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Supervision Challenges in the Training Of Community Development Work Practitioners

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Abstract

The study examines the demanding role of field supervisors in the Bachelor of Community Development program, an adaptation of social work field education, at an urban University in South Africa. Using qualitative interviews with nine supervisors of third-year and honors students, the research highlights challenges such as inadequate training and insufficient resources. Through a systems theory lens, the study underscores the importance of effective communication in field instruction. Recommendations include implementing comprehensive training programs for supervisors to enhance their skills and capabilities, addressing the significant but often overlooked challenges they face.

Keywords: field instruction; supervision; community development and leadership; training

Background

Effective community development in South Africa is acknowledged as a fundamental pillar of national progress (Hart, 2012). Furthermore, Quiroz-Niño and Murga-Menoyo (2017) argued that the Social Solidarity Economy framework promotes the development of learning and teaching processes tied to community development, which occur across various social, workplace, and cultural interactions within ecosystems to meet basic needs and uphold human rights. As such, South Africa embarked on the path of professionalizing the practice of community development, starting with developing academic programs. Despite the growing number of qualified

community development workers produced annually by institutions offering this program, there is a scarcity of literature on the education of community development students. This also includes limited knowledge on the challenges experienced by field supervisors in this field. Cobigo et al. (2016) postulated that a community can be delineated as a collective of individuals possessing diverse attributes who maintain social connections and may coexist in proximity (Cobigo et al, 2016).

While some communities exhibit affluence, others require interventions to address their needs, as outlined by Reisch (2012). Community interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in mitigating poverty and inequality (Nel, 2009). The escalating adoption of community interventions has engendered an augmented demand for community development workers. In response to this need, an urban University in South Africa established the Bachelor of Community Development and Leadership (BCDL) program. This academic program is modeled after a Bachelor of Social Work degree (BSW) program, except in duration. While BSW is a four-year program in South Africa, BCDL has a three-year duration. Some universities in Africa, Europe, and North America offer three-year social work degree programs, as is the case with BCDL in this university. In Europe, the Bologna Declaration standardizes higher education degree structures, including social work, by requiring a minimum of 180 credits or three years for a bachelor's degree to promote consistency and compatibility (Campanini, 2020). In most cases, social work training is regulated by statutory bodies or government departments, such as the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) in the United States, and the Social Workers Board (SWB) in Singapore. However, although the SACSSP began the process of establishing a board for the training of community development workers, this process has yet to be finalized.

BCDL aspires to cultivate community leaders. The program has a vertical articulation to an honors program in Community Development and Leadership or other cognate fields. It comprises two integral components: a theoretical segment and a practical facet, often referred to as field instruction (FI).

The FI program provides learners with a valuable opportunity to apply newly acquired theories and skills within a workplace environment or one that closely resembles the professional workplace (Auslander & Rosenne, 2016; Baikady et al., 2022; Kaiser, 2016). This program places a strong emphasis on the integration of skills, ethical conduct, and professionalism throughout the field instruction process (Trevithick, 2001). Ncube (2019), as well as Ross and Ncube (2018) and Kaiser (2016), elucidated that this process is overseen by seasoned field educators employed by the educational institution. These field educators collaborate with students, field supervisors, placement agencies, educational institutions, and the client service user system, all with the primary aim of equipping students with high-quality training for community development (Auslander

& Rosenne, 2016).

As indicated earlier, Ncube (2019) asserted that FI is not unique to the BCDL program but has been adapted from social work and other applied sciences programs. He further asserted that it represents the distinctive contribution of social work to the body of knowledge and practice in the realm of applied social science programs, including BCDL (Ncube, 2019). The role of field educators is substantial, given their pivotal responsibility for shaping the development of students. Field supervisors are thus a critical component of the field instruction program, as they engage with students where practical knowledge is paramount. They serve as gatekeepers, determining the students' readiness for professional practice (Ross & Ncube, 2018). In this regard, they play a role akin to that of superheroes or ordinary individuals with exceptional abilities (Coogan, 2009). Similar to superheroes, supervisors are expected to achieve remarkable results. However, a pertinent question arises: Are field educators adequately prepared for these formidable responsibilities?

