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Supervisors' Challenges with Online Supervision Using Microsoft Teams in Supervising Open Distance and E-Learning (ODeL) Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract

Online supervision has been introduced to the field of education. However, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, university pre-service programmes did not provide pre-service teachers and supervisors with online teaching practice experience. Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) has proven to be an indispensable tool in facilitating online supervision. The Domestication Theory was used as a lens to explore the challenges supervisors faced with online supervision, using MS Teams in an Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) institution in South Africa. This study adopted an exploratory case study design, using semi-structured interviews. Eight supervisors were purposefully selected to participate in the study. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. The findings of this study showed that poor communication between supervisors and pre-service teachers, the lack of digital literacy among pre-service teachers, the difficulty of network coverage, and providing feedback were some of the challenges that supervisors experienced during online supervision. This study recommends that training be conducted for supervisors and pre-service teachers in using MS Teams and its various functions before supervision. Further research should explore pre-service teachers' engagement with online supervision tools to inform the future practice of teacher education programmes.

Keywords: online supervision, pre-service teachers, supervisors' challenges, teaching practice, Microsoft Teams, ODeL

Introduction

Teaching practice supervision is regarded as a vital component in teacher education as it determines the quality of teachers produced (Abdullaha, Sulongb, & Abdul, 2020). Abdullaha et al. (2020) further argue that teaching practice supervision aims at providing support to pre-service teachers and ensures that guidance is provided to them as they prepare to become teachers. However, research has shown that supervisors and pre-service teachers face challenges during the teaching practice supervision process. Pre-service teachers reported challenges such as placement and mentorship (Mokoena, 2017), and supervisors highlighted the substantial number of pre-service teachers they supervise and the great distance they travel during supervision (Ngara & Magwa, 2018).

Online teaching practice supervision by employing technology, has recently been introduced to the field of education (Kim, Park, & Jang, 2019). The benefits of online supervision have been documented in the literature. Online supervision enables university supervisors to offer technical and emotional support to pre-service teachers while observing them in the classroom (Sepulveda-Escobar et al., 2020); it enhances communication between pre-service teachers and supervisors (Nel & Marais, 2020); it increases the accessibility of supervisors to pre-service teachers and reduces visits to remote areas (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017); and it provides feedback to pre-service teachers through video conferencing (Rock et al., 2013). The success of teaching practice supervision depends on supervisors and pre-service teachers always having open lines of communication (Rice & Deschaine, 2020). Online teaching practice supervision includes the use of learning tools such as MS Teams, Zoom, and so forth. The idea of integrating MS Teams for learning has received a lot of attention due to its popularity. It is currently being used by more than 270 million people each day (Curry, 2023). As an online platform, MS Teams has features that allow video meetings, audio calls, and instant messaging (Hubbard, Bailey, Hess & Hellebro, 2021). The application, commonly referred to as MS Teams, provides an opportunity for supervisors to collaborate with pre-service teachers on an online platform (Çankaya & Durak, 2020). Another feature is that MS Teams can record meetings and provide automatic transcription. The MS Teams application is easily accessible to its users via the internet through desktops, laptops, and mobile phones. Supervisors can schedule meetings in advance to allow pre-service teachers to prepare for online supervision.

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Each participant can join, view, or listen to the meeting.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most university pre-service programmes did not offer online teaching practice experience to pre-service teachers or their supervisors (Loose & Ryan, 2020; Rice & Deschaine, 2020). However, during the pandemic, supervisors were expected to use online platforms such as MS Teams to supervise pre-service teachers. Despite the plethora of literature on students' use of online learning platforms such as MS Teams and Zoom (Allison & Hudson, 2020; Buchal & Songsore, 2019; Mathisen & Bjorndai, 2016), there are little data relating to the potential of technology in supervising pre-service teachers during teaching practice (Mathisen & Bjørndal, 2016). The use of digital video in student-teacher supervision has been the topic of research, but Mathisen and Bjrondal (2016) point out that this only applies to micro-teaching on campuses and not to actual teaching practice supervision in schools. Set against this backdrop, the primary aim of this paper was to explore the challenges supervisors faced with online supervision, using MS Teams in an ODeL institution in South Africa. The following research question guided the study:

> What were the challenges experienced by supervisors when conducting online teaching practice supervision using MS Teams?

