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The goals of the school-based experience (practicum) in pre-service teacher education: a qualitative study of Israeli mentor teachers' perceptions

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Introduction: The study explores the goals of the school-based experience as perceived by Israeli mentor teachers, who guide pre-service teachers in the host schools as the representatives of the academic institution.
Methods: Fifteen mentor teachers from diverse academic institutions were interviewed.
Results: Following thematic analysis, three goals for the school-based experience were found: (1) *Qualification* – achieving the skills that enable effective teaching; (2) *Socialization* – adapting behavior appropriate for a teacher in school; (3) *Role identity development* – developing attitudes and values associated with the teaching profession.
Discussion: Importantly, the quality of their teaching was not emphasized as a central goal of pre-service teachers' school-based experience.

KEYWORDS
mentor teachers, pre-service teachers, qualitative research, school-based experience, teacher education

Introduction

Pre-service teachers' school-based experience (practicum), in which they are placed in local K-12 classrooms to observe and work with K-12 teachers and students, is an indispensable part of teacher education (García-Noblejas et al., 2023; La Paro et al., 2018; Robinson and Rusznyak, 2020). Among other benefits, the school-based experience facilitates pre-service teachers' transition from a student to a classroom teacher, exposes them to various student populations, helps them understand the complexities of teaching and the full scope of the teacher's role, and allows them to examine the connection between theory and practice (Burn and Mutton, 2015; Dalinger et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Burn and Mutton (2015) outlined seven objectives for the school-based experience. These include recognizing the limitations of research-based understandings for novice teachers, valuing the expertise of experienced teachers, comprehending the intricacy of their knowledge, prioritizing practical experience and experimentation, acknowledging the challenges of inadequate professional learning conditions, preparing teachers for diverse educational settings, and cultivating a commitment to ongoing learning and the

creation of new knowledge among teachers. The current study explores the goals of the school-based experience as perceived by mentor teachers, seeking to understand what mentor teachers, who are crucial in developing teachers, do and think and how that might frame the student teachers' views of what it is to teach is worth academic attention.

Specifically, this study explores the goals of the school-based experience in Israeli teacher education. In 2020, about 30,000 students were enrolled in teacher education programs in Israel (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Israel's Ministry of Education encourages teacher education programs to see the school-based experience as central to the training process (Orland-Barak and Wang, 2021). The Israeli mentor teachers are critical in the school-based experience. As the academic institution's representative, the mentor teacher coordinates between it and the host school, observes students during their practice, and holds workshops on various aspects related to the school-based experience. Pre-service teachers view the mentor teacher as a critical factor in benefitting from the school-based experience (Lofthouse et al., 2020). The current study aims to expand the available knowledge on the goals of school-based experience by answering the following question: What do mentor teachers in Israel perceive as the goals of the school-based experience in pre-service teacher education?

Theoretical background

School-Based experience in teacher education

The school-based experience (practicum) has been shown to significantly influence teacher education (Tarman, 2012) and is at the heart of pre-service teachers' knowledge construction and professional development (Tang, 2004). By observing real teaching/learning contexts and performing tasks under the supervision of mentor teachers (from the academic institution) and coaching teachers (from the host school), pre-service teachers can develop their teaching knowledge and skills and reflect on their educational beliefs (Cheng et al., 2010). The school-based experience supports pre-service teachers' cognitive learning and development and serves as a learning arena in which they maximize their opportunity to link theory with practice (Hascher et al., 2004). The school-based experience provides an opportunity for the pre-service teacher to develop an "experiential understanding" of student learning and appropriate teaching strategies (Retallick and Miller, 2010). Participation in school-based experience experiences is mandated by some certification bodies (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2022; Heafner et al., 2014; NCATE, 2010) and recommended by others (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015; NAEYC, 2009).

Questions have long been asked by various stakeholders about the practical aspects of the school-based experience, such as: At what stage of their program should pre-service teachers engage in the school-based experience? Which schools should they attend for the experience, and for how long? What should they do while they are there? Who will assess whether sufficient professional learning has been achieved and demonstrated? (Allen and Wright, 2014; Cohen et al., 2013). Teacher preparation programs worldwide differ from one another in the duration of the school-based experience, the setting in which this experience occurs, and the competencies and outcomes expected from the pre-service teacher. The duration of school-based experience ranges from having one classroom-based experience to multiple experiences in classrooms (Bornfreund, 2011; Rice and McLaughlin, 2007). The setting can vary across the ages of children and the racial, socio-economic, and ethnic backgrounds of both teachers and children (Lim et al., 2009). In addition, programs vary regarding the expected and required competencies for pre-service teachers during the school-based experience and in using assessments to document learning, outcomes, and growth (La Paro et al., 2014). Despite these differences, it is agreed that the school-based experience is vital for becoming a teacher (Baum and Korth, 2013; Zeichner, 2012).

