending to interns' emotional needs and helping them deal with the pressure of work during internship, was a part and parcel of their duties as a supervisor. The supervisors were not only aware but also willing to extend the necessary support to their interns.

Along with their role as facilitators for learning to teach, helping interns make their practice grounded in theory and an emotional support system, supervisors mentioned other administrative duties mandated in the Handbook of B.El.Ed. They knew they had to be a mediator between the school and the college department. This was done primarily by the Regular Supervisors. They would meet the school principal before the commencement of internship to apprise him/her of the internship requirements and protocols, introduce the interns to teachers, help the school allocate classes and familiarise the school staff with the overall aim and expectations of the TEP. This, however, was more of an initial task:

Schools are usually supportive. Once they become familiar with our course and our expectations from them, they facilitate smooth functioning of internship. From our side, it only some effort in the beginning...

(Regular supervisor 2, first interview)

The interns are both, student and a teacher, and supervisors prepared them for this role. They held that working in an organisation involves following certain rules and regulations laid down by the system. No institution can function without rules, whether written or unwritten:

All schools begin at 7.30 a.m. in the morning...interns are expected to be there at 7.30 a.m. along with others. These rules are not only important but also necessary. They may seem strict but they prepare them for future.

(Subject supervisor 1, first interview)

Supervisors considered punctuality as the most important virtue in a professional. Hence, they expected each intern to be punctual in reaching school, preparing lessons/teaching learning materials and submitting other assignments. Doing work on time is a professional necessity and in the 'learning to teach' phase, it facilitates timely interventions and redressal of problems thereby making the whole process more effective and meaningful. Supervisors' job was to foster these professional qualities in her interns.

Although, supervisors visualised their role and duties with respect to interns and did not speak much about their own growth and learning in their

current role. On being asked about how they reflected on their work and what they did to grow professionally, all four of them expressed a willingness to develop their knowledge by learning, especially in the use of technology and online resources. They saw reflection and mutual discussion with colleagues as a means to evolve professionally.

Research Q2. What are the challenges encountered by supervisors in the process of supervision?

Maintaining the Programme standard and preparing 'good' teachers was the responsibility of a supervisor and this was a goal which they considered difficult to achieve. They held that the Programme demands in terms of tasks interns were required to do during the internship restricted their ability to reflect and grow. Also, these curricular requirements made subject supervisors expect too much from their interns in very less time. As a result, interns work under a 'lot of stress':

I think we need to relook critically at the tasks...Internship should be a learning process and there should be space for them to reflect and examine things happening around them... we have too many expectations from them. There's a lot of work for them...

(Subject Supervisor 2, second interview)

Interns are required to write their daily plans, maintain daily reflective journals, write lesson plans, work on a case study, do a small field-based project, set up a resource centre in their school and so forth. Getting interns to fulfil these requirements placed supervisors in a position where they are not left with any choice but to put more pressure on interns and sometimes, compromise with the quality.

Supervising large number of interns was perceived as another major challenge by supervisors. As discussed earlier, subject supervisors were concerned about quality of lesson plans which, in their view, was possible only through intense engagement and detailed discussions with interns. While some interns show better progress, others take more time to learn. Such interns need more support in terms of supervisor's time and attention. Supervisors felt that this was not possible as they were working with a large number of interns. In the present TE college, each subject supervisor works with about 20-25 interns. They believed it was not possible for any supervisor to devote the kind of time expected from a her in spite of her best intentions.

Handling intern diversity is another challenge faced by supervisors. Given that supervisors had to provide every intern with necessary support and guidance so that they could achieve their full potential, they also felt that a supervisor could extend her support only if the intern was willing to receive it. Usually, the intern who needed most help, avoided discussions with supervisors:

There are some interns who never come for discussions. We almost chase them, send them messages or catch them in corridors to come for discussions.

(Subject Supervisor 2, second interview)

Supervisors had to fulfil the expectations of diverse group of interns; each intern expected different supervisory style. Some expected more time for discussions so that they could prepare plans that meet the expectations of the supervisor. Others wanted freedom to experiment, try out new ideas and devise their own solutions to problems. Interns had a tendency to criticise and complain about their supervisors when they did not get the support expected from supervisors.

Supervisors found their work as an evaluator a difficult role to perform. They were aware that supervision was a source of anxiety among interns. Teaching in the presence of supervisor was much about impressing her than doing actual teaching. Interns would ensure they did their best activity and used 'good' teaching materials on the day their supervisor was to observe their class. This performance-oriented teaching on supervision days is reflective of how conscious interns were about assessment. Supervisor's presence would sometimes affect their teaching adversely. Supervision was also seen as one of the reasons for conflict between interns and supervisors.

The subject supervisors felt that assessment of interns' performance on the basis of observation of few classes could never be fair:

Observations are not frequent. We visit each school only 3-4 times during the internship period. It is not only unfair but unjust on our part. No one can capture an interns' growth in such few visits.

We have large classes ...

(Subject Supervisor 2, second interview)

Giving individual attention was a difficult task when supervisors work with large number of interns.

Another impact of interns' excessive consciousness of assessment was their reluctance to ask questions or show disagreement with their supervisors. This was especially observed by subject supervisors who were engaged in lesson planning discussions. Supervisors said that interns had a tendency to agree with every suggestion

made by them as they wanted to keep the supervisors in good humour. They avoided situations that could affect their assessment adversely and therefore, preferred to be 'safe' and do things that could lead to a good score:

For some interns, we are an authority who must be kept in good humour and whose suggestions should be followed unquestionably. With some interns, it is always one-way communication... I speak and they listen. This isn't how it should be...

(Subject supervisor 1, second interview)

Supervisors felt that this defeats the very purpose of supervision, which is to guide, support and advise students through dialogue and interaction so that they could improve their teaching skills. Appeasement of supervisors rather than pupil learning had become the goal for some interns.