In the context of this inquiry, the BCDL program's field supervisors are individuals who possess bachelors' qualifications in either community development or social work and bring with them a wealth of experience in the realm of community development. The selection of these supervisors is based on a careful evaluation of their suitability and credentials. Additionally, the educational institution responsible for overseeing the program provides supplementary training to enhance the capabilities of these supervisors, enabling them to guide and mentor students within the program effectively.

This study was undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the training and support mechanisms provided and their subsequent impact on the quality of supervision extended to the students. The primary focus of this research was to explore the challenges and training needs of field supervisors in the BCDL program at an urban university in South Africa. Its objectives were to explore the perceptions of supervisors on their training and support needs related to their supervisory role, to investigate the supervision challenges and coping strategies of field supervisors, and to contribute to the body of knowledge on field instruction in community development. Given the relatively recent establishment of this program, in 2010, at this institution, and the scarcity of comparable programs nationwide, the available information pertaining to field instruction within the BCDL program is notably limited.

The study employed a systems theory framework to examine and analyze FI. Within this framework, FI is conceptualized as a system comprising various interconnected subsystems, namely the agency, educational institution, student, and supervisor (Dimo, 2013). Applying systems theory to FI posits that there exists a continuous and dynamic interaction between the overarching system and its constituent subsystems

(Payne, 2005). The functionality of the system hinges on the ability of these subsystems to collaborate effectively (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009). In the context of this study, the FI system and its subsystems share a common objective, which is the cultivation of proficient and high-caliber community development workers.

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was employed to collect in-depth data on the training needs of field supervisors using participant narratives in their context. Employing a descriptive research design (Bless et al., 2013), the study explored and explained specific concepts, offering flexibility to identify previously unexplored phenomena.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Demographics

(See Table 1). Six of the nine participants were female and three were male. Gender did not significantly affect the study's outcome and is noted only for context. All participants were university graduates with community work experience. Eight were qualified community development workers, and one had a social work degree. Each had at least one year of experience supervising students. However, none had a formal qualification in supervision. These findings align with Engelbrecht's (2010) South African case study, in which none of the participants had formal supervision qualifications. The study explored supervisor working conditions, supervision training, and supervision functions.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Participants

	Qualification	Group supervised	No. of years supervising	Gender	Age
Participant 1	CDL Honors	3rd-year	2	F	20-30
Participant 2	CDL Honors	3rd-year	2	F	20-30
Participant 3	CDL Honors	Honors	1	F	20-30
Participant 4	CDL Honors	Honors	3	F	30-40
Participant 5	BSW	Honors	4	M	20-30
Participant 6	CDL Honors	3rd-year	4	M	20-30
Participant 7	CDL Honors	Honors	2	M	30-40
Participant 8	CDL Honors	3rd-year	3	F	20-30
Participant 9	CDL Honors	Honors	1	F	30-40

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted thematic analysis on transcriptions of audio-recorded virtual interviews. Following Clarke and Braun's (2017) six-step process, this involved becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, producing the report.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical risks were carefully considered due to the involvement of human participants. Data were treated confidentially, using pseudonyms, and participants' safety was prioritized to prevent harm. Arrangements were made with Sophiatown Counselling Centre for therapeutic intervention if needed. The study received ethical clearance from the university's Ethics Committee.

Limitations

The study faced limitations, including the inability to conduct face-to-face interviews due to COVID-19, but this did not affect data quality. Potential bias from respondents' university affiliation was addressed with careful follow-up questions. Although not all field supervisors participated, the results are generalizable within that specific population, as the participants fairly represented the overall group.

Results

While there were points of convergence among participants, there were also disparities in the viewpoints held by field supervisors. A meticulous examination of the data led to the identification of the following distinct themes: perceptions of participants on the training received, challenges and coping mechanisms for field supervisors, and challenges with the education institution.

Perceptions of Participants on the Training Received

Participants shared their views on the training they received for supervisory roles as mandated by their educational institution. All had completed an introductory supervision module during their undergraduate studies and underwent specific training provided by the institution. Despite these opportunities, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the adequacy of their training. This aligns with Beddoe et al.'s (2016) study across 14 countries, where over half found supervision training lacking, and 64% desired formal qualifications. Similarly, Bradley et al. (2010) and Engelbrecht (2010) noted a lack of formal training for supervision in South Africa.