The findings from this research will have positive implications for the successful implementation of online pre-service teaching practice supervision in an ODeL context and will contribute to the debate on the use of technology for online pre-service teacher supervision.

Literature Review

Remote supervision via the Microsoft Teams application

Existing literature commends the use of MS Teams to conduct online supervision (Stolte, 2021). Paksuniemi, Keskitalo, Frangou and Korkko (2021) mentioned that the use of MS Teams in online supervision brings new dimensions to the supervision process, such as systematised interaction between supervisors and pre-service teachers throughout the supervision process. This is because MS Teams allows participants to chat, share files, and have meetings (Nemec, Berkova & Hubalovsky, 2020). Supervisors

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can schedule meetings with pre-service teachers and explain to them what is required during the actual supervision. Important documents such as lesson plans, curriculum documents, and lesson evaluation forms can be shared, using MS Teams.

Supervising pre-service teachers remotely allows the supervisor to observe classroom activities without disturbing the classroom setting and the school timetable (Rice & Deschaine, 2020). During face-to-face supervision, supervisors need to be accommodated in the classroom; however, when MS Teams is used such challenges are eliminated. Moreover, the use of MS Teams during supervision saves supervisors from travelling long distances to supervise pre-service teachers (Stolte, 2021). This saves resources and time for supervisors and teacher training institutions.

Further, scholars endorse the use of MS Teams because this tool appeals to pre-service teachers and young people in general (Mavuru, Pila, & Kuhudzai, 2022; Nemec et al., 2020). Many young people, including pre-service teachers, are familiar with using various technological software and hardware (Azizan, 2021). As a result, they usually find it easy to use MS Teams, which is also accessible to many people through smartphones, computers, and laptops (Wijayanto & Sumarwati, 2021). Adopting MS Teams to conduct online supervision may be favourable to both pre-service teachers and teacher training institutions because teacher training institutions "meet" pre-service teachers where they are on online platforms (Pal & Vanijja, 2020).

Lack of digital skills

Digital skills are the cornerstone of online supervision for both supervisors and pre-service teachers (Liu et al., 2018). Supervisors often receive training before engaging with online supervision; however, pre-service teachers are overlooked in such training. There is a common belief that being young gives pre-service teachers the prerequisite skills to engage in online supervision. Flores and Gago (2020) argue that this is not always the case, and some pre-service teachers lack the required digital skills to engage in online supervision. Lee (2007) postulates that teacher training institutions should recognise that some pre-service teachers are at an advanced age and need intensive support to engage in online supervision. Strydom et al. (2021) reveal that pre-service teachers who lack digital skills are excluded from online supervision. Overall, teacher training institutions should recognise that not all pre-service teachers and supervisors have the required digital skills to engage in online supervision, and even after training

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there may be some pre-service teachers and supervisors who may still experience challenges with online supervision. Hence, digital literacy training should be ongoing.

Communication between supervisors and pre-service teachers

Communication between supervisors and pre-service teachers is key to the success of online supervision. According to Rice and Deschaine (2020), supervision relies on clear and consistent communication. Online communication transcends the boundaries of time and space (Kim, 2020). Communication between supervisors and pre-service teachers before, during, and after teaching practice helps pre-service teachers receive guidance and support from their supervisors (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017). Online communication platforms allow for sharing of information between parties (Kim, 2020). To maximise communication between supervisors and pre-service teachers, teacher training institutions employ various tools of online communication such as emails, Zoom, MS Teams, and Social Media platforms (Kim, 2020).

