

# Between Academia and the Field: The Case of School Counselling Effectiveness of School Counselling Training and Its Impact on Professional Identity

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## Abstract

Previous studies confirmed that training for master's programs for school counseling is deficient. The present study differentiates between three types of academic institutions that train school counselors in Israel: Universities, education colleges and academic colleges, in terms of how professional counselors evaluate the efficiency of academic studies to the school fieldwork and their impact on personal and group professional identity. A total of 158 school counselors, divided into groups of educational institutions, participated in this study. Of whom 5 men and 153 women, aged 27 to 63 years ( $M = 43.63$ ;  $SD = 8.11$ ), while the seniority in counseling profession ranged from 1 to 32 years ( $M = 9.65$ ,  $SD = 7.60$ ). After factor analysis of the 'School Counselling Training Efficiency' questionnaire, a significant difference between the training institutions was found only in the training efficiency, but not in professional identities. Universities-trained counselors reported less training efficiency than counselors trained at education and academic colleges. The average of academic training efficiency was also low in two typical colleges. Training efficiency fully mediated the relationship between training institution and both professional identities. The research findings raised pointed questions about the efficiency of training for school counselors in academia, in all educational institutions. It is important to develop evaluation of school counseling students in their training to support personal and group professional identity.

**Keywords:** academic training, professional identity, professional training, school counselling

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 School Counseling in Israel

The school counselor's role in Israel is intricate and complex. The definition of school counselor's role and position type differs and adapted as per need of each school. Working conditions, job structure and perception of the school counselor role are often outlined by the school administration (Erhard, 2014). The lack of clarity of the role definition, leads counselors to engage in the myriad areas in school (Heled & Davidovitch, 2020). School counselors are required to fulfill many roles in diverse fields of activity (Deshevsky, 2009). Counselors typically work with a vast target population within the school (principals, coordinators, teachers, homeroom teachers) as well as with relevant elements outside the school (psychologists, social workers, and other community workers). The counselors are responsible for assisting and integrating students with special needs, operating intervention plans, placements, and filling out various forms. The counselor's work also includes individual therapy with struggling students and topic-focused groups (Erhard, 2014; Perlberg-Simcha & Erhard, 2007). Furthermore, school counselors in Israel are also teachers, and they must teach classes at school to a varying extent according to the school's regulations (Deshevsky, 2009).

### 1.2 Professional Identity in School Counseling Profession

The school counselling profession immaturity, unclear definition, and terms of employment can lead to low professional identity and satisfaction issues of school counselors in Israel and elsewhere (Blake, 2020; Erhard, 2014). The school counselors well-established professional identity enables them to show professional significance to the other educators working with them, thus encourage its significance as perceived by others. The counselors who have low professional identity might lose their special place in school (Reiner & Hernandez, 2013). Professional identity is formed according to the external and professional's self-perception (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005). Therefore, in this

study, we importantly differentiate two levels of professional identity in school counseling: group and personal professional identity.

### *1.3 Group and Personal Professional Identity*

A group professional identity is a collection of expectations and characteristics attributed to the profession by those who belong to it, nearby professionals, complementary professionals, and by the general public (Remley & Herlihy, 2007). Consolidating from a clear group professional identity helps counselors to perceive them as a specific professional community, gives them an advantage in demonstrating profession to address numerous professional factors and to the general public (Lanman, 2011).

Personal professional identity is a practitioner sense of attachment and solidarity with the profession (Tickle, 1999), help to define the field of occupation (Brott & Myers, 1999) and facilitate understanding of work-related skills and knowledge (Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2012). Furthermore, personal professional identity also provides confidence and pride in practice (LaFleur, 2007). The school counselor's personal professional identity is directly influenced by the profession definition and the group professional identity. As the definition of school counseling is vague and leads to unclear personal professional identity of counselors (Gazzola & Smith, 2007). An unclear personal professional identity may produce negative consequences for counselor's work. As a lower sense of pride and stability in the profession (Nelson & Jackson, 2003), unfamiliarity with job rules or services provided, counselor's work boundaries or ethics (Remley & Herlihy, 2007).

Personal and group professional identity complete each other (Alves & Gazzola, 2011; Brott & Myers, 1999). A significant relation was observed between counselors' group professional and their personal professional identity (Heled & Davidovitch, 2021b). Further reinforced by LaFleur (2007), claimed that one's perception of the profession leads to a sense of confidence, stability, and pride. The relationship could be reversed, as the personal professional identity; the counselors understanding of the profession, their reconciliation with choices, knowledge that they are able to effect change and are good at their job, leads to higher group professional identity (Heled & Davidovitch, 2021b).