Opinions varied on training efficacy, with two participants finding it adequate for supervision objectives, while others found it insufficient. Engelbrecht (2013) emphasized that the content of supervision training greatly impacts supervisor quality and skills. Most participants felt their training did not enhance their supervisory skills. One reported,

> It was merely a workshop on what we are expected to do as supervisors this year. It gave us information on how to refer students if they have certain issues. I was expecting more information on how to mark reports.

Hair (2013) stated that supervision training is required for supervisors to provide effective services. The findings suggest that even though all supervisors went through the same training provided by the university, they had different perceptions of what constitutes training. They also had different opinions on the quality of the training they received. One participant described the training as "extensive" while two others defined it as insufficient. Another participant felt that the training was ambiguous regarding supervision roles. The responses below have been extracted from the data:

> At the beginning of the year, all supervisors received extensive training.

> There was no formal training other than a workshop that merely explained details of referring students and not really practical skills of supervision.

> I can't really say there was any training, I had engagements with people from the university and the administrators, but I didn't have any training.

The data question the efficacy of the training program offered by the institution. Supervisors have three different supervisory functions: administration, support, and education (Ross & Ncube, 2018). The data collected in the study indicate that, due to inadequate training, supervisors felt incompetent in some of the functions:

> I think we should have more training on the content of the course.

> I feel that we should be having more training on what we are expected to do.

Inadequate preparation can hinder supervisors from fulfilling their responsibilities effectively, and can create variability in competency levels, which affects the alignment of collective objectives. Engelbrecht (2010) emphasized the need for standardized, accredited, and accessible supervision training, advocating for collaboration between organizations and educational institutions to develop such training. This training should be consistently available to meet supervisors' needs.

This study views field instruction (FI) as a system with subsystems, including the agency, learning institution, supervisor, and student (Nadesan, 2020). Effective functioning of this system requires the combined effort of all subsystems (Wright,

2009). Ackoff (1971) described FI as a goal-seeking system that adapts to events to achieve outcomes. The system aims to produce competent community development practitioners through collaborative efforts. For effective fieldwork education, role players must work together to support students' academic progress and serve vulnerable users (Carelse & Poggenpoel, 2016). The study's data reveal varied opinions on the training's efficacy among field educators, which could impact other subsystems, including student progression and service quality.

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms for Field Supervisors

The researcher sought to reflect on the challenges and coping mechanisms faced by supervisors in the supervisory duties. The data reveal that while there are areas of satisfactory performance in their duties, they also grapple with numerous challenges stemming from various subsystems of the FI supersystem, such as the educational institution, agency, and students:

> We need to get access cards to the university premises so that when we get to campus, we don't waste time having to sign in and sometimes stand in the queue to get in. This is time-consuming.

> The communication between the agency and the university is bad, there are so many things that are misinterpreted. At one time, students went to the agency and were told that they were not expected on that day and they should come back on another day. In the meantime, the university was expecting them to attend classes or submit reports on that day.

A challenge many students face is that the agency has unrealistic expectations of them. The challenges that the agency wants students to address are far beyond the capacity of the students.

> I think we need more training as supervisors because we are dealing with students that are dealing with so much, so I feel like there has been training but not at a standard in which I feel I could fully support the students.

The interplay of subsystems within a broader system, as illuminated by systems theory, highlights the significance of each component's impact on overall functionality. Consequently, when multiple subsystems encounter adverse effects, achieving the primary objectives of the system can prove challenging. A study by Ross and Ncube (2018) delved into this dynamic, with 63.5% of students identifying feedback loops as pivotal for enhancing goal attainment. Within the context of this study, looking at the development of competent community development practitioners, certain subsystems may not contribute effectively to this overarching goal. The research findings indicate that some supervisors underwent training specifically aimed at cultivating feedback loops, as evident from the provided excerpt:

> The training includes a lot of things on how a supervisor goes about marking students' reports. It also indicated how supervisors are expected to assist their students to solve problems that might arise during their engagements with the community and how they need to take necessary precautions. So, these are the things that we discussed including communication skills and other relevant skills.