Online communication tools used by teacher training institutions come with numerous benefits to pre-service teachers. The study conducted by Kim (2020) revealed the adoption of tools such as emails after online supervision allowed supervisors to provide feedback to each pre-service teacher. This suggests that online communication tools enable supervisors to provide individualised feedback to pre-service teachers after online supervision. Furthermore, the use of online communication platforms to facilitate communication between supervisors and pre-service teachers improves the quality of the online supervision process (Cavanagh, 2021). This is due to the use of WhatsApp groups, Zoom and emails by supervisors to communicate with pre-service teachers. Online communication tools, such as MS Teams, allow synchronous and asynchronous communication which is critical for distance education pre-service teachers (Poston, Apostel, & Richardson, 2020).

Nurlaelawati and Gunawan (2019) found the use of social media networks during teaching practice useful as it enabled pre-service teachers to form and belong to a community of practice. The creation of such a platform may lead to pre-service teachers learning from one another and sharing ideas on how to engage in online supervision (Kidd & Murray, 2020). Pre-service teachers can take advantage of online communication tools to reach their counterparts and receive support during the journey of teaching practice. For distance education pre-service teachers, this can

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be a great benefit because they are normally separated from their counterparts and supervisors.

Theoretical framework

This study used the Domestication Theory as the theoretical lens to understand the phenomenon under investigation. The Domestication Theory refers to the integration of novel technology by the users in their formal and informal activities (Lindeman, Suensson, & Enochsson, 2021). In the context of this study, the Domestication Theory involves supervisors integrating MS Teams into their formal task of supervising pre-service teachers during teaching practice. The attempt to integrate MS Teams in teaching practice supervision is deemed new in the field of education. Therefore, adopting the Domestication Theory helped the researchers to understand and interpret the challenges faced by supervisors when it comes to adopting MS Teams to conduct teaching practice supervision. The Domestication Theory helps to understand the dynamics between users and various kinds of technology (Yere-Arne, 2019). Haddon (2006) adds that Domestication Theory looks beyond the adoption of technology by the users and asks what technology means to the users, how they experience it, and the role technology plays in their everyday lives.

The proponents of this theory indicate that individuals go through four stages of domesticating modern technology in their daily activities. These are the appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion stages. The appropriation stage involves the users' motivation to use technology by embedding it in their practice through understanding its effectiveness and functionalities (Lindeman et al., 2021). At this stage, supervisors are expected to integrate MS Teams into their teaching practice supervision, because they understand the advantages that come with integrating the tool in performing their supervision task. In the objectification stage users give meaning to the tool by appreciating its practical value and usefulness in their daily practices. Through MS Teams, supervisors can observe the classroom, the pre-service teacher teaching, learners in the classroom, and provide feedback. In the incorporation stage, users use the novel technology for purposes other than what they initially used it for (Lindeman et al., 2019). At this stage, supervisors can use MS Teams to perform other activities beyond supervising pre-service teachers. The conversion stage is the final stage of the Domestication Theory. This stage occurs when individuals use modern

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technology to interact and communicate with others (Lindermann et al., 2019). This will not only smoothen the process of teaching practice supervision but can also strengthen relations between the supervisors and pre-service teachers.

Methodology

This study followed a qualitative approach. Qualitative research provided the researchers with in-depth insight and an understanding of the real-life experiences of supervisors in their social and cultural context (Gumbo 2018). This case study was conducted at the University of South Africa (UNISA) to gain in-depth information about the phenomenon under study (Yin 2003).

Research site

Unisa is an open, distance, and e-learning (ODeL) university. This means there is a physical distance between the students and the university, student-centeredness, and the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning (van den Berg 2020). The study was conducted at the College of Education where more than 30 000 students are enrolled in two programmes. These programmes are a four-year BEd (Bachelor of Education) degree and a one-year Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). The Foundation Phase, the Intermediate Phase, and the Senior and Further Education and Training Phase are the three phases that make up the BEd degree programme at the ODeL institution under consideration. This framework covers all levels of teacher education in South Africa.

Teaching practice is recognised as essential and mandatory by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) in South Africa (DBE 2015). The students enrolled in the BEd and PGCE programmes are expected to apply the theory they learned in real-life situations in schools. The BEd students do five weeks of teaching practice each year and the PGCE students are expected to do ten weeks of teaching practice. These students are supposed to be supervised, but the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible for in-person supervision. As a result, the Teaching Practice Office (TPO) launched a pilot project to explore the use of digital platforms in supervising pre-service teachers who are doing teaching practice. The results of this pilot project are presented in this study.