Under what conditions and through what mechanisms does the school-based experience improve pre-service teachers' practices? What should be done to facilitate this transformation? In some contexts, policy consensus around the significance of the school-based experience has led to an increase in the amount of time spent in schools. However, the assumption that more time in school is sufficient to enhance the quality of training has constantly been challenged. One of the contributing factors to making the school-based experience more meaningful for pre-service teachers is overcoming the so-called "theory/practice divide" (Guillen and Zeichner, 2018). To this end, the partnership arrangements between the academic institutions and the hosting schools should be strengthened. In addition, the practical, skills-based components of academic institutions' programs should be expanded (Kidd and Murray, 2020; Lillejord and Børte, 2016). Another contributing factor is the ability of pre-service teachers to reflect on their school-based experience. Reflective practice, which involves learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice, should be adopted (Brandenburg et al., 2017). Action research approaches should also be utilized (Goodwin and Kosnik, 2013). In addition, the mentoring and supervision skills of mentor teachers must be developed through appropriate training (Mackie, 2020; White and Forgasz, 2016).

The goals of the school-based experience

The current study explores the goals of the school-based experience as perceived by mentor teachers. These goals need to be discussed in the context of a broader question: What are the ultimate goals of teacher education? To address what he called a "missing paradigm" (Shulman, 1986, p. 4) in teaching and teacher education Shulman (1987, 1996, 2004), coined the term Pedagogical Content Knowledge, which combines both the content knowledge of a specific subject and the knowledge of how to teach that subject (Gess-Newsome et al., 2019). According to Shulman (1986), Pedagogical Content Knowledge "goes beyond knowledge of subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge for teaching". (p. 9), It includes "the most useful forms of representation of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations – in a word, the ways of

representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others" (p. 9) as well as "an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult: the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning". (p. 9). Introducing the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge Shulman (1987, 1996, 2004) answered the need for paying extra attention to the subject matter and overcame the artificial distinction between content and pedagogy (Rollnick and Mavhunga, 2016).

In recent years, several scholars recommended moving "from a predominant focus on specifying the necessary knowledge for teaching toward specifying teaching practices that entail knowledge and doing" (McDonald et al., 2013, p. 378). Against the backdrop of the lacuna between theory and practice in teacher education, practice-based teacher education seeks to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to put teaching methods into practice and use those methods in various teaching situations (Jao et al., 2018). This emphasis on practice led to a focus on specific core practices (Forzani, 2014). To identify them, Grossman et al. (2008) proposed the following characteristics of core practices: (1) they frequently occur in teaching; (2) they can be enacted in classrooms in different curricula or instructional approaches; (3) beginners can master them; (4) they enable learning more about students and teaching; (5) they maintain the integrity and complexity of teaching; (6) they are research-based and have the potential to improve student outcomes. TeachingWorks (a project at the University of Michigan) pointed to 19 core practices in various subject areas, grade levels, and contexts. These practices include, among others, leading a group discussion, eliciting and interpreting individual students' thinking, diagnosing common patterns of student thinking, and setting up and managing small-group work (TeachingWorks, 2021). To support novice teachers in learning how to implement these core practices capably, teacher educators need to use pedagogies such as *representations of practice* – showing what these core practices look like and breaking them down into their components, and *approximations of practice* – allowing pre-service teachers to try these core practices out as they learn (Grossman et al., 2018).

When it comes to the specific goals of the school-based experience, Korthagen and Buitink (2020) argued that there is a strong tendency towards school-based teacher education "with the aim of maintaining firm connections between educational institutes and their satellite schools (professional development schools)". Liu et al. (2022) identified three types of processes describing the role of teaching experiences in student teachers' belief development: belief confirmation, belief change, and belief elicitation. Most often, experiences confirmed student teachers' teacher-centered beliefs. Zeichner (2012) asserted that when academic knowledge and knowledge that exists in communities and schools come together in less hierarchical and more democratic ways in the service of teacher learning, colleges and universities can fulfill their mission in the education of teachers. Burn and Mutton (2015) summarised the following seven goals of the school-based experience: (1) Acknowledgement of both the profound value and the inevitable limitations of decontextualized research-based understandings of practice for beginning teachers. (2) Appreciation of the rich seams of knowledge, understanding, and skill that beginners could potentially access in the practice of experienced teachers. (3) Understanding of the complexity and context-specific nature of experienced teachers' knowledge and of the processes by which it is developed within particular communities of practice. (4) Explicit recognition of the fundamental importance of experience within teachers' learning and of their need to test all ideas offered to them. (5) Awareness of the poor conditions for professional learning that tend to prevail in schools where ITE is only a marginal concern. (6) Concern about equipping teachers to work effectively in educational contexts very different from those with which they have been familiar. (7) Ambition to produce teachers committed to life-long learning and capable of generating the new professional knowledge that they will need to adapt to different contexts and changing demands within the educational system.