The comments align with Jurich and Myers-Bowman (1998) and Payne (2005), who described supervision as a circular process where input is transformed into output and then reintroduced as input. Adequate training for supervisors is crucial for maintaining quality, but Engelbrecht (2013) noted that the quality of supervision also depends on the supervisors' resilience. Resilient supervisors better facilitate student growth, as supported by Carelse and Poggenpoel (2016), who highlighted that the challenges faced by supervisors affect students' academic performance. This emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of these subsystems. Outlined below are the various subsystems that emerged from the data, as aligned with systems theory, which serves as the theoretical lens for this study.

Challenges with the Education Institution Subsystem

The education institution, which is the employer of the supervisors as well as the education service provider to the students, plays a big role in FI. Participants described having challenges such as communication and other logistical challenges relating to the institution. Below is one extract from the data:

> The university should make venues readily accessible for supervisors. At times you find supervisors running their sessions outside the building due to the inaccessibility thereof. Thus, if they can make venues readily accessible, it would be highly beneficial for the supervisory process.

The issue of supervisors' employment status highlights that they are often contract employees lacking the privileges of permanent staff. Some participants sought official recognition to access university resources, such as libraries and equipment, which are essential for their duties. As mentors (Ketner et al., 2017), supervisors face challenges with venue access that can create a perception of underpreparedness and affect student commitment. Supervision, being laborious and time-consuming (Ketner et al., 2017), is further complicated by logistical issues. Participants felt that increased attention to their role and status as adhoc university employess would resolve some of these logistical problems.

The BCDL FI program supports supervisors through the Supervision Champion Program. This initiative designates a Supervision Champion (SC) to oversee supervisors' work and ensure quality. SCs receive progress reports on students from

supervisors, allowing close monitoring of student development, with reports also shared with the FI facilitator to address challenges. Testimonials from participants on the SC role are included below:

> The university is supportive since they have provided us with Supervision Champions. They are the link between supervisors and the facilitators. They quality-assure our monthly reports and give us feedback. It also helps us to monitor student's progress.
>
> Yes, all supervisors submit progress reports, they report in relation to the student's growth and the session that they facilitate. Supervisors are required to write feedback and send it to the Supervision Champion for each and every contact they make with each student. Supervisors have about seven to ten students and for each student they need to give the supervision champion a report.
>
> We submit monthly reports to the Supervision Champion where we discuss the growth of each student and highlight any challenges they are facing. This helps supervisors to monitor students easily and for the system to account for every student.

In support of the comments, one other participant intimated that facilitators are available when there are challenges. WhatsApp was used as a platform for immediate correspondence. In contrast, Holosko and Skinner (2015) noted that there is usually a poor connection between the learning institution and supervisors. Although this challenge appears to have been mitigated by the measures described above, some participants stated that communication needed further improvement so that issues needing attention do not fall through the cracks. Below are some comments from participants reflecting on this theme:

> I think the link between the supervisor, institution, and student is very important. The quality of supervision depends on those relationships. So, if there are meetings between these three parties, we can all clarify our roles. With regular meetings, it would be easier to identify gaps in the Field Instruction program.
>
> The contact person said that the student was not coming to the agency, but nothing was done. I only found out about it at the end of the year when the student had already passed. I felt like my opinion didn't really matter because the student passed regardless of what I said to the facilitators.

The sentiments expressed align with Carelse and Poggenpoel's (2016) study, which highlighted the need for better coordination among the university, agency, and supervisors to meet academic requirements. Poor communication between these

stakeholders can undermine the FI system's effectiveness. A program coordinator oversees student submissions during the summative assessment phase, and feedback from supervisors or agency contacts is integrated into the student's Portfolio of Evidence. Perceptions that a supervisor's report was ignored may indicate a communication breakdown in the assessment process.

Additionally, supervisors faced challenges in meeting the university's expectations, finding them unclear and unmeasurable. The research findings include excerpts that support this observation:

> To be able to provide the students with the best possible supervision, supervisors need to fully understand what is expected of them by the university, including the objectives of the program and how to measure those objectives.

