Blended Supervision of Theses: Lessons and Future Directions from COVID-19 and Post-Pandemic Situation

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the education sector in Bangladesh. Consequently, completing a successful thesis has become a great challenge for university students. As a result, the supervisors in Bangladesh are incorporating both online and face-to-face supervision sessions to help the supervisees conduct successful research. This study aims to determine the challenges, prospects, and future directions of blended supervision for students pursuing Masters degrees in English. We conducted this qualitative research using the narrative method and a purposive sampling technique. We collected the blended thesis supervision experiences of six supervisees who completed their theses during the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic situation as the primary data. The results indicated their optimism about blended supervision, as it enabled them to complete their graduation on time, save money and energy, and ensure research quality through immediate feedback. Moreover, students who hold jobs and are mothers of toddlers can benefit from blended supervision, as it alleviates their tension and passivity. However, the supervisees pointed out that Internet and electricity issues, financial problems, controlled access to the Internet, and time management can create challenges in conducting successful research. This research can be helpful for policymakers and educational bodies.

Introduction

Universities have always acknowledged research supervision as a multifaceted and complicated responsibility, but the COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more complex (Singh et al., 2021). This sudden setback of regular learning forced the institutions to immediately adapt blended learning (BL), which is a combination of traditional face-to-face and online learning, to continue their students' learning progress (Shah, 2020). However, this has highlighted a real need for novel ways of conducting research supervision, especially in a post-pandemic world. Grasping this need, the concept of blended supervision, including traditional face-to-face meetings as well as online communications, provided an alternative source in response to the changing demands related to research students (Karunaratne, 2018). However, in practice, blended supervision has not been implemented much within Bangladesh (Erichsen et al., 2014) since its prospects and challenges are not defined yet.

The literature has a significant gap, necessitating urgent empirical research on integrating blended supervision into universities, particularly in the English department. Contrary to the BL experience, blended supervision is a new term in the educational field (Perez-Cabañero et al., 2021). The pandemic crisis that has led to the abrupt introduction of online or hybrid teaching and learning reflects how critically technology can be employed in pedagogical systems (Singh et al., 2021). Similarly, the absence of empirical studies on blended supervision in Bangladesh raises questions about its effectiveness and limitations (Heinze & Heinze, 2009). Hence, there is a current demand for empirical inquiry in determining the future directions of blended supervision within the Bangladeshi higher education context.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the challenges, prospects, and future directions, of blended supervision in Bangladeshi universities, particularly in the English departments, and to address the gap in the literature. The study also assesses students' perceptions of the future directions of blended supervision while working on their theses in the Master's in English program. This research makes a valuable contribution to the field of research supervision and also has practical implications in terms of improving the quality of supervision practices in the post-pandemic period. The outcome of the study informs policy, practice, and relevant stakeholders and empowers supervisors and supervisees to address the challenges associated with conducting their research effectively.

Literature Review

The literature on blended learning and blended thesis supervision acknowledges the importance of combining traditional, in-person components with online features to create an enriching educational process. Blended Learning (BL) is defined as "a mixture of both online and face-to-face learning" (Rahim, 2019, p. 1167). This approach combines elements of both traditional learning and e-learning, a variety of theories and learning styles, as well as different pedagogical strategies (Johnson, 2010; Oliver & Trigwell, 2005, p. 19). Likewise, blended supervision is also "centered on online and face-to-face sessions" that may guide students throughout the writing of their thesis manuscript (Perez-Cabañero et al., 2021, p. 9249). A common feature of a blended supervision model, although it can take many forms, is the use of face-to-face supervisory methods in combination with peer or group supervision to increase communication and collaboration (Åkesson & Thomsen, 2016).