### *1.4 Training Programs in School Counseling*

Since 1962, there has been academic training for the school counselors in Israel, with first diploma study program for teacher-counselors at three main universities. More than 40 years later, counselor's bachelor's and master's degree diploma in counseling was started. Since 2005, there is a requirement for a master's degree in school counseling to work as a school counselor (Erhard, 2008). As of 2021, there are 14 programs to study a master's degree in school counseling: Five at universities, seven education colleges and four academic colleges. All the training institutions offer a standard training course, includes:

- Methodological courses – Research courses (more methodological offered at universities).
- Theoretical studies – Theoretical courses in school counseling and psychology, including systemic skills, group, individual skills (Schwartz, 2008).
- Practical training and supervision – The training consists of at least 300 hours of fieldwork and specialization in supervision (group supervision in academia). The student comes to school or to another educational institution to intern once a week and accompany the school counselor for two years. During internship the student learns important counseling skills for future work (Ricke, 2018).

### *1.5 Role of Academia in the Development of the Professional Identity of the School Counselor*

Professional identity - personal and group, begins to develop during vocational training and is essential for students to become skilled counselors (Erhard, 2014). The emphasis in training phase, which highly promotes the development of professional identity, is learning theoretical foundations of profession, accumulating knowledge about skills and performing various roles which are part of job structure, learning unique professional language and understanding professional ethics (Jebri, 2008). During their studies, school counseling students are expected to think about their place in profession and compare themselves to students and other mental health professionals (Hill et al., 2007).

Ockerman and Mason (2012) claims that training programs for school counselors are responsible for preparing students to practically work at school from all aspects. However, Erhard (2014) argues that academic training of school counseling in Israel is deficient. She claims that training programs for school counseling, mainly based on the psychology content and focus on the individual therapy orientation, hardly gives room for the systemic learning and therefore new counselors lack the basic knowledge and skills to enter the field.

Heled and Davidovitch (2021a) examined how school counselors in Israel, who have been on the job for several years, evaluate their academic studies for master's degree in school counseling. The findings of interviewed counselors clearly indicate dissatisfaction with the academic studies, especially associated with their job preparation. Those findings align with Amir (2013), who found that most of the school counseling students showed dissatisfaction with academic theoretical courses, arguing that most of the topics taught in the courses are not suitable for fieldwork and are not perceived as essential to the work of the school counselor. In addition, in Ben Moshe (2011) study, school counselors who were in first year of their profession, reported that their work at school is mainly utilized to become familiar with the system and how the counseling profession is executed in practice, learning about the job, the school organization, and its affiliates. The counselors in her study claimed that the academic contribution was primarily in therapeutic and personal areas and attributed the academic training as having a moderate contribution to field-work.

Other studies from all over the world, also noted disparities between the school counseling academic training and the actual work (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Goodman-Scott, 2015; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Perusse & Goodnough, 2005; Watkinson et al., 2018). Studies have found that many of the courses in school counseling programs lack the depth needed for the students to understand their future role and contribute to the discrepancies between preparation for work and the actual field (Perusse et al., 2001; Watkinson et al., 2018). Also, they found gaps between the school counselor role presented in academi, and the actual reality of the work, which is often less ideal than what is presented to students (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Watkinson et al., 2018).

Asulin (2005) examined the image of the school counseling profession and of the counselors themselves in the eyes of counseling students. For this purpose, she compared B.A students with master's degree students in counseling. The results indicate similarity to Fishman (2002) findings: Students on both degree levels are lack of knowledge of the school counseling profession. In addition, it was found that during their studies, students show dissatisfaction with their future work environment, financial compensation for the work, and the profession status. While some counseling students discover the variety and the array of opportunities for professional work, others interpret this reality as functional vagueness, makes it harder for them to shape their personal professional identity (Asulin, 2005; Erhard, 2014; Fishman, 2002).

