

ARAB ISRAEL BEGINNER TEACHERS EXPERIENCES

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine beginning teachers' perceptions during their first months of teaching.

Responses to interviews were qualitatively analyzed. Some prevalent themes emerged from the teachers' comments and were explored to answer the research questions:

1. What do stage teachers find challenging in their first months of teaching?
2. What stage teachers feel are their strengths during their first months of teaching?
3. How well do teachers feel their teacher education programs prepared them for their first months of teaching?
4. In which areas of their teacher education program would BT like to have received more instruction?

Key words: beginning teachers, Arab Israel, induction, education programs, self-perceptions, professional learning experiences, sense of preparedness, challenges.

One of the key observations highlighted in the education literature is the need for appropriate pedagogies in teacher education to meet teachers' learning and development needs in their varied socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, in pursuit of pedagogical approaches in initial teacher education that is appropriate

for the Arab particular social contexts this study set out to explore the self-perceptions, lived experiences, and expressed professional learning needs of beginning teachers (BTs) in the Arab Israel context. Significant research has been conducted over the past decades in on the perceptions, professional learning experiences, and lived experiences of teachers. However, there is still a concern amongst minority cultural groups throughout the globe, that educational researchers have been “slow to acknowledge [and appreciate] their culture and cultural differences as key components in successful research practice and understandings” (Bishop, 2005, p. 19). The above statement underscores the need to examine the lived experiences of teacher’s in particular socio-cultural settings, in order to make sense of why teachers approach their teaching roles in the way they do. Hence, a study is framed around the above premise in order to contribute towards the existing knowledge base, and also to create new knowledge and understanding about teachers’ professional learning experiences in the Arab context. This study employed an interpretive qualitative case study research approach, in an effort to get a comprehensive understanding of the professional learning experiences of BTs in the Arab Israel context.

Research focus and questions

For the past two and half decades, only the Arab teacher education institution has educated a thousand teachers who were then recruited into the Arab school system. However, little research has been conducted that examined how prepared those teachers were during their initial experiences and their lived experiences during the initial months of their teaching careers. The purpose of this study was to gain an insight into and an understanding of the experiences of these Beginning Teachers (BTs) during the first two months of their teaching careers. Of particular interest was the BTs’ self-perceived sense of preparedness, their experiences of how they were acculturated into the school working culture, and the support mechanisms provided in schools to guide and support them during the

first two years of their teaching careers. Therefore, the overarching research question that guided this study is: What are the self-perceptions of Beginning Teachers about their preparedness to teach, their lived experiences, and professional learning experiences during their initial teacher education and the first two years of their teaching careers in the Israel Arab context?

Methodology

This study used qualitative research methods.

The qualitative research approach was favored for this study because the study involved an investigation of BTs' experiences in a natural setting. Additionally, qualitative research approaches suited the focus and purpose of this study because qualitative research is viewed as a situated activity which locates researchers in specific socio-cultural contexts, and involves the description and interpretation of experiences by individuals in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Interpretive qualitative research

The intention of this study was to explore, interpret and theorize the experiences of Arab' BTs, how they perceived their roles as BTs, and the social interactions in the schools they were posted to in their first teaching engagement. Research that seeks to discover and understand how individuals in various contexts experience and interact with their environments and construct meaning out of their experiences is seen as using a qualitative interpretive approach (Merriam, 2002). The key focus is to understand situations in their uniqueness, and as part of specific contexts, with their own social interactions: for instance, how people such as teachers think and how they come to develop the perceptions they hold about their teaching roles (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Furthermore, the understanding that is reached based on the findings of such research cannot be used either to generalize or to predict. Rather, the understanding reached is an end itself—the findings portray what it means to the participants to be in a specific

situation, based on their experiences, and what the world looks like in their particular social setting (Merriam, 2002).

This study adopted methods relating to two of the traditions in qualitative research, namely case study, and phenomenology, in the design and research methods employed in the data generation and data analysis processes. The aspects of qualitative research methodology relating to these two traditions are discussed in the following sections.

Design and Methods

This BT experiences study used qualitative research methods and designs, including the case study, questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and phenomenology.

Findings

This section provides a synthesis of the findings of this study. It describes the self-perceptions of 16 beginning teachers (BTs) about their stage teacher education (BTE), and their induction and professional learning experiences during the first two month of their teaching careers. The findings are based on recurring themes that emerged from the questionnaire and interview data gathered in 2017. The section consists of five subsections sections that provide; a general overview of the research settings for this study, and demographic information about the 16 BTs who participated in this study. Following Sections discusses findings on the BTs reasons for choosing teaching as a career, describes the BTs self-perceptions about their programs, and their sense of preparedness; focuses on the BTs' initial teaching and induction experiences.; describes the BTs' professional learning experiences. Finally, a concluding summary was provided.

