Mentoring and Supervision Challenges in B.Ed Internships: A Stakeholder Analysis in Patna, Bihar, India

By

Rashmi (IIT PATNA)
Raj Aditya (IIT PATNA)

Corresponding author: rashmi_1821hs02@iitp.ac.in

Abstract:

This study explores the challenges of mentoring and supervision in Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) internship programs in Patna, Bihar, India, using Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding as a guiding theoretical framework. The research investigates the perspectives of key stakeholders, including interns, their supervisors, Teacher Education Institution (TEI) principals, host school principals, and host school teachers. Employing a qualitative methodology, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with participants selected via multi-stage sampling. Thematic analysis of the data reveals that interns frequently lack sufficient mentoring and supervisory support, primarily due to the heavy workload faced by both supervisors and mentors. Additionally, the study finds a prevalent culture of mutual blame among stakeholders, with each group attributing shortcomings in the mentoring process to others. These findings highlight the need for a more integrated and cooperative approach to supervision in teacher training programs, addressing the specific contextual challenges to enhance the quality of support for pre-service teachers. The study suggests that policy changes and structural adjustments are essential to foster more effective mentorship and scaffolded learning experiences within B.Ed programs.

Keywords:

Mentoring, supervision, internship, B.Ed, Patna

Introduction

Teacher education is a pivot of the education system because it prepares teachers who play a central role in the teaching and learning process. Amagi (1996) gave prime importance to pre-service teacher education for upliftingthe quality of teachers and schools. Internships are a vital component of pre-service teacher education as they provide a platform where prospective teachers can learn to apply what has been taught to them during the course. Moreover, it also allows teacher educators to observe behavioral changes in pupil-teacher (Rajput & Walia, 1998).National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE, 2009) also proclaims practice teaching as the most functional part of teacher education and expresses pathos for its negligence and poor quality. Understanding the centrality of teacher education and its most crucial component internship, researchers tried to understand whether interns get the required guidance from their mentor and supervisors because studies evince the need for proper supervision during clinical work in school (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Mahende and Mabuala (2014) also conducted a study in Tanzania in which they tried to examine prospective teacher's perceptions and experience of practice teaching. They felt the need for strengthening supervision during practice teaching and collaboration between the teacher education university and the host school. NCTE (2016) also recommends that host schools or lab schools act as extensions of TEIs and commends host teachers to serve the role of mentors. It suggests TEI supervisors and host school mentors work in collaboration so that they can effectively contribute in preparation of prospective teachers. Observing the criticality of mentoring and supervision in teacher education, this study investigates challenges that obstruct it. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of scaffolding and literature review on mentoring and supervision in internships are used to understand the intricacies of these services in teacher preparation.

Theoretical framework- Supervisors and mentors as scaffolds

Vygotsky's idea of **scaffolding** involves mentors and supervisors offering guidance and support, and gradually transferring responsibility to the interns as they gain more confidence and competence in their teaching roles. Vygotsky (1978) has vouched that a child's upper limit of development level cannot be determined solely by a child's performance rather there are things that a child can do with the help of others that he/she cannot do alone. His belief opens the door of guidance and supervision for fostering a child's development. Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and his concept of the ZPD offer the idea of scaffolding. "The zone of proximal development is the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance" (Raymond, 2000, p.176). Here, arises the need for support in the form of guidance by an expert thus, scaffolding is a teaching approach in which individualized assistance is given to the learner by a more experienced person (supervisor, or mentor in case of internship) so that one can learn things that he/she cannot learn without others' guidance. Supervision by teacher educators and school teachers during internship acts as a scaffold for interns. Pupil teachers need to develop critical thinking so that they utilize the experiences and supports provided by different stakeholders for their optimum development. The scaffold is temporary and diminishes with learners' advancement in that skill. Vygotsky lived a very short life and could not extrapolate his theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to the other fields of education such as teacher education. However, some scholars like Warford (2011) tried to draw from his concept to strengthen teacher education. He used the term 'Zone of proximal teacher's development' which means "the distance between what teaching candidates can do on their own without assistance and a proximal level they might attain through strategically mediated assistance from more capable others (i.e. methods instructor or supervisor)" (p.253). Extrapolating Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and concept of scaffolding to the field of teacher education can help explain the role of lab school mentor teachers and supervisors in preparing