The positive feedback from students and teachers in the studies suggests that there may be promising prospects for blended supervision. BL has positive effects in terms of motivation, flexibility, and academic achievements for students. BL delivers a wide range of benefits to students, including ways of improving their motivational ability, providing flexible learning environments, and helping boost their academic performance (Rahim, 2019). It encourages collaborative and interactive learning to develop soft skills among students and apply theoretical content to practical, real-life projects (Hasan & Ibrahim, 2017; Namyssova et al., 2019). Furthermore, BL promotes engagement, personalization, and relevance in learning, which are highly effective yet "low-risk strategies" for both teachers and learners (Kaur, 2013, p. 615). Blended supervision has similar advantages as it enables the gaining of direct experience with all the benefits (skill improvement, self-assured students, low cost) without having to work on-the-ground full-time (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013, Hasan et al., 2018). Nonetheless, with these opportunities come challenges that must be met. There are substantial barriers to the implementation of BL, such as no proper facility or access to the required technology and resources, diversified collective interests of students, and inadequacy in teacher training (Shah, 2020). There are similar obstacles to blended supervision, like the hesitance of supervisors towards change, communication challenges, and data collection problems (Djatmika et al., 2022; Miheso-O'Connor et al., 2020). In addition, these constraints are further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed increased restrictions on some schools and limited fieldwork due to the lockdown (Dewi, 2022).

Blended supervision can be beneficial, but it necessitates considering the

aforementioned challenges, addressing them appropriately, and adapting to changes in the delivery of education. Ma and Lee (2021) found that BL also enhances student satisfaction, confidence, attention, and the development of independent as well as cooperative learning career habits (Yoon & Lee, 2010). Likewise, blended supervision improves research output, cultivates the most essential skills, and lessens the burden on supervisors (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013). Despite the benefits of a blended approach, it is necessary to consider the logistical obstacles and constraints such a teaching approach may present.

Given the lack of active application of blended supervision in Bangladesh, it is necessary to conduct research to determine its potential effectiveness and methods. As identified in the literature review, there have been no studies conducted on blended supervision in the context of Bangladesh, which shows a gap regarding knowledge and understanding of the possibilities incorporating this method while mentoring research. This gap needs to be addressed, especially with the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, making it more imperative at a time when there is increasing demand for flexible and innovative educational alternatives. Empirical research on blended supervision in the universities of Bangladesh will provide policymakers, teachers, and supervisors with insights regarding the possible challenges hindering their operation as well as opportunities through which better outcomes can be achieved. These findings will be integrated to influence how decisions are made, institutional practices evolve, and stakeholders better understand the intricacies of academic research mentoring. Evidently, addressing this theory-practice gap within blended supervision will improve the quality of research supervision in the pursuit and fulfillment of student success across the world.

The study is based on Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory (1978), which vitalizes learning as a social phenomenon and an interaction with other people and the environment. Particularly for blended supervision, this theory indicates that activating prospects of collaborative engagement between supervisors and students is central to scaffolding thesis work (as cited in Åkesson & Thomsen, 2016). This is consistent with Vygotsky's ZPD, which emphasizes the importance of learning taking place under the tutelage of a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86), which is supported within an interactive blended supervision model including online interaction as well as face-to-face interaction. Blended supervision allows collaborative learning experiences, peer interaction, and knowledge construction by combining online platforms with traditional supervisory methods (Perez-Cabañero et al., 2021, Uddin et al., 2022). Using this theory as a base, the paper looks at how Vygotsky's social constructivism theory fits in with blended supervision in Bangladesh and how that affects the

effectiveness of research mentoring.

Methodology

Student narrative as methodology

This qualitative research is accomplished using the narrative method. Moen (2006) defined narrative as a set of "significant events between the narrator and their audience" (p. 58), and if we look at narrative from the perspective of sociocultural theory, we can find a link between the context and the individual. According to Moen (2006), a dialogue shapes the stories in narrative research as they discuss the research topic. In their book, Holloway and Freshwater (2009) talked about narrative research, and they said that narrative research is a frequently used approach for conducting qualitative research and has recently become popular. They also said that adding aesthetics, creativity, and craft elements is an artistic goal of narrative research. Furthermore, Carless and Douglas (2017) defined narrative as both research and "a way of theorizing social and psychological phenomena" (p. 307). They added that the term has been used for the past two decades.

Furthermore, Aktar et al. (2022, p. 233) and Overcash (2003, p. 179) stated that "researchers use narrative research to gather and interpret people's personal experiences." Moreover, they added that narrative research does not have a questionnaire boundary, and the participants can share their own personal experiences freely. Greenhalgh and Hurwitz (1998) talked about some common features of narratives. For instance, narrative writing has a proper sequence of time (a beginning, middle, and ending) and is connected to individuals. The narrative is totally based on the personal experience and feelings of the narrator. Moreover, it can capture the interest and focus of the listeners. They added that the stories told by the narrator are somehow connected to the sociocultural atmosphere. Narrative research often depends on prevailing texts, e.g., diaries, personal letters, or autobiographies, to investigate and analyze personal experiences. As per the statement by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "narrative inquiry involves the study of experiences as stories" (p. 20). This emphasizes that narratives themselves can be used as primary data sources, permitting investigators to draw conclusions or generalizations without the necessity of using interviews.