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Sampling and participants

The sampling strategy adopted in this study was a purposive and convenient sampling method. The researchers targeted individuals who were supervisors involved in the pilot project of online supervision and were willing to engage in the study and to discuss their experiences. Participants were advised that their participation was entirely voluntary, and they might end it at any time. Eight of the department's ten teaching practice supervisors volunteered to take part in the online supervision experiment. The goal of this pilot project was to determine whether online supervision could be a practical option for teacher training institutions.

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Even though the researchers employed pre-planned questions, probing was used to shed light on challenges and to follow up on crucial issues that participants had raised. Interviews were recorded and the participants were asked for their consent before using the voice recorder. Data were transcribed verbatim, and the participants received interview transcripts to ensure that their opinions were accurately represented. This gave the participants the chance to refute any inaccurate inferences that the researchers made. Pseudonyms S1-S8 were used to preserve the identity of the participants.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In the raw data, frequent and dominant occurrences revealed research findings. Data collection and analysis were done simultaneously. Line-by-line coding at the initial stage was followed by focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). This led to the development of themes and categories that are presented in this study.

Findings

During data analysis, two dominant themes emerged. These are communication challenges and technical challenges experienced during online supervision. The findings are discussed below under each theme.

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Theme I: Communication challenges with online supervision

A key element of successful coordination is effective communication. This study found that communication between the different role players posed a challenge to successful online supervision.

Communication between supervisors and the TPO

During discussions, supervisors had several challenges that were caused by a lack of communication between the TPO and the supervisors. *S6* stated: *'I was given a list of 20 students to supervise and of these 20 students, 11 students had finished doing their TP.'*

Another challenge that supervisors experienced when contacting pre-service teachers was that the telephone numbers that the TPO provided were not the pre-service teachers' numbers. In some instances, the home telephone numbers of the pre-service teachers, the school telephone number, or an incorrect number were given. One of the participants explained:

> *'We were given incomplete telephone numbers. I remember in one instance I was given the student's cell phone number with 9 digits, but because I knew the school, it was a local school, I was able to get the number of the teacher in the school.' (S2)*

S1 said: *'I was sometimes given cellphone numbers that do not belong to the student.'* Similarly, *S4* mentioned:

> *'You know TPO do not communicate with us properly when it comes to supervision, the numbers I was given belonged to schools and when I called the number some were not answered, and others were not going through.'*

The supervisors' responses indicate that there was a lack of communication between the TPO and the supervisors. Their responses suggest that the office did not facilitate communication between themselves and the supervisors, thus impacting online supervision. Having the correct contact details would have given pre-service teachers and supervisors ample time to plan for supervision.

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Communication between supervisors and pre-service teachers

Effective communication between pre-service teachers and supervisors is important because it ensures that pre-service teachers feel comfortable and supported throughout their teaching practice experience. In this study, supervisors reported many challenges they experienced when communicating with pre-service teachers. One of the challenges was the difficulty of contacting pre-service teachers. As one participant explained: *'I found communication with students to be a stumbling block, I called every student between three and five times before I could speak to them. This was very time-consuming.' (S5)*

Another challenge was arranging the actual supervision with pre-service teachers. Supervisors needed to brief pre-service teachers about the supervision process and the documents that needed to be completed before the supervision began. Some found this part of the process overwhelming, as one participant described:

> *'For me, it was a lot of administration before the supervision because one student was emailing me a lot asking about how to fill in the documents. What must she do with this? She was very frustrated and nervous. I think from an administrative point of view online supervision is very labour intensive and it takes a lot of time to arrange and conduct.' (S3)*

Even when the supervisors communicated the requirements to pre-service teachers for online supervision to run smoothly, some pre-service teachers did not comply. *S8* explains:

> *'I communicated to students and asked them to send me their lesson plans a day before the supervision, some did, and others sent their lesson plans on the day of the supervision, and this made the supervision process difficult as I could not prepare for my observation of the lesson.' (S8)*

Other supervisors complained about the postponements by pre-service teachers concerning the date of supervision. One of the participants stated:

> *'There were continual changes with my students, although I only had three students to supervise, none of them stuck to the original date and time they were going to*

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teach their lesson. They either sent you a sick note or on one of the dates there was a SADTU strike, so I had to continually shuffle these students' supervision around my work responsibilities.' (S2)

In this sub-theme, it emerged that supervisors perceived communication between themselves and pre-service teachers as a challenge. This was due to the administrative work in arranging the online supervision. This administrative challenge was also compounded by the unavailability of some pre-service teachers when the supervisors tried to call them. The level of pre-service teachers' dependence on supervisors also appeared to be challenging for some supervisors because they had to engage in administrative work, even before the actual supervision.

Theme 2: Technical challenges with online supervision

A recurrent theme in the interviews was the technical challenges experienced by pre-service teachers during online supervision which also affected the supervisors' work.

Pre-service teachers' inability to use Microsoft Teams

The skill of using digital technology is important as it ensures that pre-service teachers benefit from the affordances of technology. A common view among the participants was that pre-service teachers did not know how to use MS Teams as a digital tool. See their comments:

'Students didn't know how to use Teams and it took me a lot of time to explain to them how Teams works. they did not even know how to download the app onto their gadget" (S5). Similarly, S6 added: "They needed a lot of help, and facilitating this process took/wasted a lot of time'.

The above comments suggest that pre-service teachers were not prepared for online supervision because the MS Teams application was not downloaded on their gadgets. Therefore, supervisors had to assist them in downloading the MS Teams application and explaining to them how it works. Supervisors felt that they spent a lot of time providing technical support to some pre-service teachers. One participant

said:

> *'It was also quite a big task on my part because I had to type out how to download teams and I had to explain to each student how it works and with some students, supervision would take nearly the whole day because the first step was to help them set up the required tools and the app before I can supervise them.' (S4)*

These comments from the supervisors indicate that pre-service teachers were not familiar with MS Teams. Further, pre-service teachers were not trained in advance in how to navigate MS Teams during their online supervision. The pre-service teachers' lack of technical knowledge concerning MS Teams had the potential to negatively affect the process of online supervision, as the university used MS Teams to conduct online supervision. Furthermore, the pre-service teachers' inability to use MS Teams compelled supervisors to provide technical support to pre-service teachers to ensure that online supervision is a success.

Devices that pre-service teachers used

This sub-theme reports on the gadgets that pre-service teachers used during online supervision. Supervisors indicated that most of the pre-service teachers used cell phones instead of laptops during supervision. *S8* noted:

> *'Most students used their cell phones for online supervision instead of a laptop as cell phones are widely used by students. The school didn't have laptops and students used their cell phones', and S7 made another comment: 'They also weren't laptops at the school, so they were stuck using their cell phones.'*

It appears from the supervisors' statements above that pre-service teachers opted to use cell phones because they had no laptops, and they had no access to the schools' laptops. Supervisors seemed to be unhappy with the use of cell phones during supervision.

> *'I had three or five students that were using their cell phones and they put their cell phones in one position. So, you can see one position in the classroom. And it's difficult for you as a supervisor to say to the student that as you teach, please*

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go around with your cell phone, and show me the class. For me, observing lessons through a cell phone was difficult, I only saw one position of the classroom.' (S3)

The responses from the supervisors suggest that the use of cell phones by pre-service teachers limited their lesson observations to one position. In some instances, school-based mentors had to walk around in the classroom carrying a cell phone to enable the supervisor to see what was happening in the class.

One participant mentioned:

'I couldn't see what was going on in the class, so the mentor teacher had to walk around with the phone to show what was happening in the class, it was very challenging because the volume wasn't great either.' (S1)

The supervisors indicated that they prefer laptops or computers to be used during online supervision rather than cell phones. *S7* said:

'I would have loved my students to use a computer or laptop during supervision because the screen of the computer is bigger than the screen of the cell phone. When the computer is used, I can see the whole class.' (S7).