student-teachers. Hartman (2002) substantiates that a mentor's aim should be to progressively make learners independent so that he/she can solve his/her problems in the mentor's absence. Lempert-Shepell (1995) also believe teachers' knowledge is modified and reconstructed as per the changing experience of the schools and classrooms and thus, they advocate for providing investigative experience to prospective teachers during their preparation to develop the qualities of a researcher among them. Further, Fani and Ghaemi (2011) also consider that the development of ZPD is positively influenced by social interaction. Thus, during teaching internships, student teachers can use social interaction in the school to construct their own understanding of the profession under the guidance of school teachers and their supervisors which can benefit them in improving their skills as teachers. Hence, the constructivist framework enhances the internship experience by fostering active engagement, reflection, and collaboration. By applying theoretical knowledge in real classroom settings and refining their teaching strategies through ongoing feedback, interns experience meaningful professional growth.

Literature review:

The development of pre-service teachers during their internships is heavily influenced by the relationships they build with mentor teachers and the quality of supervision they receive. These elements are pivotal in providing constructive feedback, guiding reflective practice, and supporting the overall professional growth of interns. This review examines the significance of mentor-teacher relationships and supervision, focusing on how they contribute to the learning and development of future educators.

1. Importance of Mentor-Teacher Relationships

Mentor-teacher relationships are a keystone of successful internships for interns. Effective mentoring helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in classroom settings. Research highlights that strong mentor relationships enable pre-service teachers to develop their teaching skills, manage classrooms more effectively, and build a professional identity (Hudson, 2016). Mentors serve not only as role models but also as critical support systems, offering guidance, encouragement, and valuable insights that help shape the intern's teaching practices. The quality of the mentor-mentee relationship is vital and is often characterized by open dialogue, mutual trust, and respect. Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) note that these characteristics foster an environment where interns feel safe to share their challenges, experiment with new strategies, and learn through reflective dialogue. By facilitating reflective practice, mentors help interns connect their coursework with real-world teaching, thus enhancing their ability to apply theoretical concepts in practical contexts (Hudson, 2016). However, not all mentoring relationships are equally effective. Hobson et al, (2009) suggest that the effectiveness of these relationships can depend on factors like the mentor's level of preparation, their availability, and the compatibility of personalities between mentors and interns. To address these challenges, mentor preparation programs should focus on developing mentoring skills, such as providing constructive feedback, listening actively, and encouraging reflective practice (Leshem, 2012).

2. Role of Supervision and Feedback

Supervision is another crucial component of the internship experience, providing structured support and feedback that helps interns refine their teaching practices. Supervisors, who are often experienced educators, guide interns in developing critical thinking and reflective skills, which are essential for effective teaching (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The role of supervision goes beyond mere evaluation; it involves fostering a growth-oriented mindset that encourages continuous improvement and

adaptation to diverse classroom settings. Feedback provided through supervision is most effective when it is timely, specific, and constructive. Shute (2008) emphasizes that feedback should help interns identify both their strengths and areas needing improvement. Feedback that promotes self-reflection and encourages interns to assess their own teaching practices can help them develop greater autonomy and confidence in their professional abilities (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Zeichner and Liston (2013) argue for the value of formative feedback- ongoing, constructive feedback that helps interns reflect and grow continuously, as opposed to summative feedback, which focuses solely on assessment. Engaging interns in dialogic feedback, where they actively participate in conversations about their practice, allows them to ask questions, seek clarification, and reflect on their teaching methods (Carless, 2006). This approach can lead to deeper learning and professional growth, additionally; incorporating tools like video-based feedback, peer observations, and reflective journals can provide interns with a broader perspective on their teaching and enhance the feedback process (Tripp & Rich, 2012).