Squire (2008) talked about the increase in the rate of narrative research over the last two decades due to its popularity and shared some of its challenges. Squire (2008) added that narrative research does not start or end in an automatic way, and it does not have any rules, modes, or material for investigation. Moreover, it is mentioned that we are confused about certain facts: we are not sure whether to choose objectivity or the involvement of participants, whether we should

look for the stories in everyday speech, or whether we should use diaries, interviews, newspapers, or TV programs. Squire (2008) found that although narrative research can be challenging sometimes, people use it to get different layers of meaning. In this study, the theses supervisees were guided to write their narratives mainly in three areas: perceptions of blended thesis supervision, prospects of blended supervision and challenges related to blended supervision of thesis.

Sample and sampling technique

This study tried to figure out the challenges, prospects, and effectiveness of blended supervision during the post-pandemic situation from the university students (who have completed their Master's degree) of Bangladesh. This research employed a purposive sampling technique. The study was conducted on six students from three private universities who completed their Master's degree in the English department. In the post-pandemic situation, the students have completed their research by using blended supervision between 2022 and 2023. They were requested to share their ideas, and they have agreed to join in this research by sharing a written narrative about their experience of blended supervision. They were requested to share their narrative experience in around 300 words. The participants enthusiastically shared their story of blended supervision.

Data analysis

In this study, six supervisees' narratives are used. The supervisees are named Anika, Sumaiya, Maisha, Rafiz, Tahmida, and Nihan (pseudonyms).

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants

Supervisees	Number of Face-to-Face Meetings	Number of Online Meetings	Given Time to Complete the Thesis (in Months)	Actual Time taken to Complete Research (in Months)	Number of Publications/ Conference Presentations on the Thesis
Anika	4	18	8	8	1 Publication
Sumaiya	4	8	8	8	0
Maisha	4	15	8	8	1 Publication
Rafiz	3	9	8	10	1 Presentation
Tahmida	4	9	8	9	0
Nihan	4	10	8	8	1 Publication

Table 1 shows that four out of the six supervisees could complete their theses through blended supervision within the given time frame of the institutions. Two supervisees took a little more time. Four supervisees have published or

presented at least one paper from their theses by the time this research paper was completed. Data analysis guidelines of Uddin et al. (2022) is followed to some extent.

Findings

In this study, participants were six university students who have completed their Master's in English from three private universities. All of them shared their personal experiences about their journey with blended supervision during the COVID-19 and post-pandemic situation. They talked about the challenges and prospects of blended supervision. The narratives are provided verbatim, with some editing for grammar and syntax.

Narrative by Anika

To be honest, I didn't have many difficulties with blended supervision. However, managing dates on my end was not easy at first. My supervisor was dissatisfied because he thought I had taken my research for granted, but later I managed it because of blended supervision. I found our supervisor extremely focused on his work, and he was very concerned about upholding the standard of work provided by the supervisees. He was quite strict about deadlines. As a result, I rewrote the draft several times before online submission. On-campus supervision was better for me than Internet supervision. I was able to write down and discuss important points in my notebook. My supervisor could quickly verify those points and then provide feedback.

I believe that online supervision is inferior to offline supervision. Because so many other windows remained open on both sides of Google Meet, attention was naturally distracted. The prospect of BL seems bright, especially during the pandemic. Two years of lockdown enabled students and teachers to practice and become competent at virtual learning. During my supervision in 2022, I took full advantage of blended supervision. As a service holder, I was even supervised, focusing on my flexible schedule. For me, blended supervision is a blessing; I could log in from anywhere. I could share drafts and ideas at any moment using Messenger and Gmail. I took on campus supervision, especially when I began a new chapter following corrections because not every issue can be resolved online. You must also interact with the supervisor in person. During my supervision, I took offline constructive criticism more seriously than virtual feedback.