The current study aims to illuminate the views held by a group in initial teacher education that is not often spoken to by exploring the perceptions of mentor teachers regarding the objectives of the school-based experience. Since this study was conducted in Israel, the following section presents the Israeli context.

The Israeli context

In Israel, pre-service teachers study at higher education institutions, both education colleges and universities. The majority of teachers graduate from education colleges (Hofman and Niederland, 2012; Oplatka, 2002). Teacher education in Israel is governed by both The Ministry of Education and The Council for Higher Education. The former is responsible for ensuring adequate training for teaching, and the latter approves academic qualification programs and degrees (Orland-Barak, 2018). In recent decades, academicization processes have been encouraged, which require integrating academic content into the teacher education curriculum. Recently, influenced by global trends, there has also been a strong movement towards synergies and meaningful links between pre-service teachers' learning at their academic institutions and the school-based experience (Maskit and Orland-Barak, 2015).

The pre-service teacher's school-based experience is guided by a teacher from the host school ("coaching teacher") and a mentor teacher representing the higher-education institution. The mentor teacher has experience in K-12 instruction and is responsible for meeting the needs of the pre-service teacher's professional development. The mentor teacher observes the pre-service teacher's instruction, providing them feedback together with the coaching teacher. The mentor teacher also holds reflection workshops with the pre-service teachers. Despite the importance of the school-based experience, there is neither a particular training curriculum nor defined prerequisites to becoming a mentor teacher (Naifeld and Nissim, 2020).

There are two main models of school-based experience in Israel (Lahavy, 2009). Under the traditional apprenticeship model, the pre-service teacher acts as the protégé of an experienced teacher, occasionally delivering lessons or parts of them. Under the professional development school (PDS) model, a partnership is created between the academic institution and the school (Dana, 2017; Martin and Mulvihill, 2020). A similar

program, "Classroom-Academy", has been running for the past few years, which lengthens the duration of the school-based experience (Naifeld and Nissim, 2020).

Method

Research design

The current qualitative study uses the phenomenological method, which focuses on "describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 76). Based on this qualitative approach, this study depicts the shared meaning that fifteen mentor teachers ascribe to their perceptions of the goals of pre-service teachers' school-based experience (Marshall et al., 2021). For this study, perception is the way in which one apprehends, understands, interprets, or thinks about something (Given, 2009).

Study participants

To recruit study participants, fifteen academic institutions were first selected. Heterogeneous sampling (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) was implemented regarding the type of institution (university/college of education), sector (religious/non-religious, Jewish/Arabic), and location (a geographical area in Israel). In January and February 2020, an initial referral was made to the head of the teacher education program in each of the fifteen institutions. The referral included an explanation of the purposes of the research, its methodology, and its ethics. After receiving the consent of those responsible for the participation of that academic institution in the study (100% agreement), they were asked to recommend a mentor teacher from their academic institution who was familiar with the school-based experience and could share their experiences and perceptions about it.

Although participants were recommended by program heads, heterogeneous institutional sampling was first employed to ensure diversity across institution type, sector, and geographical region. The purpose of requesting recommendations was to identify mentor teachers with substantial experience in supervising practicum students, rather than to select participants based on a particular stance. Furthermore, because the study aimed to explore shared meanings within a phenomenological framework, depth of experience was prioritized over representational proportionality. These measures were intended to mitigate potential gatekeeping effects and enhance credibility.

The study participants were 12 females and three males (probably representing the sex division among Israeli mentor teachers). As to their education, eight of them held master's degrees, and seven had a Ph.D. Table 1 presents the participants' information.

For ethical reasons, all study participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and could withdraw from the study at any time (one participant left due to lack of time). They were promised confidentiality (pseudonyms were assigned) and were asked to provide written consent based on an understanding of the purpose of the study.

Data collection

Data collection was based on interviews with mentor teachers. In line with the phenomenological design, the purpose was not triangulation across multiple stakeholder groups but the exploration of shared meanings within a specific group experiencing a common phenomenon. The study therefore

TABLE 1 The information of study participants.