### *1.6 Master's Degree Programs in School Counseling in Israel*

In terms of their impact on the professional identity of the educational counselor, this study will differentiate between three types of academic institutions that train educational counselors, including universities, colleges of education and general academic colleges. The Central Bureau of Statistic in Israel (n.d.) defines the three institutions: University is an institution that has been authorized to award academic degrees and in which there is research activity. School counselling studies in universities are part of 'School of education' located in the university, have a wide range of study paths for teachers and education staff from B.A to PhD studies. Education college provides training of teaching staff, which has been authorized to award an academic degree in education (mainly B.Ed., M. Ed). An academic college is not a university but an institution that has been recognized by the Council for Higher Education and has been authorized to award academic degrees. The academic colleges are not specialized colleges like colleges of education or the schools of education in universities, and school counseling studies are not part of their educational agenda, as happens in the other two types of educational institutions. Moreover, admission requirements for all study tracks at universities are usually higher than admission requirements in all colleges, including for master's degree studies in school counseling.

There is a kind of 'division of labor' between the universities and colleges in Israel. The difference between the various institutions is in the dose given to the science and profession, and it defines the institution's character. It seems that the degree taught in colleges is more practical and professional, while in universities, the main emphasis is on research. Both universities and colleges serve student populations with diverse educational and vocational goals. Some students wish to continue to research while others have clearly defined professional intentions (Davidovitch, 2005; Davidovitch & Iram, 2009).

To date, no study had examined the differences between the types of educational institutions in school counseling, both in Israel and around the world. A study conducted by Weiss and Fisherman (2011) examined the difference in teacher training in education colleges versus universities. They found that despite the lower status of teacher training colleges in Israel, there are significant benefits to studying at a dedicated college. They examined the differences in professional identity of teachers at the university compared to a college and found that the training track in colleges mainly focuses on the development of professional identity. Therefore, college students have a more cohesive professional identity than students studying at a university. University training does not invest in developing a

teacher's professional identity. Therefore, students studying in universities perceive teaching as a specific subject and not as a vocation or part of personal identity.

## 2. The Current Study

A successful transition from academia to fieldwork requires graduates to internalize the skills they have acquired in academia, such as critical thinking, communication skills and collaboration in real-world work life (Grosemans et al., 2017). Most studies used student satisfaction surveys to estimate degree of satisfaction. However, surveys do not always give a clear picture of personal differences in graduates' perceptions. Regarding type of academic abilities, they can develop during their studies at the academy (Tuononen et al., 2019). We have found several measures and studies that evaluated the skill development of school counseling students during their practical training (Burgess, 2019; Lambie & Stickl Haugen, 2021), but there were no studies measuring the efficiency of the school counseling academic training in the eyes of graduate counselors.

The purpose of the current study was to examine, for the first time, how school counselors, who have been on job for several years, evaluate the professional training in the three types of academic institutions, to their readiness for schoolwork. In addition, we will examine how the preparation they received in their master's degree affects their personal and group professional identity, even years ahead.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Respondents

The research participants included 158 counselors, of whom were 5 men, and 153 women ranges from 27 to 63 years of age ( $M = 43.65$ ;  $SD=8.15$ ). The respondents' years of work in the counseling profession ranged from 1 to 32 ( $M = 9.65$ ,  $SD = 7.60$ ), while the seniority in the contemporary school where they work ranged from 1 year to 30 years ( $M = 6.76$ ;  $SD = 6.55$ ).

Table 1. Sample characteristics divided into groups of educational institutions

|                         | University<br>( $n = 63$ ) |           | Education<br>college<br>( $n = 42$ ) |           | Academic<br>college<br>( $n = 53$ ) |           |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
|                         | <i>M</i>                   | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>                             | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>                            | <i>SD</i> |
| Age                     | 41.78                      | 8.27      | 44.86                                | 7.71      | 44.92                               | 8.09      |
| Seniority in counseling | 11.12                      | 7.87      | 8.63                                 | 7.10      | 8.72                                | 7.49      |
| Seniority in school     | 7.11                       | 6.38      | 6.10                                 | 6.57      | 6.88                                | 6.81      |
| Final M.A. grade        | 91.64                      | 3.13      | 92.2                                 | 2.56      | 91.68                               | 3.57      |
|                         | <i>n (%)</i>               |           | <i>n (%)</i>                         |           | <i>n (%)</i>                        |           |
| Gender:                 |                            |           |                                      |           |                                     |           |
| Male                    | 0                          | (0%)      | 2                                    | (4.8%)    | 3                                   | (5.7%)    |
| Female                  | 63                         | (100%)    | 40                                   | (95.2%)   | 50                                  | (94.3%)   |
| Route:                  |                            |           |                                      |           |                                     |           |
| Thesis                  | 26                         | (41.3%)   | 4                                    | (9.5%)    | 2                                   | (3.8%)    |
| Final exam              | 15                         | (23.8%)   | 1                                    | (2.4%)    | 9                                   | (17%)     |
| Final research          | 22                         | (34.9%)   | 88                                   | (88.1%)   | 42                                  | (79.2%)   |
| School:                 |                            |           |                                      |           |                                     |           |
| Primary                 | 30                         | (47.6%)   | 25                                   | (59.5%)   | 25                                  | (47.2%)   |
| Junior high             | 10                         | (15.9%)   | 5                                    | (11.9%)   | 10                                  | (18.9%)   |
| High school             | 10                         | (15.9%)   | 9                                    | (21.4%)   | 11                                  | (20.8%)   |
| Junior + high school    | 13                         | (20.6%)   | 3                                    | (7.1%)    | 7                                   | (13.2%)   |