The Questionnaire Results

A questionnaire was distributed in four stage workshops. The original idea was to collect more than 100 questionnaires. After two interactions with workshops instructors, only 42 questionnaires has been collected

The Statistical Results are:

Statements about teachers level of preparedness	Av. score
1. I feel confident that I have acquired adequate planning skills to help me in lesson planning and preparation	2.0
2. I feel confident that I will be able to plan my lessons to meet students' different learning needs	1.9
3. I am confident that I can organize the curriculum content of my teaching subject into a unit scheme of work/ term programmes.	2.1
4. I am familiar with the curriculum content and curriculum goals of my teaching subject syllabus.	2.1
5. I am confident that I can translate curriculum objectives and learning outcomes into lessons.	2.5
6. I believe I have a good understanding of my subject content	1.9
7. I am confident that I can apply a variety of teaching strategies in my teaching.	2.3
8. I am confident that I can apply questioning and explanation skills well in my teaching	2.0
9. I am confident that I can plan and manage effective group-work and discussions in my class	1.8
10. I am confident that I can plan and prepare a variety of teaching resources to help me in my teaching.	1.6
11. I am confident that I can use locally available materials to construct basic teaching resources for my lessons	2.1
12. I am confident that I can begin and end lessons effectively	2.1
13. I believe that time management is very important in teaching	1.6
14. I am confident that I have acquired adequate knowledge and skills in appropriate assessment strategies during my teacher education	2.5
15. I am confident that I can incorporate effective assessment strategies into my planning and teaching.	3.0
16. I am confident that I can use assessment results to improve on my teaching and enhance students' learning	1.6
17. I believe I have enough training to deal with any student learning problems	2.6
18. I am confident that I can deal with any student behaviour problem in the classroom	2.3

19. I believe I can develop a good working relationship with the community and parents of the school I will be posted to.	1.3
20. I believe my initial teacher education programme has given me the necessary skills to become an effective teacher.	1.9

After analyzing the results, the researcher decide to make in Depth Interviews

The beginning teachers

The 16 beginning teachers who participated in this study were all Israel Arabs. The following section reports findings on the BTs’ reasons for choosing teaching as a career.

Motivations for choosing teaching as a career

The 16 BTs cited various motivations for their decisions to become a teacher. It was evident from the BTs’ responses that they had more than one reason for choosing to become a teacher.

The reasons could be classified according to three categories: intrinsic (reasons that are connected to the job itself), extrinsic (reasons that are related to benefits and conditions linked to the job), and altruistic (reasons that are linked to altruism, or the concern for humanity).

The majority cited mainly intrinsic and altruistic reasons for choosing teaching when they were first asked to state their reasons for choosing teaching in the questionnaire that was administered. The main intrinsic reasons for pursuing teaching cited by seven of the 16 BTs were the desire and interest to share their subject knowledge and expertise with young Arabs and to help them learn.

The main altruistic reasons cited by six of the 16 BTs include the desire to help address the need for teachers

Only one of the BTs cited only extrinsic reasons for choosing teaching as a career

They also indicated more than one reason for choosing teaching.

The main extrinsic motivation for choosing teaching was the influence of significant others who encouraged the BT to pursue teaching as a career. Of the six who cited influence of significant others, three cited parental influence, one cited the influence of former secondary teachers, one the influence of a spouse, and one that of older siblings. The main altruistic reasons cited by the 16 BTs were: the desire to help young people learn and succeed; that they viewed teaching as a reputable profession; and that they would like to help address the need for.

Beginning teacher education experiences

The BTs' perceptions about their initial teacher education (ITE) are reported in this section under three categories. The first sub-section encompasses themes relating to the BTs' perceptions about their ITE program. The second sub-section focuses on themes that relate to their teaching practice experiences. The third sub-section reports on themes related to the BTs' sense of preparedness.

Perceptions about initial teacher education program

When asked to identify the strengths of their teacher education three recurring themes that emerged from the BTs' responses were subject content, planning and preparation, and teaching methods and skills. For each of these strengths, the BTs also expressed concerns.

The BTs felt that the coverage of subject content in their initial teacher education courses was adequate, and provided them with a good basis for their subject content knowledge to begin teaching. However, they realized during their first month of teaching that they were not fully prepared to teach some topics in their subjects.

They also reported that in some subjects there was a mismatch between the subject content they learnt through their ITE and the subject content in the school curriculum. They suggested there was a need to revise the content of some

of their subjects so that it matched the content in the revised school syllabus and provided up-to-date researched information, particularly in subjects like social studies, science, and mathematics.

Four of the 16 BTs, suggested that they needed to learn more about the aims and content of their subjects' curricula during their ITE. They believed this would have enabled them to raise some of the concerns they met during their first month of teaching, such as outdated content.

The participants believed that their program had prepared them well in terms of instructional planning and lesson preparations skills. However, the main issues they faced in relation to planning and preparation for their lessons were time constraints and lack of teaching resources. Four of the 16 BTs also found themselves teaching subjects they were not prepared to teach.

The BTs also felt that their program prepared them well in terms of teaching strategies. They did lesson presentations through peer presentations and during their teaching practicum that helped them develop confidence in relevant teaching skills. However, four of them indicated that they were not able to apply in practice some of the teaching strategies they learnt because they learnt about them in theory only.

Those who undertook the scientific courses expressed the need for their lecturers to demonstrate more practical skills in their courses. They reported that they were not able to conduct some experiments and demonstrate certain practical skills confidently in their teaching because they were not given adequate opportunity to learn and practice those skills during their BTE.