No.	Pseudonym	Sex	Experience (years)	Education	Institution
1	Albert	Male	12	PhD	College/Jewish, Non-religious
2	Anne	Female	8	MA	College/Jewish, Non-religious
3	Barbara	Female	16	PhD	University
4	Diana	Female	12	MA	College/Jewish, Religious
5	Elizabeth	Female	7	PhD	College/Jewish, Non-religious
6	Esther	Female	18	PhD	University
7	George	Male	10	MA	University
8	Jacob	Male	12	MA	College/Arabic
9	Lisa	Female	11	MA	University
10	Margaret	Female	15	MA	College/Jewish, Non-religious
11	Mary	Female	10	PhD	College/Arabic
12	Rachel	Female	8	MA	College/Jewish, Non-religious
13	Sarah	Female	6	PhD	College/Jewish, Religious
14	Sophia	Female	11	PhD	College/Jewish, Non-religious
15	Victoria	Female	14	MA	College/Jewish, Non-religious

focused deliberately on mentor teachers' perceptions in order to capture the essence of how this group conceptualizes the goals of the practicum. While additional perspectives from student teachers, supervisors, or classroom observations could offer complementary insights, the present design prioritized depth of experiential understanding within one participant group over comparative multi-source analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were used to maintain consistency over the concepts covered in each interview (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Flick, 2018) alongside striving to articulate new meanings and deepen understanding of the phenomena (Leigh-Osroosh, 2021). The researchers developed and used an "interview guide" that included key pre-planned questions and targeted topics. Nevertheless, the interviews were also conversational, with new questions arising from previous responses whenever possible. Therefore, the interviewer could "respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). The interviews included questions such as: "What is particularly important to you in your work as a mentor teacher?"; "What regularities do you maintain as a mentor teacher?"; and "What do you focus on in your work as a mentor teacher?".

The interviews took place from March to August 2020. The researchers conducted thirteen interviews and a research assistant conducted the remaining two. The first five interviews were conducted face-to-face, and following the Covid-19 pandemic, ten more interviews were conducted over the Zoom platform. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. To achieve trustworthiness, transcripts were sent back to participants along with a request that they evaluate their responses and make any necessary additions or modifications (Koelsch, 2013). In addition, recognizing the importance of reflective journals in qualitative research (Ortlipp, 2008), the researchers wrote a personal reflective research log throughout the study to ensure critical thinking.

Data analysis

Data analysis is designed to bring order, structure, and meaning to the raw data mass. The analysis in this study was based on thematic analysis (Xu and Zammit, 2020). The researchers first read the collected data several times to become familiar with it. In the next stage, the data were sorted to look for statements that were somewhat related to the research question. As explained by Miles et al. (2014): "Data condensation is not something separate from analysis. It is a part of analysis. The researcher's decisions – which data chunks to code and which to pull out… are all analytic choices" (p. 12). Following that, the statements identified in the previous stage were coded. Coding was "the action of identifying a passage of text… that exemplifies some idea or concept and then connecting it to a named code that represents that idea or concept" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 148). Each statement was linked to a named code that represented an idea or concept (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This involved open, data-driven coding and not concept-driven coding because the researchers did not access the data with a developed system of codes but rather searched for concepts in the text without prior conceptualization and allowed the text to speak for itself (Saldaña and Omasta, 2018). After capturing the data's essence, the researchers looked for patterns and relationships. Similar statements were collected into clusters to generalize their meanings and produce categories. Category construction in qualitative research may be confusing because data within the categories cannot always be accurately and discretely delineated; however, statements were grouped and regrouped together when their codes had something in common until satisfactory categories appeared. It was like "decorating a room; you try it, step back, move a few things, step back again, try a serious reorganization, and so on" (Abbott, 2004, p. 215). The categories developed at this stage form the basis for the Findings section.

Findings

The current study sought to answer the following question: What do mentor teachers in Israel perceive as the goals of the pre-service teachers' school-based experience? Analysis of the qualitative data revealed three main goals: *qualification*, *socialization*, and *role identity development*. Q*ualification* refers to acquiring the skills and knowledge that will enable them to be effective teachers. *Socialization* concerns adopting the standards of behavior that are viewed as appropriate to the host school. *Role identity development* is about developing the perceptions and assimilating the values associated with the teaching profession.

Qualification

Interview data suggested that the first goal of pre-service teachers' school-based experience, as perceived by Israeli mentor teachers, is *qualification*, which entails everything needed for the teaching profession's core goal – getting the class to learn. Mentor teachers viewed the school-based experience as an opportunity to get pre-service teachers acquainted with the diverse challenges of teaching in the classroom and effective coping strategies.