Similarly, *S2* preferred a laptop instead of a cell phone:

'I think using a laptop was going to be more effective and help me do my job effectively as a supervisor. You know, when the student uses a cellphone, you can't even see what is written on the chalkboard and you mainly depend on listening to what the student says as he/she teaches.'

S5 indicated that most of her students used laptops during online supervision.

'Although I had two students who used cell phones during supervision, but most of my students' used laptops. Since they used laptops, I was able to see everything that was happening inside the classroom.' (S5).

It appeared from the sentiments of the supervisors that the use of cell phones

during online supervision limited them in observing the activities that were happening in the classrooms. Therefore, it was clear that online supervision could be effectively conducted when laptops or computers were used.

Network coverage

Connectivity on the part of students was also a challenge that supervisors faced. Pre-service teachers' lessons were interrupted due to intermittent connectivity.

The participants commented as follows:

> *'Students also had network problems, so the connection kept getting cut off because of a loss of network. This made it difficult to view the students' lessons.' (S7)*
> *'Connecting to the internet was a serious issue, we had to wait for some time to get them connected, and when that happened, we constantly had to pause because their internet was disrupted. This disruption affected the students' lesson presentation. Because every time they get disconnected, they start the lesson from scratch, and we did not have time to finish the lesson.' (S3)*

It is evident from the quotation above that *S3* and *S7* struggled to supervise some pre-service teachers due to connectivity issues. Poor connectivity had the potential to frustrate pre-service teachers who prepared the lesson, only to find they could not present and finish the lesson smoothly. Supervisors were likely to be frustrated as well because they had set aside time to supervise pre-service teachers, only to find that they were unable to appropriately supervise due to poor connectivity.

It also transpired during the interviews that, although some of the supervisors successfully planned lesson supervision with pre-service teachers, their lesson observations and feedback were interrupted due to poor connectivity. For instance, *S1* indicated that she managed to observe the lesson successfully but could not provide feedback to the pre-service teacher after the supervision.

> *'One of my students got cut just after presenting the lesson. I did not get the opportunity to give feedback to her and I had to rearrange the meeting for after hours, so I can give proper feedback on her lesson.' (S6)*

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It is evident from S6's assertions that poor connectivity presented a nightmare for her because the crucial aspect of supervision was interrupted by the lack of connectivity. Providing feedback to a pre-service teacher is key to the supervision process because this is where both the supervisor and the pre-service teacher reflect on the lesson. During the feedback process the pre-service teacher reflects on their lesson and could see where they needed to improve. The feedback session is even more important for the ODeL pre-service teachers because this is where they can interact with their supervisors and are mentored and coached to help them develop professionally.

Discussion of findings

This study aimed to explore challenges faced by the supervisors when conducting online supervision, using MS Teams. This study found that communication between pre-service teachers and supervisors was lacking. Supervisors' attempts to reach pre-service teachers were challenging as some pre-service teachers did not answer their cell phones. This affected the planning of the teaching practice supervision process. The findings imply that the supervisors were not using MS Teams optimally, as MS Teams has functions that allow participants to chat, call, share files, and have meetings (Nemec et al., 2020). This finding indicates that although supervisors have 'appropriated' MS Teams for their daily work as academics, they have not fully 'domesticated' it for their online supervision (Lindeman et al., 2021). In other words, the supervisors have not embedded MS Teams in their daily practices of online supervision; hence, they are not yet at advanced stages of 'incorporation' and 'conversion'. as discussed in the section on Domestication Theory above (Lindeman et al., 2021).

Another finding from this study indicated that some pre-service teachers who were supervised online lacked the required digital skills for online supervision. This appeared to be a serious challenge for supervisors because it meant that they had to go beyond providing professional and technical support to pre-service teachers. The participants had to help pre-service teachers install MS Teams on their gadgets and orientate them on the use of MS Teams before they could start with the actual supervision process.