Discussion

This study was concerned with exploring how faculty members of a pre-service TE college construe their role as a supervisors during internship and the challenges they encountered in the process of supervision. As indicated in the literature review, college supervisors are entrusted with the responsibility of professional development of interns. Freese (2005) points out the dual role of a supervisor – that of a manager of programme quality and the coach or critical friend for student teachers. All four supervisors were aware of their role and duties as a supervisor. They acted as a bridge between university and schools by way of keeping constant contact with school authorities, apprising them about the programme and its expectation from the participating schools. They ensured that interns followed all the rules and regulations laid out by the school and there were no violations on the part of interns. This, however, had to be done in the beginning of the internship and there were few administrative issues once the internship commenced and the roles of stakeholders became clearer.

Of the six types of supervision styles delineated by Martin and Evans (2021), the supervisors in this study followed a combination of roles: they were 'critical friends' guiding the interns with various aspects of internship related activities; they did the 'monitoring' of interns, checking and keeping a record of each interns' progress and resolving their issues as and when needed. However, it can be said that supervisors in this study were mostly following the 'clinical supervision' style - they tried to provide support and encouragement by establishing a trusting

relationship with their interns while also following the supervision protocols laid by the university. Supervisors' activity was possible only through collaboration and two-way interaction and hence, socio-dynamic approach became the basis of their relationship. Both interns and supervisors interacted within the socio-cultural domain, learning from each other through process of constant interaction to achieve the goal of the community, in this case, pupil learning. This phenomenon aligns with Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of the Communities of Practice.

Supervisors in this study construed their primary role as that of a facilitator – helping interns connect their practice with theory. Since they had taught theory courses at college, they could easily draw interns' attention to various theories studied and how they manifested in classroom practices. However, it also posed a huge challenge for them and they accepted they could achieve success to varying degrees with different interns.

For supervisors, their role went beyond just facilitating theory-practice connections; it was their responsibility to develop interns into a better person, a sensitive teacher and a complete professional. Becoming a teacher is a demanding task and interns went through many ups and downs during the internship phase. Supervisors were conscious of the fact that interns needed both academic as well as emotional support during this time. They were willing to be their emotional support system along with being their academic guide. This understanding coincides with Martikainen's (2014) observation that sensitivity, interpersonal skills, empathy, respect and encouragement characterise supervisor-intern relationship. Their role demanded active listening and sharing of experiences, also iterated by Clarks, Triggs and Nielson's (2014) as the key aspects of supervisory duties. Even though supervisors were aware of the importance of their own professional growth and learning, in performing their duties towards interns, this goal remained neglected.

Among the challenges encountered, supervisors considered the Programme demands in terms of tasks expected from interns during the internship, as the biggest challenge. Getting interns to fulfil these requirements demanded pushing them and thereby creating unnecessary pressure on them. Supervisors believed that these multitude of tasks left interns with no time to examine things around them. These tasks were more of an impediment in interns' ability to reflect and grow in their practice. The second major challenge perceived by interns was supervising large number of interns. Given that preparing quality teachers required

intense engagement with interns, supervisors felt they could not give the kind of time and individual attention expected of them because they were dealing with a large group. It is important to note that inspite of their awareness of the issue, supervisors were not keen to address it. For them, it was a systemic flaw which was beyond their purview to act upon. There is a need for Education colleges and faculty members to find ways to reduce the burden of interns and create more room for reflection and growth.

Accepting individual diversity among interns goes a long way in creating a supportive learning environment (Vehvilainen & Souto, 2021). Supervisors in this study believed that their role involved attending to expectations of a diverse group of learners. They had to modify their supervisory style according to the needs of different interns. Interns' expectations from supervisors ranged from prescriptive supervision in form of detailed and clear directions on how to prepare plans/teach on one end to complete autonomy to try out and experiment with teaching and planning on the other.

The most challenging aspect of supervisory role was their work as an assessor. Assessment of teaching was a dominating concern for interns and a lot of practice was done to impress the supervisors. Interns did their 'best' when their supervisors were observing them. Supervision was also a source of anxiety for some interns and it would affect her performance during supervisors' observation. Also, many interns abstained from asking questions, seek clarifications or show disagreement which, in supervisors' view, defeated the larger purpose of supervision – to guide and support interns. The absence of meaningful dialogue in a supervisor-intern relationship points of power dynamics and the presence of a culture of conformity. It should be a supervisor's responsibility to break this culture by creating an ethos of trust and anxiety free interaction.

Limits and implications

Working with a small sample of four supervisors enabled an in-depth analysis of their responses to interview questions. However, limitations of a small sample cannot be ignored. Though it allowed closer examination of the phenomena being studied, one needs to be cautious when drawing conclusions or generalizing the findings and thinking about the implications of the study. This study was limited to only one college where the B.El.Ed programme is presently being run. There are several logistical and administrative

issues in involving supervisors from other colleges, however, doing this would have allowed wider perspectives and more generalizable results. Since this study was carried out in a qualitative paradigm and aimed at understanding and developing insights about supervisors' beliefs and practices, it did not aim to show universally applicable truths and generalizable conclusions. This study underlines the dynamic nature of supervisors' work. Supervisors' own belief and understanding of their practice determines, to a great extent, how they carry out supervision. Given that supervisors are instrumental in determining the quality of field experience in any TEP, it is important to know how they construe and enact their role. The findings from this study point towards a need for dialogue among teacher educators and curriculum makers so that some of the issues encountered by supervisors could be addressed. Supervisors work directly with interns and therefore, their views about the programme content, activities and challenges in discharging their duties are valuable inputs for teacher educators and programme designers if we want to improve the quality of field experience for interns.

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