Notably, the most frequently mentioned component of *qualification* was classroom management. Mentor teachers believed that dealing with students' extreme behaviors could be a discouraging and even daunting experience for novice teachers and claimed this to be their main difficulty. Twelve participants (Albert, Anne, Barbara, Elizabeth, Esther, George, Lisa, Margaret, Rachel, Sarah, Sophia, and Victoria) described themselves as helping the pre-service teachers understand how to talk to misbehaving students, employing a skillful balance of hiding the teacher's feelings and using techniques to prevent aggravation of the behavior. Albert, with twelve years of experience as a mentor teacher, emphasized classroom management and student discipline: "I mean, they're really going to deal in depth with classroom management and issues related to discipline. The mentor teacher facilitating this workshop will be able to actually look together with them at what is being done". In contrast to the majority, Mary, with ten years of experience as a mentor teacher, emphasized the "danger" entailed in focusing on behavioral issues as unhelpful: "I'm saying you have to be careful here about falling into this deep hole, it's deep and it's somewhat futile".

With regard to instructional abilities, lesson planning was frequently mentioned by mentor teachers. However, they

referred to it as a means to get into an instructional conversation with the pre-service teacher and a significant component of their evaluation rather than as an instructional ability that should be developed. Six mentor teachers (Barbara, Elizabeth, George, Margaret, Sophia, and Victoria) demonstrated a responsive approach to instructional abilities, beginning their sentences with the phrase "if I see…" and then stating their suggestions for reacting to that situation. In fact, only five mentor teachers (Barbara, Diana, Esther, Jacob, and Sophia) noted aspects of instructional abilities and teaching methods as the school-based experience's goals. Three of them (Barbara, Esther, and Jacob) mentioned focusing on general pedagogical knowledge, while another two (Diana and Sophia) referred to knowledge about teaching content in particular ways to lead to enhanced student understanding.

Eleven study participants (Anne, Barbara, Diana, Elizabeth, Esther, Jacob, Lisa, Mary, Rachel, Sarah, and Sophia) emphasized that their role is not to deal with subject-matter knowledge, as explained by Anne, with eight years of experience as a mentor teacher, who claimed that she did not have to engage in subject-matter knowledge because it is supposed to be taught during academic lessons: "We don't teach them their discipline knowledge, they have a bachelor's degree, so they already come with this knowledge, and what we focus on is the teaching in the field". In some cases, avoiding instructional issues was not presented as logical or ideological, but rather as a result of how the school-based experience is organized. For example, Sarah, with six years of experience as a mentor teacher, pointed out that her group consisted of pre-service teachers in various subject matters and focused on generic and consensual topics such as discipline.

Socialization

The second goal of pre-service teachers' school-based experience, as perceived by mentor teachers in Israel, which emerged in data analysis, is *socialization*. In this study, *socialization* is about becoming members of the school organization and internalizing its norms.

The interviews show that substantial attention was given to taking part in school activities. Ten mentor teachers (Albert, Diana, Elizabeth, Jacob, Lisa, Margaret, Rachel, Sarah, Sophia, and Victoria) addressed these events as part, and even as a crucial untaught aspect, of "the real teacher's life" (Jacob, with 12 years of experience as a mentor teacher). Various school routines were mentioned by the mentor teachers as being more relevant than pedagogy, as noted by Lisa, with 11 years of experience as a mentor teacher, who emphasized events such as school trips and meetings: "I want them to understand that the teacher's work includes many areas. If the coaching teacher is now on a field trip and you're supposed to join them, you'll be part of the mission. And if there's a meeting going on about a particular school-related topic, you'll take part". Elizabeth, with seven years of experience as a mentor teacher talked about tasks such as ceremonies, plays, and shows that received attention in the school-based experience: "As I said, the program was built according to the annual life cycle. So, if in September a teacher is busy designing the classroom… we had Parents' Day and parties. We discussed the role of a party, what's the goal, and also Parents' Day and how to prepare for it". Interestingly, the mentor teachers reported that they discuss these issues during workshops, but are not actually accompanying pre-service teachers while experiencing events such as Parents' Day or a trip.