> The contract clearly outlined the expectations for both students and supervisors. However, there was a challenge in determining the most effective way to oversee and assess compliance with those expectations.

The Agency Subsystem

To enhance the supervision practice and create a significant benefit for the students, some participants felt that supervisors should spend time observing students at the agency to improve the FI processes. This was largely with reference to the externally contracted supervisors who have no affiliation with the agency in which the supervisees are placed.

> I think it would also be helpful if the supervisor can spend one day with the student to experience what they're experiencing in the community.

> The communication between the agency and the university is bad, there are so many things that are misinterpreted. At one time, students went to the agency and were told that they were not expected on that day and they should come back on another day. In the meantime, the university was expecting them to attend classes or submit reports on that day.

> As a supervisor, it's important that you contact the agencies to find out what is the progress of the students.

The above extracts reflect the nature of the relationship between the agency and supervisors. The lack of communication between the parties resulted in agencies misunderstanding their roles and the roles of the student. Thus, agencies ended up having unrealistic expectations of students, which undermined the objectives of the placement. The extracts below indicate the implications of such misunderstandings:

> Many students grapple with the issue of unrealistic expectations imposed by the

> agency. At times, the challenges presented by the agency surpass the students' capabilities, posing a significant hurdle for them.
>
> Some agencies do not understand what the purpose or need for a community developer is.
>
> Some agencies were not suitable as placements for community development practicums, as many students were assigned to schools that did not have the facilities to put a project in place.

Carelse and Poggenpoel (2016) noted that achieving learning outcomes is difficult when placement requirements differ significantly from academic standards. To address this, Nadesan (2020) suggested prescreening agencies before student placements. The research findings reveal a lack of effective feedback loops between the agency and the university, where input and output are cycled for continuous improvement (Jurich & Myers-Bowman, 1998; Payne, 2005). Poor collaboration between the university and agencies, as noted by Carelse and Poggenpoel (2016), affects supervision quality. Nadesan (2020) also highlighted the need for better communication before placements. Additionally, one participant felt the agency could improve the system, as reflected in the following extract: "The agency observes how the student works with the community and is therefore in a better position to monitor the students' progress and give adequate and constructive feedback to the university."

Agencies often have limited resources, which affects how much they can offer students during their placements: "I know that this institution has great difficulty finding agencies that will agree to be part of the Field Instruction and most of these agencies have very limited funding."

According to Nadesan (2020), "the availability of suitable resources is integral to the proper functioning of the FI system, as these provide placement opportunities for students to implement praxis" (p. 13). As such, limited resources in the form of finances to employ supervisors, or agencies with inadequate resources to accommodate the needs of the students, could hinder the proper functioning of the FI system.

The Student Subsystem

Kadushin and Harkness (2014) and Ketner et al. (2017) argued that effective supervision involves a balance of administration, education, and support. The administrative function focuses on community projects and student interventions aligning with agency mandates (Bogo & McKnight, 2006). The education function involves teaching social work skills and reinforcing classroom theory (Kadushin &

Harkness, 2014). Supportive supervision provides encouragement and referrals to help students become independent practitioners (Bogo & McKnight, 2006). Participants reported more challenges with the supportive and educational roles than with administration.

Administrative Function

Data shows that training primarily addressed the administrative function, often neglecting the educational and supportive roles. Ncube (2019) attributed this to limited training in supervision. This finding supports Engelbrecht's (2010) view that the administrative function often overshadows education and support:

> The training was mainly on the structure of the courses. It was also on what is expected regarding the supervisor; what is also expected in terms of the students' participation and just going through the guide that students will receive regarding the module.

> The training of the supervisors should provide details on how to mark the students' reports and how to give feedback to help them improve their skills. During the workshop, we did not get much training on marking of the reports hence most of the supervisors were confused about how to do this.

Participants expressed that many students struggled with time management due to the large volume of workload demands in the CDL Honors program. This is a view also shared by Carelse and Poggenpoel (2016), who stated that poor time management affected report submission, attendance of supervision sessions, and participation in fieldwork practice. A participant mentioned that time management was a huge problem, as evidenced by the late submission of reports by most students:

> In one month, the student adheres to the deadlines for report submissions, while in the subsequent month, the student submits reports after the designated timeframe.