### 3.2 Research Tools

1. Demographic questionnaire. The counselors were asked about their gender, age, seniority in the profession and the school they work in, and the type of school they work in. The counselors were asked about the institution of training in their master's degree, their final grade and whether they completed the degree with a thesis, final research, or final exam.

2. 'Counselors' personal professional identity questionnaire' (Heled & Davidovitch, 2021b). The questionnaire is a 24-item version of Fisherman and Weiss (2011) questionnaire that examines factors which produce the strengthening of teachers' professional identity. Respondents rated answers on a 4-point scale from 1 (very incorrect) to 4 (very true). Higher score means a higher value for personal professional identity. The questionnaire consists of three factors: 'Confidence in the choice of profession' – 13 items assess the extent to which counselor has come to terms with her decision to engage in the profession ( $\alpha = .948$ ); 'Professional efficacy' – 7 items evaluate counselor's professional efficacy ( $\alpha = .898$ ); and 'Sense of solidarity with the profession' includes four items that examine whether counselor identifies with the counseling profession ( $\alpha = .474$ ).

3. 'Counselors' group professional identity questionnaire' (Heled & Davidovitch, 2021b). The questionnaire for examining the group professional identity of the school counselor is an 18-item new short version of the 'Professional Identity Scale in Counseling (PISC)' (Woo & Henfield, 2015). The items selected for Heled and Davidovitch (2021b) translated from the original questionnaire were developed to examine the overall professional identity (no distinction was made between personal and group identity) of the United States counselors in several areas in the counseling field (school counselors, professional counselors, parenting and marriage counselors, and mental health counselors). Respondents were asked to rate their responses on a 6-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Greater score means stronger group professional identity. The new questionnaire has three factors: 'Professional involvement' – 8 items that examine the counselor's involvement in different school counseling professional organizations ( $\alpha = .765$ ); 'Knowledge of professional rules' – 4 items which evaluate the participants knowledge of the school counseling professional rules in Israel ( $\alpha = .724$ ); and 'Attitude towards the profession' – 6 items that examine the counselor's appreciation of the profession ( $\alpha = .798$ ).

4. 'School Counselling Training Efficiency' questionnaire. It was taken from Ben Moshe (2011) dissertation at the 'Beit Berl' education college in Israel. In the dissertation, factor analysis and validation of the questionnaire were not performed, and it was analyzed qualitatively. In the present study, we will conduct a factor analysis for the questionnaire and test each factor's reliability and the entire questionnaire. According to the school counsellor, the questionnaire examines the contribution of practical training in academia. The original questionnaire contains 27 items describing how academic and practical training has contributed to the counselor's integration in counseling field work. The respondents were asked to rank their replies on a seven-point scale from 1 (did not contribute at all) to 7 (contributed very much).

### 3.3 Research Procedure

Data collection was approved by the University's Ethics Committee. To reach as many respondents as possible, the researchers posted on the Facebook page 'Counselors for Counselors', which has more than 7,000 counselors and counseling students in Israel, with attached link to the questionnaires in Qualtrics software. All school counselors who responded to the message and filled out the questionnaires were included in current study. In addition, the researchers contacted the counselors of the educational counselors (supervisors / volunteers in counselors' association). They had asked them to encourage counselors to fill out questionnaires and participate in the study.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

A factor analysis was conducted since the 'School Counselling Training Efficiency' questionnaire was not validated in the original research (Ben Moshe, 2011). Four factors were created after a principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted. Subsequently, differences between the three educational institutions in terms of training efficiency of the practical training and professional identities were examined through one-way MANOVA and at last, Zero-order correlations were examined.