In addition, five mentor teachers (Albert, Diana, Elizabeth, Margaret, and Sophia) saw themselves as responsible for *socialization* regarding instructing pre-service teachers how to behave in different situations at school, such as how to refer to staff members and what to do during lesson breaks. They wanted the pre-service teachers to know the unwritten rules and practices of the school, which allow for proper integration into the school personnel. One mentor teacher encouraged the pre-service teachers to bring their unique skills (e.g., technological skills) to the attention of the teachers in the school and offer to help. Margaret, with 15 years of experience as a mentor teacher, warned the pre-service teachers: "When you hear gossip, do not participate, and when a teacher tells you their secret, keep it to yourself. And never talk trash. Showing your colleagues that they can trust you is a basic step in building solid relationships with them".

Moreover, three mentor teachers (Elizabeth, Lisa, and Sarah) attached importance to the pre-service teachers' understanding of the school system: who is responsible for what and who to contact in each specific matter. They pointed to the task of helping new teachers become more aware of the dynamics of various school processes such as decision-making, implementing school policy, and allocating resources within schools, ranging from allocation of teacher-student ratios to the distribution of paper and pencils.

Role identity development

The third goal of pre-service teachers' school-based experience, as perceived by Israeli mentor teachers, is *role identity development*, which means developing the perceptions and attitudes required for the teaching profession.

Eleven mentor teachers (Albert, Anne, Barbara, Diana, Elizabeth, George, Lisa, Mary, Rachel, Sarah, and Victoria) saw the strengthening of a sense of efficacy as a critical component of their work. Support was chiefly described as helping the pre-service teachers gain confidence and self-efficacy. In this context, Barbara, with sixteen years of experience as a mentor teacher, emphasized the importance of listening to the pre-service teachers: "They need someone to listen to the entire complexity, not necessarily from the perspective of the discipline - math, Arabic, and so on, but rather someone who will see the big picture. The pre-service teacher needs someone to make them stronger, to listen to them, to see the difficulty". George, with ten years of experience as a mentor teacher, described it as a tension between the instructional goals and the emotional and self-esteem needs: "We must also address the emotional realm, try to strengthen them, boost their abilities. When we see that the problem is in the professional field, then I refer them to their coaching teacher in order to receive, plan and produce the material. So, we try to cope on both levels, at the professional level of teaching practice and at the emotional level, how they deal with the difficulties".

Imparting values to pre-service teachers, the mentor teachers labeled their own work as an "inspiration" to the pre-service teachers. In this context, six mentor teachers (Barbara, Diana, Esther, Mary, Rachel, and Victoria) mentioned the ability to care, listen and show empathy. For example, Rachel, with eight years of experience as a mentor teacher, highlighted empathy and introspection: "I would like to strengthen the ability of empathy and introspection of teachers, their ability to see the other, to see a complex, multi-dimensional vision… [teachers] who will have patience and tolerance for processes". Five mentor teachers (Diana, Elizabeth, Margaret, Mary, and Victoria) mentioned leadership, aspiring to make the pre-service teacher a leader who initiates and brings a proactive approach to class, as noted by Diana, with 12 years of experience as a mentor teacher: "First and foremost it's about the educator as a visionary leader". Three mentor teachers (Esther, Mary, and Rachel) sought to cultivate the pre-service teachers as mentors, who see the students' strengths and help develop them, as explained by Esther, with 18 years of experience as a mentor teacher, who viewed teachers as leaders: "The focus is on accompanying the pre-service teacher on her journey to becoming an elementary school teacher. I will say not only a teacher, but also an educator and even more than that – a leader. That means, besides teaching her class, how to conduct herself at school in a way that she initiates, takes the lead, and proposes projects".

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that Israeli mentor teachers conceptualize the school-based experience as serving purposes that extend beyond instructional technique alone. Rather than centering subject-specific pedagogy, the mentors emphasized qualification primarily in terms of classroom management, organizational socialization, and the development of professional identity. This configuration of goals raises important questions regarding the place of instructional expertise within the practicum and invites a reconsideration of how the aims of school-based experience are framed in teacher education discourse. The discussion that follows situates these findings within the broader literature on teacher preparation.

Research on pre-service teachers' school-based experience is extensive, with recent studies continuing to highlight the perceived benefits of the practicum for student teachers' professional growth and classroom readiness (e.g., García-Noblejas et al., 2023). However, its goals were not sufficiently investigated (Allen and Wright, 2014; Cohen et al., 2013; Mattsson et al., 2012). This study examined the perceptions of Israeli mentor teachers in relation to the goals of pre-service teachers' school-based experience. Qualitative data analysis yielded three main goals.