As previously said, blended supervision is a blessing. It allows you to do whatever you want. It saves you both time and money. It is more useful for those who live far from campus or are in unavoidable situations such as a strike or pandemic. Although there are certain difficulties that should be mentioned here, our country's infrastructure may not be able to handle full-fledged blended learning.

The primary causes of this issue include power cuts, high Internet costs, a lack of computing skills, and the high cost of devices such as laptops and computers. Inaccuracy or a lack of understanding can be a problem for weak students. I would rather receive criticism in person than online. My dedication from the beginning allowed me to graduate on time. It relies on each individual's hard work and dedication. Those who help themselves will benefit through blended supervision.

Narrative by Sumaiya

Throughout the period of my research, I faced a couple of problems, and Internet access was one of them. Due to the slow Internet speed at the time, I occasionally experienced disruptions during online classes and struggled to understand my supervisor's instructions. Moreover, I was not able to access and read through some research papers related to my topic. Those papers were private and controlled by an institution or organization. Access to those articles required permission from gatekeepers. We can save time through blended thesis supervision. It also helps us avoid traffic jams and saves on transportation costs. A supervisor, on the other hand, does not need to visit the university frequently. Furthermore, in mixed thesis supervision, supervisees can develop their confidence and motivation, as well as their interactive skills. Furthermore, they also get opportunities like engagement, instant feedback, etc. A mixture of both in-person and online was very effective for me. It helped me complete my research successfully on time, even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whenever I encountered errors or encountered difficulties in my research, I promptly reached out to my supervisor, who assisted me in resolving the issues. Apart from that, I provided my supervisor with my updated work. Having reviewed it, he gave me feedback and corrected it if necessary.

Narrative by Maisha

I did not face any difficulties that are mentioned by my peers, except for the controlled access to the research field. On the Internet, even on Google Scholar, there are many articles available that need to be paid for to read further. So, I faced difficulties collecting data from past research while working on the literature review. I believe there are many opportunities for blended thesis supervision. During the pandemic, it helped a lot since blended supervision includes online sessions. It helped in distance learning by avoiding traffic jams, which ultimately saved our time. Furthermore, face-to-face supervision significantly aided us in receiving immediate feedback. In face-to-face supervision, our teacher could motivate us more, and it also increased our interactive skills. So, I think I benefited from blended thesis supervision. In my opinion, blended thesis supervision is very effective and the best way to supervise. The quality of supervision increases

with blended supervision. Teachers can give direct feedback to the students, which helps them understand better. It also helps the students graduate on time since it includes online sessions. So, if there is any emergency situation, students can easily attend the class from their home and finish their thesis on time.

Narrative by Rafiz

The first challenge I have experienced is the "lack of positive attitude" from my peers. Initially, their demotivation from the blended thesis supervision stemmed from Internet issues and the limitations of their living area. They did prefer the offline classes more than the online classes because they did not have the required devices or Internet due to financial challenges. The second problem that I have faced is a lack of electricity. Blended supervision is very convenient for both teachers and students. To get general or instant feedback, online supervision saves time, money, and energy. It will also increase the technology skills of the students. Blended supervision is an easier and more time-saving process. Online supervision also removes the tension between teacher and student communication. Sometimes students feel trouble expressing their problems to their teachers. I also felt the same way, but online supervision removes that passivity. Also, online classes can be held at any time, which would be preferable for both students and teachers, and practical work can be left for on campus. Therefore, I believe that blended learning (BL) is an essential component of thesis supervision. Blended thesis supervision is a very effective learning process. The BL process saves time. When I used to inform my supervisor that I needed some guidance, he could easily arrange an online class to guide me and give me effective feedback. If there were no BL process, I would have had to wait a week or a month to complete my thesis. This learning process also maintains the quality of learning very well. So, I think this learning process also needs to be applied to undergraduates to make their learning process better.

Narrative by Tahmida

In online classrooms, eye contact between teacher and students does not happen, and, in some cases, I had to ask the same question repeatedly as I couldn't see my supervisor's expression. A technical issue is a major fact that has happened several times to me. Moreover, I saw that some of my friends faced huge difficulties due to the technical errors, especially those who were staying out of Dhaka during the COVID-19 pandemic and in post-pandemic situations. Moreover, I was a big victim due to the electricity issue. I was preparing my assignments, and I was almost about to finish, but the electricity went off. I lost my whole effort. I was blessed to have online courses, as I am the mother of a toddler. It would be really tough if I had to go to the campus regularly. I am extremely grateful to all of my mentors; they never made me feel that I lacked anything through the

online course. I always got the chance to talk to my teacher any time I needed to.