3. Integrating Mentorship and Supervision for Intern Development

Combining strong mentorship with effective supervision creates a comprehensive support system that promotes the professional development of interns, when mentoring is integrated with structured supervision, interns benefit from a cohesive approach that addresses both immediate instructional challenges and long-term professional goals (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). Zeichner (2010) suggests that when mentorship and supervision are synergistically combined, they can create an enriched learning environment that facilitates the intern's transition from student to professional teacher. Regular, reflective supervision sessions coupled with mentoring discussions provide a platform for interns to critically analyze their experiences, adjust their practices, and gain a more profound understanding of their roles as educators. This collaborative approach supports the development of a professional learning community that fosters continuous improvement, adaptability, and a commitment to lifelong learning (Leshem, 2012). The mentor-teacher relationship and the supervisory role of providing feedback are essential for shaping the professional growth of interns. Effective mentorship creates a supportive environment for learning, while supervision offers structured guidance and constructive feedback that encourages reflective practice and growth. Together, these elements help to cultivate skilled and confident educators who are prepared to navigate the complexities of teaching. Continued research should focus on innovative mentorship and supervision models to further enhance the quality and effectiveness of teacher education programs. Thus, studies highlight the importance of mentoring and supervision and its essentiality in interns' development. Most of the literature delineates the scenario of developed countries and indicates a dearth of studies in developing countries. Further, very few studies investigate challenges that interns face in getting these services. Hence, this study was conducted to address these gaps.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Patna capital of Bihar, India. Multi-stage sampling was used for data collection. Data was collected from interns who were final year students of the B.Ed program doing internships in different schools in Patna, their supervisors from TEI, principals of TEI, principals of host schools, and teachers of host schools (mentors). Three universities running B.Ed colleges (TEI) in Patna were selected randomly and two colleges from each university were selected randomly. Further, two groups of interns from each TEI were randomly selected; each group consisted of ten to twelve interns. Table- 1 shows the total number of respondents.

Table 1: Showing the total number of respondents

	Male	Female	Total
Interns	35	80	115
Supervisors	4	7	11
Principal of Teacher Education Institution	3	3	6
Host teachers	11	24	35
Principals of Host School	3	8	11
		Grand Total	**178**

Source: compiled from empirical research

Semi-structured interviews were used as research tools. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through a thematic analysis approach. This process included becoming familiar with the data, creating initial codes, identifying potential themes, refining and defining these themes, and compiling the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Basic statistics like percentage was used to observe the frequency of some findings.

Results and Discussions

Three themes emerged through analysis of semi-structured interviews which are discussed further.

Supervisors juggling between responsibility of TEI and school

Supervisors are representatives from TEIs who are supposed to observe and guide interns during the process. However, only twenty-five per cent supervisors were regularly visiting lab schools that too were from female government TEIs. The entire supervisor complained about their hectic schedule and seemed overburdened. Their major concern was regarding doing double duty- one as an instructor at their TEIs and the other as supervisor. For example, *"It becomes very hectic for us. We need to make biometric arrival and departure attendance at our college and have to visit the lab school also. Lots of time and money are wasted in this process. We are not given any extra allowance for supervision. Moreover, school and TEIs time also differ so it becomes very difficult to manage at both places. In such circumstances observing class, checking lesson plans and teaching aid of all interns are very difficult" (Sayeeda Begun, a supervisor).* Similarly, another supervisor from a private TEI shared *"I am assigned supervision in two schools. I cannot go to both schools every day. Besides, I have to do other work for TEI like teaching first-year students and other official works. I have made representatives among interns who keep me updated." (Shyam Patil, a supervisor).* These statements indicate double workload can be one of the probable reasons for supervisors not paying attention to all the dimensions. Even, during field visit days very few supervisors were found present in the lab school. Many came at the request of the researcher for the interview. Even, regular supervisors were also coming around the second half as school starts earlier than TEIs and supervisors need to mark their attendance at TEIs first. Hence, due to various reasons supervisors hardly stay one to two hours in host schools. Zeichner (2002) also detected supervision creating workload problems for

supervisors. However, the hectic schedule could not justify supervisors' reluctance as internship is more crucial than theoretical classes because it shapes teaching competency in interns. Hence, merely checking interns' attendance by the supervisor would not help in providing the required scaffold (Vygotsky, 1978) to interns. NEP (2020) advocates for flexibility in education. Hence, flexibility from biometric attendance can be given to supervisors during internship as mostly school time does not match the timing of TEIs, and even the distance between the both can be long.