> A considerable number of students encountered difficulties attending campus-based supervision sessions, prompting their preference for group supervision. Their challenges included financial constraints for transportation and scheduling conflicts between supervision sessions and repeat modules.

One participant noted that students lacked resources like laptops and data coverage, hindering their ability to complete reports. Financial difficulties were lessened when students had access to university internet and computer labs. Some supervisors found marking challenging due to the absence of rubrics and insufficient feedback from FI facilitators and coordinators. Here are some of the comments.:

> Some students don't have laptops to type their reports, so they try to hand-write

their reports which is not in accordance with the university standards.

My issue revolved around students who submitted their reports after the deadline, often accompanied by excuses such as laptop malfunctions or difficulties in sending reports due to internet connectivity issues.

Marking students' reports was a challenge for me because you can't just say this is right or wrong. I must try to guide the student so that they know what they can improve on or what they can do differently. You needed to be adequately trained and assisted by a clear rubric.

The university says they don't want you to comment "good" on reports, but they haven't given us any direction on how to mark reports.

I'm very organized so that's how I dealt with challenges. I set aside time for marking and supervision. It was just about aligning it with the student's needs at that point.

I find marking easy since I know that the students are struggling with time management, so they send reports very late but once I receive them, I quickly mark them.

When faced with challenges from students, I engage in discussions with supervisors to address performance issues. I strive to understand the nature of the challenges and find solutions. If improvement is not observed, I arrange another meeting with the student to reinforce expectations. Should the situation persist, I take the initiative to report to the department, prioritizing communication with the student before involving the educational institution.

Engelbrecht (2010) advocated against a fixation on one supervision function, such as the administrative function, that may preoccupy supervisors. Instead, all supervision functions should be employed to optimize the efficacy of the supervision practice.

Educational Function

Bara (2022), and Kadushin and Harkness (2014) posited that the educational function of supervision calls on the supervisor to assist the supervisee in gaining up-to-date knowledge on case evaluation methods, innovative case types, and addressing of ethical concerns. The educational function aims to enhance supervisees' training professionally, recognize their knowledge and skills, fulfil the ongoing training needs, and assess the outcomes following supervision of the workers. In this way, supervisors are crucial in creating effective practitioners because of the constructive criticism that

they can provide to students (Engelbrecht, 2004; Lee & Cashwell, 2002). Below are some of the excerpts relating to this theme:

> There is a need for additional training for us as supervisors. Dealing with students who have diverse challenges requires a higher level of expertise. Although we have participated in a training program related to our responsibilities, it did not reach a standard where I could adequately support students in various supervision functions, including the educational aspect.
>
> I always wonder whether I am doing a good job as a supervisor in comparison to other supervisors.
>
> I am concerned about whether the students are getting the same amount of knowledge and support from different supervisors.

What became evident from various participants is that they did not immediately distinguish the educational function as part of the execution of their duties. As such, it became difficult for them to clearly indicate what they were doing relating to the educational function. While this is a gap in the knowledge of participants, it does not therefore mean that they were not discharging their educational function. It may, however, suggest that if they were executing the educational function, they did so unaware of the name of the function. This was apparent when asked about whether they assisted students on ethical issues, skills, and theory integration in their reports. Their feedback indicated that they assisted students beyond the topics covered in training:

> I have individual sessions one week, and the following week I have group sessions. During the individual sessions, I clarify whatever challenge the students may have. Normally I would have already discussed this with them during the week via WhatsApp calls. I have an open-door policy when it comes to WhatsApp communication. I tell them you can text me or write to me whenever you have any problem. That provides me with the opportunity to give feedback and seek clarity when I'm marking their reports.
>
> I think the link between the supervisor, institution, and student is very important. The quality of supervision depends on those relationships. So, if there are meetings between these three parties, we can all clarify our roles. With regular meetings, it would be easier to identify gaps in the Field Instruction program.