Overall, it is a great opportunity for new mothers like me. I think blended thesis supervision is definitely a great concept. It surely makes the job easier for both the student and the supervisor. It exemplifies the beneficial use of technology. It can mend the shortcomings I faced in individual online and offline courses. The thesis work can be more convenient, as both the student and the teacher can arrange meetings according to their schedules. Overall, I must say that I would like to have this experience.

Narrative by Nihan
While I was in Dhaka, the Wi-Fi connection was available, and I didn't face many problems. But when I moved back to my hometown, I faced problems because the cellular network was not that strong. Sometimes getting a proper network and being able to attend classes was hard. I had to go to specific places to get full network access. It was particularly challenging during the monsoon season. The places that had a proper network were sometimes pooled with water, and it was hard to stay dry while using electronics. The electricity shortage was a problem as well. The electronic devices being used sometimes did not have charge and I had to borrow someone else's device.

Nonetheless, the supervisor was so helpful and gave us instant feedback online. He did his utmost to make sure we were doing well and staying up-to-date with the feedback. He was understanding of the late submission and helped us through any turbulence. I think both physical and virtual classes have their pros and cons. But in my opinion, face-to-face supervision is far better than online supervision. Of course, we had the privilege of taking supervision online. Physical classes, however, have rules and regulations. To make sure we are getting to class on time, we must be disciplined. We should consult our teachers if we encounter any issues. The humane touch of the regular classes was missing from the virtual ones. So, a blend of physical and virtual supervisions will be effective.

Discussions
Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of blended supervision
From the responses of the participants, it is clearly visible that they are optimistic about blended supervision, and according to their views, it is effective. By going through the past studies of blended learning, we can see that all the researchers have found the effectiveness of BL (Yoon and Lee, 2010; Ma and Lee, 2021; Eryilmaz, 2015; Alijani et al., 2014; Sankar et al., 2022). With the help of blended supervision, students can complete their research within the given time (Sumaiya, Maisha) and "graduate on time" (Maisha). Yoon and Lee (2010) found that BL is time-saving and useful. Maisha added that "in any emergency

situation, students can easily attend the class from their home and finish their thesis on time." Besides, the students can get the chance to correct their mistakes and clear up confusion by getting an immediate response from their supervisors (Sumaiya, Maisha, Rafij). Maisha said that by using the blended supervision technique, "teachers can give direct feedback to the students, which helps the students understand better." Sankar et al. (2022) also said that BL can be effective for getting teachers' attention and having successful interactions with teachers and peers. Moreover, Yoon and Lee (2010) mentioned that BL can help learners to be independent and help them engage in interactive learning activities. In addition, blended supervision "increases the quality of supervision" (Maisha). Similarly, Alijani et al. (2014) found that BL can increase the success rate of students.

Moreover, blended supervision can save time (Anika, Rafiz), and the supervisor can also "give different examples from online articles to make things clear" (Rafiz). In addition, "Blended supervision is a blessing, and it can save money as well" (Anika). Besides, Tahmida added that blended supervision is "a great concept, and it can make the job easier for both the student and the supervisor." Additionally, blended supervision is convenient because the teacher and the students can "arrange meetings according to their convenience" (Tahmida). Moreover, Nihan stated that "face-to-face supervision is far better than online supervision" due to the rules and regulations, "determination of doing good," time-bound classes, teacher-student interaction, and "humane touch," but there is also the privilege of doing online classes. Overall, the participants agreed that blended supervision was helpful for them to complete their research effectively. However, a student should be dedicated and hardworking, and only then can blended supervision help them to complete their research properly (Anika).

Prospects of blended supervision
All six participants were positive about the blended way of supervision while doing their research in a post-pandemic situation. Among all the participants, four of them said that blended supervision can save time (Anika, Sumaiya, Maisha, Rafiz). According to Anika, blended supervision can be beneficial for working people because of the "flexible schedule" which match Kaur (2013) and Rahim (2019). Rahim (2019) also stated how the blended way of learning can be flexible, and Kaur (2013) discussed how blended supervision can ensure flexibility for both teachers and supervisees. Moreover, Rafiz responded that "blended supervision is an easier and more time-saving process." Rafiz also added that "online supervision saved not just time, but also fuel cost." Additionally, Tahmida stated that blended supervision is helpful for the "mother of a toddler" and that "it would be really tough if I had to go to the campus

regularly." Similarly, Anika added that "blended supervision is a blessing" for a service holder student as it gives flexibility in choosing the time and place for supervision (online or face-to-face), and online supervision can save time and face-to-face supervision can help in correcting mistakes.