In essence, the BTs wanted to see more exemplary teaching and demonstration of relevant teaching strategies and skills for their specific subjects by their lecturers. They also wished they were given adequate opportunities to practice what they learnt in theory.

Perceptions about their teaching practicum

The BTs viewed the teaching practice (TP) component of their program as a very important part of their pre-service program which gave them the opportunity to observe experienced teachers in action. They also said that their TP program was very useful, as it helped them to experience what teaching was like in real-life classrooms, and to gain more confidence in their teaching roles

However, some of the BTs felt that the duration of their teaching practice program should be extended. They believed that the more time they spent in the field during their teaching practicum the more confident they would become in their teaching. Furthermore, they would like associate teachers in schools to demonstrate exemplary teaching during their teaching practicum so that they could also learn from them.

They were also concerned about the quality of feedback received from some associate teachers and supervisors. They reported that their associate teachers often just ticked the boxes in the Teaching Observation Form without writing any comments.

They reiterated that such feedback was inadequate. They would prefer more detailed feedback that clearly points out strengths and weaknesses and provides practical suggestions for improvement.

Sense of preparedness

It was evident from the BTs' responses to the questionnaire, and interviews that they felt prepared to take on their teaching roles at the end of their initial teacher education. Their responses to statements provided in the questionnaire indicated that they felt well prepared in various aspects of teaching, including planning and preparation of lessons; curriculum; and teaching strategies. They gave a high rating to the 20 items provided in the Likert scale. This indicated that they were generally confident and believed that their initial teacher

education program had prepared them well to become stage teachers. The only aspect of teaching that showed a low average score was assessment.

Although the BTs' responses to the questionnaires showed that they were confident in various aspects of their teaching roles, it was evident in their responses to other questions in the questionnaire and interviews that they were less confident about and less prepared in planning and preparation of assessment tasks, preparing students' reports, keeping up with a teaching plan, time management, meeting students' various learning needs, communicating with students and teachers, preparing teaching resources, standing confidently in front of a class, classroom management, and dealing with students' behavior problems.

The BT examples indicated that the BTs felt inadequately prepared to teach and manage classes in schools that enroll students who are purported to be below average. However, the BTs believed that if they were provided with the professional support they needed as soon as they began their teaching careers; they would gain confidence and would be able to deliver quality instruction from the first year of their teaching careers.

Beginning teaching and induction experiences

This section focuses on the BTs' induction experiences during the first two months of their teaching careers. The findings are reported under three broad sections. The next sub-section focuses on the BTs' feelings about their induction experiences during the first two months of their teaching careers.

Feelings and perceptions about teaching

For the 16 BTs who participated in this study the transition from a pre-service teacher to a full-time stage teacher was marked with a myriad of feelings and expectations about what teaching would be like. This situation persisted as they struggled to settle into their new careers, and positioned themselves in the teaching community of practice.

The first month of teaching

The BTs reported mixed feelings of anxiety and excitement during their first month of teaching. Anxiety was the predominant feeling reported by nine of the 16 BTs who had not had any previous experience as stage teachers. However, all of them also reported feelings of excitement. Those that reported feelings of anxiety thought that this was mainly due to their unfamiliarity with the school environment, students and staff, school processes and procedures, curriculum goals and expectations, and not being confident in certain aspects of their teaching roles. For example, a number of them were anxious about school expectations and procedures. They were especially concerned because they had not yet been informed about processes and procedures at their schools.

Participants reported that they felt reluctant to approach those in authority for such information during their first month of teaching because they felt they were still new to the school. Such notions could be associated with cultural practices, in that those who are new to a place should keep a low profile, and should not question things that they see around them. However, this could be a hindrance to a new teacher's confidence and efficiency at the beginning of their teaching careers.

Other aspects of teaching that some of the BTs were anxious about include students' background and previous knowledge about their subjects. They were not really sure about the level at which they should pitch their teaching so that it would match their students' ability level

Some of them were also anxious about how to manage their classes and time well so that they could cover all the topics they needed within a week or term. They were particularly concerned that their class time might be taken up by other activities or teachers and that they might not be able to complete their teaching plans in time.

Others were concerned about the expectations of the teaching service office and education authorities. They were particularly anxious about the requirements for becoming a fully-registered teacher at the end of their one-year stage.

In general, the BTs were anxious about those aspects of teaching that they were not really confident in at the beginning of their teaching careers. These included: planning and preparing assessment tasks, preparing student reports at the end of each term and school year, time management, meeting students' expectations and learning needs, being confident to stand in front of the class and teach, and dealing with students' behavior problems. They were also concerned about the limited availability of teaching resources, a heavy teaching load, and the lack of specialized classrooms and teaching resources for scientific subjects.

The BTs also reported feelings of excitement at the beginning of their teaching careers. Their feeling of excitement came with their sense of accomplishment that they had acquired a teaching qualification and would now be regarded as stage teachers. Furthermore, they were excited about commencing a new career, and a full-time paid job, which meant that they could now receive a regular salary and could financially sustain their livelihoods.