The primary analysis technique for the present study was path analysis, using the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) program. Several indices were examined to assess model fit, including the  $\chi^2$  goodness of fit statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker Lewis index (TLI), and the Root Mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA). An adequate fit is indicated by non-significance for the  $\chi^2$ . For the CFI and TLI values over 0.95 indicate excellent fit. Finally, for the RMSEA values <0.05 indicate excellent fit.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Factor Analysis of the 'School Counselling Training Efficiency' Questionnaire

We conducted a factor analysis to validate the 'School Counselling Training Efficiency' questionnaire. In the first step, the second item from the original questionnaire ('*Strengthening my self-confidence as a counselor*') was omitted during the statistical analysis due to low associations with the factors. According to the findings, four factors were formed, which were categorized as follows (for factor loading and reliability, see table 2: (1) 'Integration in schoolwork', (2) 'Work with students', (3) 'Professional efficacy', and (4) 'Profession knowledge'. Internal consistency analysis was found for each factor (Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )), as is, to what degree the set of items is interrelated. Finally, 26 items were included in the new version questionnaire. The counselors were asked to indicate on a Likert scale, the extent to which they felt that their studies at the academy contributed to schoolwork from 1 (didn't contribute at all) to 7 (contribute a lot). A higher mean score means greater training efficiency.

Table 2. Results of principal component analysis (PCA) of the Training efficiency questionnaire ( $N=158$ )

| No | item   | Factor<br>Integration<br>schoolwork<br>$\alpha = .879$ | 1: Factor<br>in<br>with students<br>$\alpha = .841$ | 2: Work<br>Professional<br>efficacy<br>$\alpha = .796$ | 3: Factor<br>Profession<br>knowledge<br>$\alpha = .733$ | 4: |
|----|--|--|---|--|---|----|
| 18 | Familiarity with school norms.   | .770   |   |  |   |    |
| 11 | Integration in working with the school staff.  | .750   |   |  |   |    |
| 13 | Integration in working with teachers.  | .749   |   |  |   |    |
| 20 | Organizing school activities for students, teachers, and parents.  | .747   |   |  |   |    |
| 17 | Integration in schoolwork.   | .741   |   |  |   |    |
| 21 | Dealing with difficulties facing various factors in school.  | .714   |   |  |   |    |
| 12 | Integration in working with parents.   | .627   |   |  |   |    |
| 1  | Gradual and 'soft' entry into the education system.  | .509   |   |  |   |    |
| 25 | Expanding knowledge that helps me in my schoolwork (i.e., acquiring Work strategies, problem solving methods). |  | .818  |  |   |    |
| 16 | providing students emotional support, encouragement and help dealing with frustrations.                        |  | .764  |  |   |    |
| 26 | Dealing with students' behavior problems.  |  | .701  |  |   |    |
| 23 | Building intervention programs.  |  | .679  |  |   |    |
| 22 | Use of therapeutic tools in the counseling work.   |  | .615  |  |   |    |
| 24 | Preparation of educational work materials.   |  | .578  |  |   |    |
| 14 | strategies for increasing students' learning motivation.   |  | .524  |  |   |    |

|    |  |      |      |
|----|--|------|------|
| 3  | Expanding knowledge that helps me in my schoolwork (i.e., acquiring Work strategies, problem solving methods). | .523 |      |
| 15 | Relationships with other counsellors.  |      | .732 |
| 27 | consulting with co-workers.  |      | .669 |
| 4  | Developing reflective thinking, concerning my work as a school counsellor.                                     |      | .589 |
| 19 | A sense of autonomy in the profession.   |      | .554 |
| 7  | Providing tools for dealing with issues during my work.  |      | .532 |
| 6  | Solving problems that arise during my work at the school.  |      | .526 |
| 10 | Recognizing my duties as a school counselor in the Israeli education system.                                   |      | .794 |
| 8  | A deeper acquaintance with the world of school counseling.   |      | .766 |
| 9  | Familiarity with intervention programs.  |      | .716 |
| 5  | knowing my rights as a school counselor in the Israeli education system.                                       |      | .626 |

*Note.* Only high loadings above .40 are presented.