The three goals: qualification, socialization and role identity development

The first goal is *qualification*, which involves developing the knowledge and skills needed to become a productive teacher. Specifically, Israeli mentor teachers consider the prevention and treatment of disciplinary problems a critical goal of the pre-service teachers' school-based experience. Classroom management is vital for ensuring student academic success but is a significant challenge for novice teachers (Wolff et al., 2015). The study participants prioritized and emphasized developing an ability to maintain discipline in the classroom and successfully address inappropriate behavior. For them, instilling discipline and order in the classroom is a prerequisite for effective instruction, and difficulties in this aspect often evoke a feeling of helplessness or even impotence in pre-service teachers. Therefore, the mentor teachers viewed it as a primary goal of the school-based experience.

The second goal was *socialization*, which is the process through which pre-service teachers adopt or create social strategies that are appropriate for the teaching profession and the particular school in which they work. During socialization within the organization, a novice teacher, as a new member of the school community, acquires a manner of behavior and adapts to the school (Paula and Grīnfelde, 2018). From the study participants' perspective, the change from a student role to a teacher role does not always occur spontaneously. Pre-service teachers need to learn the school's norms and customs, developing sets of behaviors as they confront social situations. Thus, Israeli mentor teachers ascribed much importance to the integration of pre-service teachers into the school "order", understanding the overt and covert expectations about their work and role. Since national context matters for initial teacher education, future research could investigate whether there is something in the Israeli school system that makes this necessary, or something in the choice to have mentor teachers doing this work that enables it, and what this seems to contribute to successful journeys of student teachers.

The third goal was *role identity development*. Recent systematic reviews underscore the central role of the practicum in shaping student teachers' affect, beliefs, and professional identities (Österling and Christiansen, 2022). Each of us has multiple identities because identity is a reflection of the context or activity in which the person is situated. A person assumes the identity of a parent or partner when they are at home, but takes on their own identity as a productive community member on entering a school board meeting (Kaplan and Garner, 2017). One of our identities is the role identity, which is used when we are at work (Pennington and Richards, 2016).

The *role identity development* in the present study included two interrelated components. First, Israeli mentor teachers emphasized the importance of strengthening pre-service teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy has been consistently associated with motivation, perseverance, and student achievement (Clark and Newberry, 2019). Participants therefore sought to cultivate confidence in pre-service teachers' capacity to plan, organize, and implement instruction effectively. The emphasis placed on reinforcing efficacy and emotional resilience aligns with recent scholarship highlighting the pivotal role of mentoring in supporting well-being during the practicum (Dreer-Goethe, 2023). From this perspective, mentoring extends beyond instructional supervision to encompass affective and relational dimensions that are essential for sustainable professional development.

Second, mentor teachers aimed to foster professional values and dispositions, including empathy, care, and leadership. In this respect, *role identity development* can be understood as intertwined with socialization. Socialization involves not only learning organizational norms and behavioral expectations, but also internalizing the ethical commitments and professional orientations associated with teaching.

The integration of the goals

Overall, this study suggests that the goals of pre-service teachers' school-based experience, as perceived by Israeli mentor teachers, are not rooted in the pre-service teachers' ability to convey subject-specific knowledge. As mentioned above, there are differing opinions about the essential components of teacher education. Some scholars advocate concentrating on the necessary knowledge for teaching, both content knowledge – teachers' understanding of the subject matter taught, and pedagogical content knowledge – teachers' understanding of how to make the subject matter taught accessible to students (Gess-Newsome et al., 2019; Shulman, 2004). Other scholars recommend focusing on core practices, which are strategies, routines, and moves that can be learned by teachers. These practices occur with high frequency in teaching and can be implemented in classrooms across different curricula or instructional approaches (Grossman et al., 2018; McDonald et al., 2013). While scholars somewhat disagree on how to prepare teachers for their role, they all agree on the overarching goal of improving pre-service teachers' instructional abilities. However, the findings of this study show that in Israel, the school-based experience is perceived as only partially related to helping teachers master effective teaching methods.

As mentioned above, Burn and Mutton (2015) identified seven goals for the school-based experience: (1) Acknowledge limitations of research-based understandings for beginners. (2) Appreciate the knowledge of experienced teachers. (3) Understand the complexity of experienced teachers' knowledge. (4) Recognize the importance of experience and test all ideas. (5) Be aware of poor conditions for professional learning. (6) Equip teachers for different contexts. (7) Develop teachers committed to life-long learning and generating new knowledge. From the perspective of Israeli mentor teachers, the ultimate goals of the school-based experience are learning classroom management, undergoing a socialization process, and developing self-efficacy. They hardly mention the body of knowledge pre-service teachers need for teaching, the knowledge they need to transform a particular subject matter for student learning, and the instructional practices that are essential for promoting improved student results. Indeed, classroom management is a condition for effective teaching, socialization makes pre-service teachers caring and empathetic, and teachers' self-efficacy contributes to student performance. However, the study participants did not directly embed the objectives of the school-based experience in the teaching/learning core function of schooling.