There was evidence from the BTs' responses to suggest that their perceptions of teaching were based on their teaching practicum experiences, school experiences, and previous teaching experiences. For some of the BTs, their previous thoughts and views about teaching matched their initial teaching experiences. However, for some their expectations about teaching changed when they began their teaching careers. For instance, some of them thought that teaching would be like what they had observed and experienced during their school days. That is, teaching requires commitment on the part of a teacher, and it involves teachers in planning, preparing, and presenting lessons, and marking

students' assignments during and after school hours. These participants reported that what they observed at their current schools did not match their initial perceptions of what teaching would be like.

Some of them thought that teaching would be like what they had seen when they undertook their teaching practicum. Some schools were well organized and had adequate resources, while others were not so organized with very limited resources.

Moreover, some schools required teachers and students to observe strict rules, while others were a bit more lenient.

Some participants thought teaching was not particularly challenging because they felt that they had learnt enough during their ITE, and they had had previous teaching experience. They felt that having had some teaching experience in the past meant that they could easily handle their teaching roles.

It was evident from the 16 BTs' responses that they began their teaching careers with a variety of perceptions about what teaching would be like in the schools where they were posted. Additionally, their perceptions of what teaching was like were linked to their previous experiences, beliefs, and expectations about teaching.

It was evident from the BTs' responses that their existing beliefs and values about teaching were challenged by certain practices at their schools. However, they felt obliged to abide by the rules and live up to their school's expectation, in order to meet the requirements for their full registration.

After two months of teaching

Eight of the BTs found teaching during the first year more challenging than they had expected. When asked to describe what teaching was like after two months of teaching during the first year, they reported that teaching was interesting and enjoyable but also challenging. They said that they found teaching

enjoyable because they had come to understand their students and other teachers better and interacted more with them. They also stated that they had learnt more about their subjects as they taught each topic.

However, they also found teaching challenging because they came to realize that teaching requires proper planning and preparation in advance and that a teacher needs to have the necessary teaching resources available before they can plan and prepare properly for their lessons. They reported that time constraints and the lack of basic teaching resources at their schools made planning and preparing for their lessons a challenge.

They also came to realize that teaching is not only about helping students to develop their intellectual ability in the subjects they teach but also involves taking care of the students' social and physical development.

As they progressed through their first month of teaching, they reported that they felt more confident in their teaching roles and enjoyed teaching more. They thought they felt this way because they became more familiar with their school's processes and procedures. They also became more aware of what constitutes a bad and good day. They experienced a 'good day' when they knew their subject content well, prepared their lessons in advance, had the resources they needed to teach their lessons, and involved their students in a variety of activities in their lessons. They reported that they enjoyed their teaching more when their students were more motivated to learn—were attentive, participated actively in class activities, and responded well to questions.

The BTs also came to learn what a 'bad day' in a teacher's working life was like. They learnt that a 'bad day' was when they were not well prepared and students did not participate well in their lessons.

They discovered that the time of the day may also affect students' motivation to learn.

The BTs learned from their own experiences as they progressed in their teaching careers. However, whether they had perceived this as a learning opportunity which could inform their future teaching practices needs to be confirmed.

The challenges faced by the BTs during their first months

This sub-section focuses on the challenges participants said they had experienced during their first month's years of teaching. These challenges had been personal as well as contextual.

The main personal challenges faced by the BTs in their first month of teaching were lack of confidence, nervousness and being shy. Challenges they faced due to contextual factors included lack of guidance and support, lack of teaching resources, and heavy teaching loads and extra responsibilities.

Lack of confidence

Almost all the BTs expressed that they lacked confidence in various aspects of teaching when they began their teaching careers. This was despite the strong sense of preparedness and confidence shown in their responses to the questionnaire.

Some of them said that they lacked confidence in teaching specific content areas in their subject because there were topics in the syllabus that were not covered thoroughly during their pre-service teacher education program.

Some reported that they lacked confidence in classroom management skills and how to deal with student discipline.

Nervousness and shyness

Some BTs reported that they tended to be shy and nervous when they are in front of unfamiliar faces and a big class of students. However, they all believed that with more experience and time they would gain more confidence and be able to deal with the above challenges.

Lack of guidance and support

The majority of BTs reported that they found their first month of teaching challenging because they were not given the kind of guidance and support they expected. They said that they were left alone to seek help and advice as they chose. They reported that as new teachers they did not know whom to approach, from whom they should seek assistance, and where to get the assistance they needed.

They suggested that new teachers should receive as much guidance and support as experienced teachers

Relation with Parents or PI (Parents Integration)

Drawing on the literature review, it's will predicted that the school's organizational climate, as well as relationships between the educational staff and students' families, based on mutual trust, respect, and tolerance, would have a positive impact on school-parent collaboration and the way in which the teachers perceived parental involvement.

The findings indicate that although BT perceived their school policies as constructive for cultivating PI, their testimonies regarding the rates of parents' participation in their schools demonstrates that practices entail a limited range of PI. The teachers emphasized problems that have a negative influence on their subsequent interactions with families since they increase the potential for conflicts with parents in their schools. The BT feel that the parents still regard them in a respectful manner.