In addition, some of the participants responded that they got instant feedback from their supervisor by using the blended method of supervision (Sumaiya, Maisha, Tahmida, Nihan). Sumaiya also said that "the supervisor does not need to go to the university frequently" to give instant feedback through blended supervision. Similarly, it is found that face-to-face supervision is "more engaging" (Sumaiya), and the students feel motivated and their interactive skills get upgraded (Maisha). It also matches the previous study of Rahim (2019) and Rahman et al. (2020), who discovered that blended supervision can be motivating and can develop students' skills. Moreover, "online supervision removes passivity as well as tension between teacher and students' communication" and helps the students express themselves freely (Rafiz). On the other hand, online supervision can "help a student in distance learning" (Maisha), "save transportation costs" (Sumaiya) and energy, and "increase the skill of technology in the students" (Rafiz). Similarly, Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2013) added that blended supervision is more cost-effective, which matches our research outcome. Supervisees can work independently when they are supported in blended supervision approach which reflects Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It can also be interpreted that the supervisees co-constructed research skills and knowledge when learning took place both online and offline mode, in a blended learning approach.

However, outcomes of some research do not align with our findings. For example, Emelyanova and Voronina (2017) and Hasan and Ibrahim (2017) argue that online learning is more convenient because of the rich, accessible contents and because it makes the students more engaged, self-directed, and independent. Similarly, Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2013) noted that in face-to-face supervision, students feel anxious to show their unfinished work, and the academic schedule deprives the supervisor of time to provide for the supervisees. Besides, Mali and Lim (2021) found that students prefer face-to-face learning to blended learning. The students only accepted blended learning during the COVID-19 and post-pandemic periods. The results of these researchers differed because their area of work did not concern the Bangladeshi context, having done their research based on different situations.

Challenges of blended supervision
Although blended supervision has received positive responses from the participants, there are some challenges as well. Most of the participants mentioned

that they have faced Internet issues during the online sessions (Sumaiya, Rafiz, Nihan). Nihan mentioned that when she moved back to her hometown, she faced problems due to the "poor cellular network." The result matched with Shah (2020) and Djatmika et al. (2022). Shah (2020) also mentioned lack of Internet access as a challenge in incorporating blended learning. Similarly, Djatmika et al. (2022) found that poor Internet signal can create problems in conducting online classes. Additionally, the participants encountered issues with the electricity (Nihan, Tahmida, Rafiz). Nihan narrated that sometimes the electronic devices used to be out of charge and she "had to borrow someone else's device." Moreover, Sumaiya and Maisha responded that they faced problems due to the "controlled access of research fields." Sumaiya added that "the related articles were private and was asking for the gatekeeper's permission." Hasan et al. (2018) and Pardede and Purnamasari (2021) also pointed out that controlled access of research fields presented a great challenge to research. Besides, Djatmika et al. (2022) mentioned that the data collection process is challenging for the students and, as a result, they lose motivation.

The participants also mentioned other challenges. Anika said that "managing dates was not that easy at first, and my supervisor was dissatisfied because he thought I had taken my research for granted." Anika also added that "online supervision is inferior to offline supervision" and that online classes can be distracting because "other windows can remain open on both sides along with Google Meet." Additionally, Rafiz added that there was a lack of positive attitude among peers, and "they did prefer the offline classes more than the online classes because of not having the applicable devices and Internet due to financial challenges." Shah (2020) also mentioned how a lack of positive attitude can be a hurdle for blended learning. Besides, in online supervision, "eye contact between teacher and students does not happen," and the students cannot see the expression of the supervisor (Tahmida). A similar result was found by Djatmika et al. (2022) and Pardede and Purnamasari (2021). They pointed out that effective communication does not happen on an online platform.