#### 4.2 Differences between the Three Training Institutions

To examine differences between the three training institutions, we used one-way MANOVA (means and standard deviations, as well as the results of the multivariate and univariate levels, as represent in Table 3). The results showed significant differences at the multivariate level. However, a significant difference was found only in the training efficiency but not in professional identities. Post-hoc analysis showed that university-trained students reported less training efficiency than students from the academic college.

Table 3. Differences between the three training institutions in training satisfaction and professional identity ( $n = 158$ )

|                                | Training institution |      |                   |      |                   |      |     |          |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|-----|----------|
|                                | University           |      | Education college |      | Academic college  |      | $F$ | $\eta^2$ |
|                                | $(n = 64)$           |      | $(n = 42)$        |      | $(n = 55)$        |      |     |          |
|                                | $M$                  | $SD$ | $M$               | $SD$ | $M$               | $SD$ |     |          |
| Training efficiency            | 2.96 <sub>a</sub>    | .56  | 3.25              | .64  | 3.42 <sub>b</sub> | .61  |     |          |
| Group professional identity    | 4.26                 | .57  | 4.23              | .61  | 4.24              | .57  | .04 | .000     |
| Personal professional identity | 3.24                 | .52  | 3.23              | .45  | 3.25              | .46  | .10 | .001     |

Note: Means not sharing the same subscript are significantly different. The multivariate level test show significance differences,  $F(6, 308) = 3.62, p = .002, \eta^2 = .066$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Since the significance level in the differences between a universities training institution and education colleges training institutions ( $p = .053$ ), was borderline, a follow-up analysis of independent samples T test was performed between the groups. A significant difference was found between university-type training institution and an education college-type training institution, as presented in table 4.

Table 4. Differences between the two training institutions in training satisfaction ( $n = 105$ )

|                     | Training institution |      |                   |      |     |          |
|---------------------|----------------------|------|-------------------|------|-----|----------|
|                     | University           |      | Education college |      | $t$ | $\eta^2$ |
|                     | $(n = 63)$           |      | $(n = 42)$        |      |     |          |
|                     | $M$                  | $SD$ | $M$               | $SD$ |     |          |
| Training efficiency | 2.96 <sub>a</sub>    | .56  | 3.25              | .64  |     |          |

\*\* $p < .01$ .

### 4.3 Correlations between Research Variables

Sample descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations are presented in Table 5. The correlation of Group professional identity with Training efficiency was higher than personal professional identity with training efficiency. A negative correlation was found between dummy coded university variable (University coded as one, education college, academic college coded as zero) and training efficiency. Professional seniority was positively correlated with both professional identities. Neither group professional identity nor personal professional identity was associated with the training institution. In addition, a Fisher r to z transformation test was calculated between correlation failed to identify significant differences in correlation between group professional identities and the variables, professional seniority, and training efficiency (see table 6).



Table 5. Correlations between research variables (n = 158)

|                                   | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4       | 5       | 6 |
|-----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---|
| 1. Professional seniority         | -      |        |        |         |         |   |
| 2. Personal professional identity | .306** | -      |        |         |         |   |
| 3. Group professional identity    | .266** | .645** | -      |         |         |   |
| 4. Training efficiency            | .098   | .276** | .415** | -       |         |   |
| 5. University                     | .158*  | -.014  | .021   | -.302** | -       |   |
| 6. Academic College               | -.088  | .035   | -.007  | .259**  | -.579** | - |

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01.

Table 6. Correlations comparison with Fisher r to z transformation

|                        | Partial correlation controlling for Fisher r to z transformation |                             |      |
|------------------------|--|-----------------------------|------|
|                        | Personal professional identity                                   | Group professional identity |      |
| Professional seniority | .306**   | .266**                      | .38  |
| Training efficiency    | .276**   | .415**                      | 1.39 |

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01.

#### 4.4 Examination of the Hypothesized Mediation Models

Next, a mediation models were examined. In the hypothesized model, students in colleges training processes will report higher training efficiency (compared to university students), and higher training efficiency will predict a higher professional identity – Personal and group. Following this, training at the academic colleges of education and university were introduced as dummy variables, training efficiency was introduced as a mediating variable, while group and personal professional identity were introduced as dependent variables. In addition, professional seniority was introduced as covariate variable. Results of the model (See figure 1) indicated that the model has a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 [2] = .29; p = .75; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.05; RMSEA = .00 [0.00, .11]$ ).