According to BT perceptions, they are insufficient proficiency in negotiating with parents. They feel that parents pay little attention to their opinions or to what they say. They feel that parents underestimate their professional skills. Part of the BT feel that PI threatens their professional authority and their supremacy as pedagogical specialists. They are not interested in the

parents' involvement in their pedagogical region (Eden, 2001) and they are not motivated to involve parents (Unn-Doris Baeck, 2010; Goldring & Shapira, 1996; Mapp, 2002; Hughes & McNaughton, 2011; Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Shimoni & Baxter, 1996). They regard the parents' involvement in their professional autonomy as a treat. Furthermore, they defined their relationships with parents as distrustful (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Addi- Racciah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008). Contrary to Ziv-Gur and Levi-Zalmanson's (2005) dichotomy of teacher-parent confrontations, where parents feel helpless compared to the teachers' superiority, in this study, the BT did not feel powerful. Their self-perception in the confrontation with parents is one of apprehension, as well as high levels of stress and anxiety (Sakharov & Farber, 1983).

Obviously, parents were more involved at home with their children's education than in school. The intensive involvement with their children at home reflects their self-insights of their parental role.

BT member workshops should be organized to increase parents' contribution and create an active partnership.

In-service students, who are training to become future teachers, should be required to take seminars that develop their skills and knowledge about how to communicate with parents.

At the same time, mutual trust between teachers and parents must be nurtured at schools.

Parents who feel that teachers make every effort to advance their children's academic, emotional, and social development will be more satisfied with their school.

All in all, parents, teachers, school principals, and other key players must show their willingness to promote PI.

Reciprocity, shared responsibility, trust, social bonding, and social control should characterize the relations of teachers and parents in Israel Arab schools.

BT Experiences Study context

This BT Experiences study was based on the premise that differences in socio-cultural contexts between various groups mean that beginning teachers in different contexts enter the classroom at the beginning of their teaching careers with varying degrees of preparation, experiences, expectations and professional learning needs. Such a premise is supported by previous studies which indicated that teachers developed most of their ideas about teaching from past experiences and actual practice, primarily from their own experiences, and through observing other colleagues (Kagan, 1992). Furthermore, teachers are seen to begin their teaching careers with differing expectations, and perceptions of their role as a teacher, which are influenced by contextual factors in their previous learning environments (Flores, 2001, 2006). Research has also confirmed that beginning teachers in different contexts enter the classroom from various sets of circumstances and background, and experience diverse challenges. These experiences may influence teachers' sense of preparedness to teach, how they perceive their roles as teachers, their motivations to teach, and the pedagogical approaches they choose to employ in their teaching (Lambeth, 2007).

The BT mainly cited the influence of significant others to pursue teaching as a career—particularly parents, spouse (often a husband), and older siblings (often brothers). This reflects the impact of culture on these teachers' choices of a career, that is, families still play a vital role in the decision individuals make about their career choices. Of the BTs who cited the above- mentioned extrinsic reasons for choosing teaching, five were females.

Motivations for choosing teaching

The findings of this study indicated that the beginning teachers (BTs) who participated in this study had a variety of motivations for choosing teaching as a career; and that they had more than one reason for their decision. The reasons the

BTs gave for choosing a career in teaching were mainly intrinsic and altruistic in nature. However, six of the BSTs mentioned extrinsic reasons when asked the same question two months into their teaching careers.

Need for guidance and professional support

The findings of the qualitative study showed that the BTs were generally satisfied that their teacher education programs provided them with the foundational knowledge and skills they needed to begin their teaching careers. However, they felt less prepared in some aspects of their teaching roles and expressed that they needed guidance and support to enhance their sense of preparedness and confidence to teach during the first year of their teaching careers.

There is evidence in the findings of this study to suggest that the BTs felt more prepared to teach in schools that enroll students who are purported to be below average in achievement, than schools that enroll more academically high achieving students. There is a need to examine such perceptions further as it might indicate the BTs' lack of confidence not only in their subject content knowledge but also in other aspects of teaching such as assessment and classroom management.

Previous studies have reiterated the need for teacher education programs to integrate theory and practice and ensure there is coherence and stronger links between subject matter and pedagogy. While it is undisputable that Teachers Education is a key contributor to teachers' sense of preparedness and effectiveness in the classroom, there are other factors that can also influence a teacher's performance. These includes the personal qualities, abilities, skills and life experiences of beginning teachers themselves, and the quality of advice, guidance, and professional support teachers receive (Kane, 2005). Although the BTs in this qualitative study felt prepared to begin their teaching careers, they expressed that

the level of professional support they received during their first years of teaching need to be improved, so that they could become more effective in their teaching roles.

It is, therefore, imperative that those responsible for providing beginning teachers' with induction and professional support programs should identify and prioritize the professional learning needs of beginning teachers in specific contexts, before making decisions on the kind of support and guidance they need. This is to ensure that their professional learning needs are adequately and appropriately addressed. According to a socio-cultural perspective, the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and meaning-making by individuals is embedded in their socio-cultural context (Wertsch, 1997). Moreover, proponents of the socio-cultural view of learning purported that new knowledge and skills are best learnt in contexts that reflect how that knowledge is obtained and applied to everyday situations (Fosnot, 2005). This means that if teacher education experiences are to be relevant and meaningful to pre-service teachers, they should be linked in meaningful ways to teachers' specific contexts and experiences. In the case of this qualitative study, this means that pre-service and beginning teachers need to be given adequate opportunities to observe, practice, and reflect on teaching that shows best practices in their specific subjects and schools. Also, they need to be given opportunities to observe, practice and reflect on teaching strategies that are relevant to their specific teaching subjects and cultural context. Such opportunities need to be provided during their initial teacher education, especially during teaching practicum, as well as during their initial year of teaching, with support and guidance from lecturers and experienced colleagues.