Another challenge that supervisors had to contend with during online supervision was the lack of digital tools suitable for online supervision. Many pre-service teachers

used MS Teams on their cell phones instead of laptops. This limited the supervisors' view of the classroom as cell phones have smaller screens. This resulted in some mentor teachers walking around the classroom with the cell phone allowing the supervisor greater viewing potential. One of the benefits of online supervision is that supervisors observe classroom activities without disturbing the classroom (Schmidt et al., 2015). However, the constant movement of the school-based mentor in the classroom has the potential to hamper the observation of online supervision.

Supervisors' challenges during online supervision were further compounded by poor connectivity from the side of pre-service teachers. Although the MS Teams application functions well with poor connectivity (Mohmad et al., 2021), some of our pre-service teachers still struggled to connect with MS Teams. Participants reported that poor connectivity led to the failure of some supervisors to provide feedback to pre-service teachers immediately after online supervision. This finding is worrisome because feedback to pre-service teachers is a critical aspect of supervision where pre-service teachers get professional development from their supervisors (Mufidah, 2019). However, feedback is even more important for pre-service teachers in ODeL because their interaction with supervisors is limited. It is during online supervision when they get a chance to interact with their supervisors and learn from them. Despite the challenges faced by supervisors regarding connectivity, this study revealed that some supervisors rearranged meetings with pre-service teachers to provide feedback. This is an indication that supervisors appreciate the importance of feedback to pre-service teachers after supervision.

Based on the findings of this study, we note that supervisors have 'appropriated' MS Teams in their online supervision. Furthermore, the findings indicate that supervisors have 'objectified' MS Teams as a platform that is effective in conducting online supervision. Although the supervisors' use of MS Teams was limited to calling pre-service teachers, organising supervision sessions, and conducting the actual supervision, when examining the responses of supervisors, one gets a sense that supervisors appreciate and see the value of MS Teams for online supervision. Finally, supervisors did not tap into the other functions offered by MS Teams, and this revealed that they are not yet at the 'incorporation' and 'conversion' stages where they can fully engage with pre-service teachers before, during, and after the supervision to improve pre-service teachers' experiences with online supervision.

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Recommendations

Teaching practice is a vital component in pre-service teachers' education programmes. Owing to the increasing number of pre-service teachers requiring supervision, an online technology tool has been incorporated to assist supervisors with the supervision process. This study found that using MS Teams to supervise pre-service teachers presented supervisors with many technical challenges. For this reason, we recommend that pre-service teachers and supervisors be trained in using MS Teams and its different functions before any supervision takes place. Supervisors should also be encouraged to use MS Teams throughout the supervision process which includes communication with pre-service teachers; observation of the classroom lesson; the post-lesson discussion; and sharing documents, files, and any other relevant material for the success of pre-service teacher supervision. Another recommendation to strengthen the online supervision process would be for the university to make data available for pre-service teachers and to ensure that they have access to laptops during their online teaching practice supervision.

Conclusion

This study reports on supervisors' challenges of online pre-service teacher supervision using MS Teams in an ODeL university. The findings confirm that although MS Teams can be beneficial for online pre-service teacher supervision, supervisors experience many challenges. These challenges include the lack of digital literacy among pre-service teachers; the lack of connectivity, especially for pre-service teachers living in rural areas; the use of MS Teams on a cell phone instead of a laptop owing to a lack of laptops and shortage of storage facilities for laptops in schools; the difficulty of effective communication with all stakeholders responsible for the teaching practice supervision process. The challenge of digital literacy skills and communication skills can be resolved by the university by providing training to supervisors and pre-service teachers on the effective use of MS Teams and its various functionalities. Only when this happens will the affordances of using MS Teams to supervise pre-service teachers be fully realised.

This qualitative case study focused on the challenges of online supervision, using MS Teams in one open distance and e-learning university in a developing country.

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The study, therefore, involved a small sample that does not reflect online pre-service teacher supervision in different contexts. However, we believe that this study will catalyse further research on online pre-service teacher supervision using technology, especially MS Teams.

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