By going through the previous research, we can see that the findings of this study match some of the previous research on similar topics. However, our research failed to uncover some other challenges that other researchers encountered during their research. For example, Shah (2020) found that blended learning can be challenging if there is a lack of access to an e-library, free Internet and e-materials, well-trained teachers, and policies and supervision. Similarly, Bwire and Mwangis (2020) observed that the supervisors were reluctant to use blended supervision due to a lack of self-efficacy. Pardede and Purnamasari (2021) pointed out that supervisors' work load and unspecified roles can create

issues in conducting research. Moreover, Djatmika et al. (2022) and Hasan et al. (2020) pointed out that the transition from offline to online platforms can be challenging to adopt.

Future directions

This study found out the prospects, challenges, and effectiveness of blended supervision from the personal experiences of some university students who have completed their theses during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic situations. Blended supervision is helpful for the supervisors and supervisees because it saves time, money, and energy. Moreover, due to the flexible time schedule, mothers of toddlers, working people, supervisees, and supervisors greatly benefit. Additionally, supervisors can give instant feedback to the students, and the students can get the opportunity to work on it immediately and address their errors. Besides, BL is engaging, students feel greatly motivated, and it removes passivity and tension between teachers and students. In addition, students can express themselves freely during blended supervision as well as save time by avoiding traffic jams during commutes.

However, blended supervision can be challenging. Poor cellular networks, controlled access to research fields or materials, electricity problems, a lack of positive attitude among peers due to poor Internet and financial issues, and so on can create problems for the supervisees. Additionally, students who work and study simultaneously can face problems managing dates due to their busy schedules. Moreover, in online supervision, students can be distracted because of the multiple tabs open on their computers, unlike in offline classes. Besides, in online sessions, eye contact does not occur, which can create issues.

Blended supervision is effective for students as it helps them complete their research on time by incorporating both offline and online platforms, and allowing flexibility with time. Additionally, it improves the quality of the research and helps the students graduate on time. Besides, blended supervision helps the students receive immediate responses from their teachers, clears their confusion, and helps them improve their writing. Moreover, it can save money and energy, and improves the quality of supervision. Thus, blended supervision is a great concept that can make the job easier for both supervisors and supervisees. This study will be helpful for supervisors, students, and policymakers. As it is a unique research topic, it can add great value to the education system. Policymakers can learn about the effectiveness of blended supervision, and incorporate it by addressing the challenges that have emerged from this study.

Limitations of the study

Firstly, there is a need to conduct research on different private and public

universities for better understanding. Secondly, the participants were chosen by personal network, and there were only six participants in this research. Due to the small sample size, the information was limited. As a result, there is a need to conduct research on a larger scale. Thirdly, there was limited access to online articles. As it is a new topic in the Bangladeshi context, materials are not available based on Bangladesh, and supporting material had to be taken from the contexts of other countries. Finally, contextual factors need to be considered while applying the findings to any other context.

Conclusion

The study showed that blended supervision of theses is effective for university students in Bangladesh. It is useful as it integrates the positive aspects of both online and face-to-face supervision. It can be convenient for saving time, money, and energy. Moreover, working people and mothers of toddlers can continue their studies with the help of blended supervision. Additionally, it can be advantageous for the supervisors and supervisees because the supervisors have the opportunity to give instant feedback, and the supervisees can correct their mistakes immediately. Moreover, the supervisees feel more engaged, expressive, and motivated, and their passivity and tension are reduced because of blended supervision. In addition, blended supervision offers flexibility of time, helps to complete research and graduation on time, increases the quality of supervision, and so on. However, blended supervision can be staggering in consequence of a poor network, controlled access to the research field, lack of electricity, paucity of positive attitudes among peers, financial issues, etc. Moreover, supervisees can face trouble managing dates and get distracted during online supervision because of other tabs on the window.

Although blended supervision has its pros and cons, it has received positive feedback from the supervisees, and it should be implemented officially in Bangladesh. This research will be a pioneer for researchers who want to explore blended supervision in Bangladesh. In the future, research can be conducted on blended supervision more elaborately by including students of both private and public universities. Other researchers can also conduct comparative studies between face-to-face supervision and blended supervision. A methodological change in the design can also give new insights about blended thesis supervision. Thus, this study will be beneficial for policymakers, educational bodies, supervisors, and supervisees.

Ethical Statement

All participants gave their consent and were assured about the ethical considerations such as confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation, which were all maintained throughout the study.

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