Appropriate role-models and modelling of best practice

The findings of the qualitative study pointed to a critical role that teacher educators, associate teachers, and experienced teachers need to play in the

professional learning and development of pre-service and beginning teachers. That is, the need for them to be not only appropriate role models, but also model best practices in their teaching. The BTs in this study particularly expressed the need for good teacher models during their stage, as well as during their first year of teaching. In particular, they expected teacher educators, associate teachers, and experienced colleagues to model best practice while teaching their specific subjects, so that they could learn from them. Such expectations reflected the BTs' beliefs about what they think teacher educators and experienced teachers should do, and how they should behave. In essence, they expected teacher educators and experienced teachers to display ethical behavior and be of good character, as they are perceived to be 'pillars' of the community. Moreover, they expected them to model appropriate pedagogical approaches in their specific curriculum areas of teaching so that they could learn from them.

Being a good role model in teacher education is important because everything a teacher educator does models something to pre-service teachers. This could be linked to the notion of apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), which supports the argument that pre-service teachers observe what teacher educators say and do in practice, and this can have a profound influence on their views and expectations about teaching. This means that teacher education institutions and schools need to provide pre-service and beginning teachers with opportunities to observe, explore, reflect, develop, innovate, and adapt new ideas and practices that are relevant to their specific subjects and contexts. Such opportunities would encourage beginning teachers to develop deeper understanding of their own practices, which leads to purposeful development of their personal and professional self.

Findings of previous research confirmed that it is essential for BT to be exposed to good role models, as it helps them to build their sense of confidence,

and enhance their professional learning during the initial years of their teaching careers (Langdon, 2007).

One-to-one mentoring

The findings of the qualitative study also indicated that the BTs preferred one-to-one mentoring as the best mode of professional support for beginning teachers. They believed that if they worked alongside a mentor, preferably an experienced teacher in their own subject areas, for at least the first year of their teaching careers, it would enhance their professional learning and development, and help them gain more confidence in their teaching. This view supports Vygotsky's (1978b) socio-cultural theory of learning, which emphasizes the need for 'scaffolding' for apprentice learners within their zone of proximal development. This is necessary for beginning teachers so they can receive guidance and support from mentors, or experienced colleagues, and successively achieve more complex teaching skills, understanding, and ultimately independent competence in specific areas of teaching and learning. The findings indicated that there is inadequate professional guidance and support for beginning teachers during their first years of teaching. The reasons for this could be two-fold: first, school administrators hold the misconception that beginning teachers are fully prepared to take on their teaching roles as soon as they graduate. As a result, the BT in this study were assigned the same teaching load as their experienced colleagues and were expected to perform the roles of full-time experienced teachers, unsupported, right from the beginning of their teaching careers. Second, there was a shortage of teachers in the schools that were involved in this study. Therefore, it is difficult to assign additional roles, such as a mentor, to existing teachers.

Mentors need proper training and professional support, because they are expected to be involved in classroom observations, analysis of students' work,

shared planning, and meetings in which they would discuss with beginning teachers specific areas relating to teaching and learning that are important to their teaching roles (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). An effective mentoring program has been described as one that beginning teachers are engaged in joint enquiry with a mentor who is well prepared to assist beginning teachers in understanding the importance of learning from practice. At the same time, they provide useful tools for enhancing beginning teachers' understanding of teaching, through observation, feedback, and analysis of students' work. Mentors in such a program, work with beginning teachers in managing a class, planning and implementing engaging learning tasks, knowing subject matter, assessing student learning, and learning in and from their practice as teachers. Hence, the guidance provided for beginning teachers in such a program goes beyond just sharing instructional tips with beginning teachers, to placing mentors in teaching roles that help beginning teachers build on their knowledge and experiences gained through their initial teacher education (Stanulis & Floden, 2009). Previous studies has also affirmed that a formal induction program with a strong mentoring component was the best avenue through which beginning teachers can be supported during the early years of their teaching careers (Luft, 2009).

Israel Education authorities already explore mentoring support in two projects: PBS and Academy Classroom based on past research that confirmed that mentoring does contribute positively to the professional development of teachers, as well as teacher retention in some countries (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; Flores, 2006; Hagreaves & Fullan, 2000; Langdon, 2007; Moskowitz & Stephens, 1997; Rippon & Martin, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Research evidence has also suggested that when mentors have substantial preparation and when the mentoring is instructional and standards based,

beginning teachers can have a significant impact on students' achievement (Conyers, Ewy, & Vass, 1999). This means that mentors need to be selected cautiously and adequately prepared before they can assume a mentoring role (American Federation of Teachers, 2001). Smith and Ingersoll (2004) noted that beginning teachers, who are mentored by experienced teachers who are well trained and teach the same subject, are more satisfied with the assistance they get during their induction. Furthermore, they were less likely to move to other schools or to leave the teaching profession after their first year of teaching. This further justifies the need for education authorities and school managers to seriously consider and address the need for mentors in Arab Schools.