Host-teachers just engaged in office work

Approximately, 65 per cent host teachers confessed they do official work when interns teach their classes. Even interns reported the same. A host teacher, Ritu Kumari stated *"I do other official work when interns take my class. They do not contact me for any kind of support. In our school, one teacher is assigned the duty to check whether interns are going to their allotted class or not. The rest of us do not even recognize all of them"*. This statement reflects the absence of engagement between the interns and the mentor teacher suggesting a failure to provide essential support. Without proper mentoring, the interns are deprived of the collaborative learning opportunities that are vital for their professional development. The scenario described reveals a lack of meaningful support or feedback, hindering the interns' ability to reflect and improve. This weakens the experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) process, which involves hands-on experience, reflection, abstract thinking, and application. Moreover, the isolation of interns from the regular school environment and the lack of integration into the teaching community limit the depth of their learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They are not fully participating in the authentic practice of teaching, which is essential for their professional growth. Thus, the statement reveals a lack of mentorship, support, and collaboration between interns and the teaching staff. This weakens the professional development of the interns, as it contradicts the principles of constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), cognitive apprenticeship (Kolb, 1984), and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The internship experience appears to be procedural rather than one that promotes meaningful learning and professional growth.

On the other hand, many host teachers confessed internship eases their work as the workload in school is very high in that case class engagement by interns relaxes them.

"I won't lie; we get time to relax when students come for internships as they engage class so we don't need to go in the class. There is lots of table work in our school so, we do all those works. However, the duration of the internship is long so our interaction with students is also decreasing which is not a good thing" (Shabana Ara)

Though here host teachers hold a positive attitude towards interns as they share their responsibility, this kind of attitude is not good for the purpose for which the internship is designed. Internship is planned to build close association among interns and host teachers so that prospective teachers can learn through the experience and guidance of expert teachers which will act as a scaffold (Vygotsky, 1978) to interns. This study indicates despite building close associations between host teachers and interns, the long duration of internship is leading to the loosening of bond between host teachers and school students. Host teachers are supposed to observe their classroom when interns teach, check their lesson plans and teaching aids, and give feedback. Moreover, they must coordinate and guide interns in all the components prescribed by NCTE (2016) during the internship. But in almost all host schools, only one teacher was assigned the job of making attendance of interns, and no other task related to the internship was assigned to any other teacher. Likewise, in none of the field visits, did the researcher find subject teachers observing classes. Here, it's central to understand host teachers must play the expected role and discharge assigned duty so that they can improve interns' teaching ability

and eradicate prevailing dysfunction (Durkheim, 1893). Learning from the experience of an expert teacher is an important component of internship (Loughran, 2013; Mena et.al, 2017), if interns do not get regular scaffold (Vygotsky, 1978) from them, then organizing internship for such a long duration is of no use. NCTE (2016) has assigned roles to every stakeholder but the field study evinces that the workflow regarding internship was not meeting the prescribed standard.

Blame dynamics

Data analysis identified lots of problems that detriment the quality of the internship but each stakeholder blamed others for the shortcomings evincing conflicts due to competing interests and power dynamics (Marx, 1867). Like, interns accused their supervisor of not regularly supervising them and blamed mentors for not cooperating and taking extra work from them. Interns revealed, "*We take classes the whole day, teachers of this school do not have any work, they just sit idly and talk. They neither take class nor observe our class. Interns for all subjects are not available but school teachers just leave all classes on us so we are compelled to teach other subjects. Our supervisor hardly visits here. We neither get any guidance from our supervisor nor host teachers*" (Sushmita, an Intern). Most interns carry similar opinions towards mentors and feel they do not get proper support either from their college or school.