It should be noted that Israeli mentor teachers are typically experts in specific subject areas and do not work across multiple disciplines. Therefore, one might expect them to place strong emphasis on subject-specific instruction in order to ensure that student teachers graduate with well-developed instructional competencies. However, the findings suggest that the quality of subject-specific instruction is not perceived as a central goal of the school-based experience. This discrepancy raises important questions regarding how the purposes of the practicum are understood and prioritized.

Although the significance of mentor teachers' work is undisputed, Israeli teacher education programs do not require formal prerequisites for becoming a mentor teacher, nor do they provide structured preparation programs for this role (Naifeld and Nissim, 2020). At the same time, recent scholarship calls for rethinking traditional mentoring models and moving toward more holistic and reflective approaches that recognize the complex and multifaceted roles of mentor teachers in contemporary educational contexts (Ben-Amram and Davidovitch, 2024). In this light, clarifying and critically examining the goals of the practicum with mentor teachers becomes not merely a theoretical consideration, but a necessary component of their professional preparation.

Theoretical and practical contributions

Based on the present study's findings, structured dialogue about the goals of the school-based experience could form part of the selection and preparation process of mentor teachers, as well as their ongoing professional development. Such dialogue may benefit not only mentor teachers themselves but also the broader faculty of teacher education programs. Thus, the integration of the three goals - qualification, socialization, and role identity development - may serve as a conceptual model highlighting the interrelationships among these goals and the dynamics of their development across different stages of teachers' professional trajectory: the teacher education period, the induction period (internship), and the stage of ongoing professional development. Each goal may evolve across these periods through mentoring processes tailored to the specific stage and institutional context in which teachers operate.

Although the study is situated within the Israeli teacher education system, the three identified goals, qualification, socialization, and role identity development, reflect dimensions that are likely relevant across diverse educational contexts. While specific emphases may vary depending on national policy, institutional structures, or cultural expectations regarding teaching, the tension between technical preparation, organizational integration, and professional identity formation appears to be a broader feature of teacher education internationally. Therefore, the findings may serve as a conceptual lens for examining practicum goals in other sociocultural settings. Future comparative research could investigate how these goals are prioritized differently across countries.

Limitations and future directions

This study produced new knowledge on the goals of pre-service teachers' school-based experience as perceived by Israeli

mentor teachers. However, it has several limitations. First, the limited number of study participants is insufficient to generalize the findings to all Israeli teacher education. Further research is required to establish the findings' validity. Second, the data were collected at a particular point in time. Since teacher education in Israel is undergoing some changes, repeated data collection over time could reveal trends of change in the goals of pre-service teachers' school-based experience. Third, the data were collected in a particular context: Israeli teacher education programs. Replicating this study worldwide will enable us to compare the findings of this study with results from other countries. Fourth, as with any self-reporting method, the interview offered little control over whether participants might provide socially desirable responses. Research using techniques such as direct observation may supplement mentor teachers' self-reports with more objective data on the goals of pre-service teachers' school-based experience. Fifth, data analysis did not look for the interactions between the perceptions of Israeli mentor teachers and variables such as gender, experience, academic degree, the type of academic institution (university/college of education), and sector (religious/non-religious, Jewish/Arabic). The goals identified in the present study were derived from statements emerging from the interviews. To strengthen the findings of the qualitative research, future studies should examine the relationships among the different goals, including across various stages of teacher preparation, using quantitative methods, such as multifactor analysis of variance. This approach may yield integrated data that would also enable the measurement of these goals across diverse cultural and international contexts.

Conclusion

This qualitative study inquired into the goals of the school-based experience, which is part of teacher education, as perceived by Israeli mentor teachers, who guide the pre-service teachers in their host schools. Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews identified three primary goals: *Qualification*, which focuses mainly on class management skills; *Socialization*, which focuses on adapting behavior standards that are appropriate for a teacher in school; and *Role identity development*, which focuses on the development of self-efficacy and values related to the teaching profession. Notably, Israeli mentor teachers did not concentrate on the goal of imparting subject-specific knowledge. Further research in various sociocultural contexts would be advisable to compare this study's findings with other countries.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by The Research Authority of Achva Academic College. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

DN: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. HS: Writing – original draft, Investigation, Supervision, Data curation, Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization. OA-U: Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization, Resources. IL: Methodology, Data curation, Investigation, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. YG: Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing.

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