Based on the findings of this study, the conditions that would support effective mentoring includes the following:

- Provide training and regular professional development opportunities for mentors.
- Provide day release time opportunities for mentors during the school year, so that they have enough time to meet and discuss with beginning teachers how to manage issues that might arise from their teaching roles.
- Assign less teaching load to beginning teachers, so that they have the time and opportunity to observe other teachers teach, confer with colleagues, work with their mentors, and reflect on their own teaching.
- Provide same office space for beginning teachers and mentors, so that they can easily discuss and share ideas with one another.
- Beginning teachers and mentors sharing morning tea or lunch meetings together, as and when necessary.
- Beginning teachers and mentors attending professional development activities together, so that the mentor also learns and provides further

clarification on matters that the beginning teacher might need further explanation on.

- Provide fair remuneration for teachers who take on the role of a mentor.

A study by Anthony et al. (2007a) on New Zealand beginning teachers' induction experiences found that two forms of mentoring were needed. First, the formal school mentoring system which involves school-wide policies and systems, and second, the informal 'buddy' mentoring system, which involves beginning teachers in working with a colleague who is available for advice on an informal basis. The findings showed that informal interactions between BTs and experienced colleagues already existed in Schools that were involved in this study. However, there is a need to recognize and harness an informal mentoring system, as it was currently done on an ad hoc basis between beginning teachers and their colleagues. Furthermore, there is a need to establish formal mentoring systems in schools, so that beginning teachers' professional learning can be appropriately enhanced through formally endorsed and funded programs. Such provisions need to involve proper training of potential mentors.

School culture and leadership

The findings of this study showed that the BTs were not provided with adequate opportunities to involve in professional conversations, ask questions, receive feedback, and learn from their experienced colleagues. Such experiences have impacted negatively on the BTs perceptions about the school culture and leadership at their schools. Flores (2001), who examined the influence of biographical and contextual factors on beginning teachers' professional learning and development during their first years of teaching, noted that workplace conditions have a strong effect on beginning teachers' practices and attitude towards teaching.

Kardos and Johnson (2007) pointed out that the interaction that goes on in a school, as well as the professional environment within a school, are important contributing factors to beginning teachers' professional learning and development when seen from a socio-cultural perspective. Furthermore, they reiterated that established modes of professional practice within a school; the norms, interactions, relationships, and the prevailing institutional and individual values, determine what teachers do, and how they do it. Thus, schools should be viewed "as a social and psychological setting in which teachers construct a sense of practice, of professional efficacy, and professional community..." (Flores, 2004, p. 299). This requires schools to develop into communities of professional learning, where teachers' professional development can be enhanced so that they can create optimal learning conditions for students to learn and develop (Varrati et al., 2009). School principals in Arab Sector need to play an active leadership role in creating an environment in their schools where teachers can continuously seek to improve their practices through shared learning opportunities so that they can effectively implement what they learned through their learning. The ultimate goal is for school principals and their staff to enhance their effectiveness as professionals so that they can provide effective learning opportunities for beginning teachers and students.

Hord and Sommers (2008) noted that a professional learning community is one that promotes a positive school culture and where critical inquiry is practiced by collegial partners, who share common vision and goals and engage in shared decision-making. School culture refers to important aspects of a school setting that can transmit a sense of meaning which shapes how teachers and students think and act (Barth, 2002). The literature clearly identified five necessary requirements for successful professional learning communities, which Israel Arab schools can adopt if they are to improve their school culture and learning

environment. These include; supportive and shared leadership, collective learning, shared values and visions, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Roberts & Pruitt, 2009). The findings of the qualitative study indicated that there was little evidence of these five characteristics of a successful professional learning in the Arab Schools. For instance, the BTs spoke of how staff meetings at their schools were irregular and that there was very little opportunity for teachers to be involved in decision-making processes at the school level. The findings also indicated that collaboration between teachers and principals was minimal. In fact, the BSTs reported that they had very little contact with their principals, given that no separate meetings were organized for them during their first year of teaching. The majority of BTs found it difficult to approach their principals, given the cultural notion that they were junior teachers and should not speak directly with those of senior status unless they are approached, or spoken to. Such beliefs prevented the BTs in this study from approaching the principal on important matters relating to their teaching roles, such as the need for teaching resources to teach their subjects, or concerns they had about their teaching load. Principals need to create a school culture that encourages teachers to speak out.