This pertains to systems theory, as the subsystems consistently interact. FI, operating as an open system, demonstrates adaptability, which Ackoff (1971) defined as the system's capability to modify itself or its environment, and is crucial. This study's results indicates that a system's adaptability enhances the likelihood of achieving FI's

goals.

Supportive Function

The supportive function focuses on providing students with emotional support (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). Supervisors play a role in providing support in challenging situations, and helping the student to release emotional energy, so the student can continue working (Ross & Ncube, 2018). Ketner et al. (2017) described supervision as a protective factor which provides students with support against burnout. Below are some excerpts from the data in this regard:

> We are here to give students support, that's why the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee is very important.
>
> It is my responsibility as a supervisor to be observant of my students and provide support where I feel that performance could be affected by issues not related to their work.
>
> The challenge that I have since picked is that students who need support do not openly engage the supervisor. Students need to fully appreciate the role of the supervisor and use it to their benefit.

Engelbrecht (2004) argued that the supportive function in supervision is linked to the administrative and educational functions, and its effectiveness depends on these areas. The tone of the supervisory relationship also affects support quality: a positive relationship encourages openness, while a hostile one fosters animosity. Engelbrecht (2004) emphasized that supervision requires mutual commitment from both supervisor and student, characterized by a reciprocal, antidiscriminatory relationship (Department of Social Development (DSD) & South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), 2012).

The study found that that students were not fully taking advantage of the support offered by their supervisors. This could indicate a gap in understanding the role of supervision or a lack of awareness of its benefits. Secondly, the mention of "ineffective" supervisory support points to a possible mismatch between student expectations and the actual supervisory support provided. This could imply that while supervision is available, it may not be tailored to meet student needs. Thirdly, the lack of "leveraging" supervisory support could be due to barriers such as communication issues, student apprehension, or limited rapport between supervisors and students. Identifying these barriers could inform ways to enhance the supervisory relationship. Lastly, supervisors may need to communicate the purpose and benefits of the support function more explicitly, perhaps by setting clearer expectations or fostering a more open environment for support.

Supportive supervision helps students manage placement stresses, but is not a substitute for therapy (Nadesan, 2020). This implies that where a need for a therapeutic intervention is identified, the supervisor, in collaboration with the student, needs to make an appropriate referral. A referral is necessitated by the fact that, even though a supervisor may be a competent counselor, for ethical reasons they may not embark on a dual relationship with the student.

Conclusions

The research, guided by systems theory, explored field supervisors' challenges and training needs in the Bachelor of Community Development program. This paper begins by drawing parallels between the Bachelor of Social Work and the Bachelor of Community Development, two closely aligned programs. Both programs, in line with global standards for social work education (Ioakimidis & Sookraj, 2021), emphasize field education as their signature pedagogy, managed by field educators employed by the university. Students are placed in social welfare organizations to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations involving service users at micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice. Field supervisors guide them in bridging theory and practice, ensuring adherence to professional standards in their interaction with social welfare organizations and the service users. Key findings indicate that while supervisors held relevant degree qualifications and received initial training from the university upon signing supervision contracts, these facts were insufficient for effective supervision. Engelbrecht (2004) suggested that comprehensive, accessible training is needed for supervisors. The Supervision Champion initiative within the FI program was seen as beneficial, providing support for supervision.

Challenges included insufficient training, limited campus access for supervisors, and communication lapses between subsystems. Supervisors often relied on limited knowledge, instincts, and feedback from Supervision Champions. Access issues could be mitigated by a department member facilitating venue access. Communication issues between supervisors and Supervision Champions affected system functioning, with no clear coping mechanisms identified. Furthermore, training both supervisors and students on effective utilization of supervision could improve the effectiveness of supervision across all its functions. Supervisors might benefit from skills in active outreach and student engagement, while students may benefit from orientation sessions on how to use supervision effectively. In line with Nadesan's (2020) postulation, some agencies faced orientation and resource challenges, suggesting the need for prescreening agencies. Overall, the FI system's effectiveness depends on the interplay of its subsystems: the institution, agency, student, and supervisor. The findings and conclusions from this study are valuable and transferable to social work programs in South Africa and globally, wherever program structures share similarities.

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