Similarly, TEIs' principals and supervisors accused host-school principals and teachers of not providing proper arrangements and cooperation. They believe during internship interns are under the school's supervision and it is their responsibility to guide them but school members do not take any responsibility. For example, "interns *go to many schools for internship and supervisors need to take classes in the college also. In this case, school teachers should act as mentors but they don't provide any guidance, they do not even cooperate. Interns from many colleges visit the same school so they don't even get proper sitting space. We can't interfere in school affairs as our rights are limited*" (Amulya, TEIs' principal). Here, TEIs' authority gives an excuse for workload and limited rights for not providing proper supervision to interns.

On the other hand, in host schools, two types of accusation prevail. Host-school principals blamed all other stakeholders. They blamed TEIs' principals and supervisors for not paying proper attention to interns and not maintaining regular communication while they blamed interns for not doing internships regularly and sincerely. A host-school principal shared "*Problems are many, TEIs just send their interns without conducting any meeting with me. Many TEIs approach at the same time which creates many problems. I cannot deny them because the authority issues a letter. At least their supervisors should visit regularly and take my feedback because interns do not take it seriously. They do not come regularly. Even my school teachers do not pay attention. They get the freedom to relax; at least they should sit in their class and observe interns. This will create a sense of responsibility among student-teachers also*" (Jaya, a school principal). Most of the host schools' principals blame not only TEIs' stakeholders but also their school teachers for all kinds of disparity in internships. While, teachers blamed interns for not contacting them for feedback, being irregular, and not showing any innovativeness in their teaching. At the same time, they also criticized TEIs' stakeholders for not taking any cognizance. Respondents blaming pressure of letters from authority reflects the prevalence of governmentality (Foucault, 1991) in teacher preparation.

In a nutshell, each stakeholder holds some grievance for the other and feels the internship is not organized in the way it should have been but none of them took this responsibility. Everyone sees flaws in others' work and thus instead of solving the problem blame game circulates in the whole process creating dysfunction (Durkheim,1893) in the entire system which necessitates the need for

sociological imagination (Mills, 1959). When interns are in the school it is the responsibility of every school member to support and guide them wherever necessary. Similarly, TEIs' responsibility does not end when interns enter the school premises. They must maintain regular communication with host schools at all stages of the internship as an effective mentor-intern relationship is the fulcrum of the internship (Punger, 2007). Hence, effective collaboration is pivotal (Helgevoldet. al, 2015), and stakeholders must build cordial relations among themselves to create a conducive environment for teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The success of internship is profoundly dependent on the collaborative efforts of all the concerned stakeholders. This is in line with the guidelines set by the NCTE (2016), which emphasize the importance of strong partnerships between these entities. The guidelines suggest that host schools should effectively serve as an extension of TEIs, facilitating a seamless integration of theoretical knowledge and practical experience. However, this study's findings indicate a gap between these policy guidelines and actual practices. Often, stakeholders shift responsibility and blame onto each other when faced with challenges during internships, which undermines the spirit of collaboration and results in conflict, ultimately affecting the quality of teacher preparation. Analyzing this issue through the lens of Conflict Theory (Marx, 1867) reveals that competing interests and power struggles among stakeholders can lead to organizational dysfunction. Instead of fostering a cooperative environment where responsibilities are clearly outlined and shared, vague role definitions and a lack of accountability contribute to tensions and misunderstandings. Additionally, theories on power relations (Foucault, 1980) and governmentality (Foucault, 1991) offer a perspective on how institutional power dynamics and discourses influence these interactions, often promoting a blame-oriented culture rather than one of collaboration. This fragmentation among stakeholders disrupts the effective implementation of internship programs and hinders the professional development of future teachers. As a result, the primary objective of internships to bridge the gap between theory and practice is compromised. This emphasizes the need for a reassessment of stakeholder roles and responsibilities to create a more cohesive and supportive environment within teacher education.

Limitation and scope of the study

The study was limited to the region of Patna and, as such, does not reflect the viewpoints of stakeholders from other districts in Bihar or other states in India. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges associated with mentoring and supervision in internships, similar comparative studies could be conducted in broader contexts. The results of this study suggest a need for a thorough review of existing mentoring and supervision practices in internships to ensure that they provide effective support for interns at a foundational level.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study by assigning pseudonyms to participants and securely storing all data.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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