Leadership issues relating to the five characteristics of a professional learning community need to be seriously considered and addressed if teachers' professional learning and development are to be enhanced in Israel Arab schools. This means that principals need to: first, promote shared decision-making in their leadership roles, whereby staff are invited to contribute to decision-making processes on matters relating to teaching and learning at the school. Such practices can foster positive relationship between school principals and teachers, which can lead to collegial relationship between principals and teachers. Second, they need to work collaboratively and continually together with staff at all levels

within the school. Such collaborations can be reflected by regular professional conversations and reflective dialogue about how to improve teaching and enhance students' learning at their schools. Third, they need to discuss with staff the values and vision of their schools, so that staff can share the same value and vision they have for improving professional practice at their schools. This can enhance teachers' commitment to their teaching roles. Fourth, they need to ensure shared professional practice at their schools where teachers accept the review of each other's work as a norm. Such practice is not evaluative but one that involves teachers providing advice and feedback on each other's classroom practices. The intention is for teachers to reflect and improve on their practices, which is enabled by mutual respect and trustworthiness amongst teachers within a school setting. Fifth, they need to ensure that there is optimal physical and structural conditions, and human capabilities and capacities to support activities at their schools. These include the provision of adequate classroom space, availability of teaching resources, policies that fosters collaboration and enhance effective communication, time and opportunities for professional development at their schools, just to name a few. School principals in the Israel Arab sector need to incorporate these five requirements of a professional learning community into their school culture if they are to promote effective professional learning communities at their schools. The lack of planned induction and professional development opportunities for beginning teachers highlighted in the findings of this study meant that beginning teachers were unlikely to create optimal learning opportunities for their students. Furthermore, inadequate classroom space and lack of teaching resources can also have a negative impact not only on teachers' classroom practices but also on the learning achievements of the students they teach.

The literature emphasized that school culture can be viewed as a product of the kind of leadership practiced in a school, which can determine a school's effectiveness or ineffectiveness (Nanavati & McCulloch, 2003). Therefore, creating a school culture that promotes and sustains learning is what school leadership should be all about. Israel Arab school principals need to take a more active role in facilitating change at their schools, which would promote a positive school culture and sustain learning for both teachers and students. Principals' in Arab Schools play a pivotal role not only in the physical infrastructure development at their schools but also in administrative matters and professional practices. Therefore, school principals have the critical responsibility for providing a school culture which is conducive to teachers' professional development. However, if school principals are not well prepared and supported with the necessary resources to initiate and sustain such a culture in their schools, they are unlikely to provide the type of school culture that would enhance beginning teachers' professional learning and development. The effective leadership in Arab schools issues need to be further explored and addressed so that school principals' professional practices can be enhanced.

There is a need Arab school principals to provide a school culture where teachers and students not only develop a sense of purpose, share collective responsibility for each other, observe shared values and goals, but also where they can learn and develop together. Such a school culture needs to recognize that formal induction for beginning teachers and continuing professional development opportunities for teachers are vital to enhancing teachers' professional learning and development. Furthermore, principals need to ensure that their schools function as a professional learning community that is committed to enhancing students' learning.

Social Aspects: Parents Interaction

The administrations of Arab schools should apply practical measures to facilitate an egalitarian school climate that will be more flexible and responsive to the parents' concerns, interests, and affinities. This presupposes an administration, headed by the school principal, which maintains open communications and parent-teacher dialogue, in which the parents and teachers view each other as partners who, through healthy mutual cooperation and mutual respect, shape the school's objectives and organization.

Summary

The study was designed to contribute to the body of knowledge in teaching and teacher education the professional learning experiences of beginning teachers in Israel Arab context. The qualitative study was launched after the survey research.

The study highlighted cultural practices that might influence the motivations teacher candidates have for choosing teaching in the Arab Israel context, in particular, the fact that teachers' career choices were still influenced by authority figures in their families. Such motivations can have a negative impact on their professional learning, as they might not be intrinsically motivated to become a teacher. The reasons beginning teachers have for choosing teaching are vital to addressing their professional learning needs, induction, and retention issues, as they reflect their beliefs, values, and motivation to teach. The study also highlighted the need of Arab Israel beginning teachers for professional support and guidance during their first years of teaching. The lack of opportunities for professional learning, coupled with lack of teaching resources, was a major concern, and could well have a negative impact on the BTs' perceptions of their initial teaching experiences.

The study also points to the need for professional support for teacher educators and experienced teachers in schools so that they can be well prepared to model best practice and become good role models for pre-service and beginning teachers. This means that teacher education institutions and schools need to provide learning opportunities not only for student teachers and students but also for teacher educators and experienced teachers. The study also suggests that there is a need to establish strong links between teacher education institutions, education authorities, and schools so that they can play a collaborative role in the provision of professional learning opportunities for beginning teachers. This would ensure that teacher graduates continue to learn during their initial year of teaching. This is not only important for enhancing teacher quality, but also the quality of learning experienced by students in schools. Therefore, authorities in the Arab Israel school system need to invest the necessary resources in initial teacher education, teacher induction, and professional development.

Finally, the study points to the need for school leaders to develop a school culture that provides not only ongoing learning opportunities for BTs but also one that gives them a greater sense of belonging, purpose, identity, and makes them feel valued as new members of their school communities.

Teachers also need to view themselves as learners and be willing to keep on learning new skills that will strengthen their roles in their teaching communities, rather than perceiving themselves as qualified teachers who need no further learning once they have completed their initial teacher education. Teachers need to work in collaboration with their leaders to enhance their ongoing professional learning, and schools need to support teachers with ongoing learning opportunities so that they can continuously improve on their professional practices, in order to provide optimal learning opportunities for students.

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