According to the finding's, training institution (university) had no significant direct effect associated neither with personal professional identity nor with group professional identity, however the indirect effect between institution (University) and the two professional identity's was found significant both for personal [ $\beta = -.06, SE = .02, CI = -.14, -.01$ ] and group professional identity [ $\beta = -.11, SE = .01, CI = -.21, -.02$ ], suggested that the training efficiency fully mediates the relationship between the training institution and both professional identities, As illustrated in Fig 1.

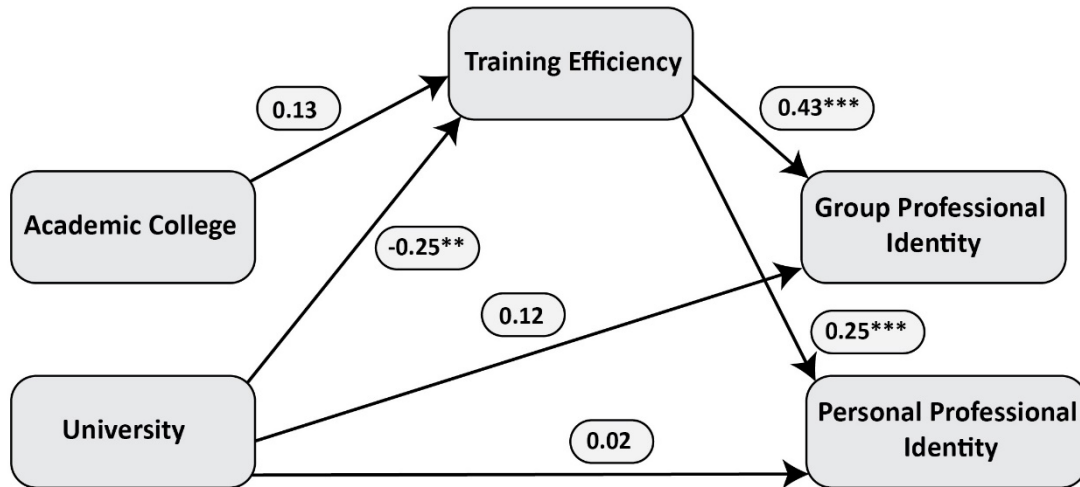


Figure 1. The structural part of the Hypothesized Model along with standardized regression coefficients

## 5. Discussion

School counseling requires special skills and training (Lambie & Stickl Haugen, 2021). The present study aimed to examine whether the training of school counselors affects their individual and group professional identity and examine whether there is a difference in the level of satisfaction of the counselors who studied in the different types of graduate institutions. We also sought to examine whether the difference in satisfaction with academic studies affects the professional identity of the counselors during their work, even years ahead.

### 5.1 Training Efficiency Questionnaire- Validation

A curriculum in academia is an outline of general instructions explain manner of teaching, assessment of the knowledge and skills related to a particular profession or field of study. The higher education systems in the world are required to prove the effectiveness of their teaching programs (Davidovitch & Iram, 2009). The evaluation of higher education curricula is a milestone in the improvement of such curricula, where academic curriculum renewed and expanded around the world (Altbache et al., 2009). In this study, we aimed to estimate the efficiency of the school counselling programs in universities and colleges in Israel. In our previous study, we found several aspects that counselors were not providing the proper preparation for the profession: The theoretical course topics, the lecturers who teach them, the contribution of practical training in schools, and whether academia studies prepare counselor for the schoolwork (Heled & Davidovitch, 2021a).

In this study we tried to estimate the previous research findings statistically, and therefore used the 'School Counsellors Training Efficiency' questionnaire, first conducted by Ben Moshe (2011) but was only examined with qualitative measures. We validated the questionnaire and performed a factor analysis on it. The questionnaire contains statements describing the extent to which the academic and practical training has contributed to the counselor integration into counseling fieldwork and attempts to encompass the tasks and responsibilities of the profession, which the future counselor must prepare for during the academic training. The factor analysis revealed four factors:

(1) *Integration in schoolwork*. The factor contains eight items that examine how the school counselors estimate that the academy's studies have prepared them for integration into schoolwork, especially in the first years of work. Heled and Davidovitch (2021a) found that novice counselors feel lost in their first years at work, due to lack of orientation in academia. Ben Moshe (2011), who used the questionnaire qualitatively, found that new job counselors reported that in the first year of their actual work is usually used to get acquainted with the system, learning about the educational organization and the school environment. Therefore, examining how the studies at the academy prepared the school counselling student for 'gradual and 'soft' entry into the education system' (item 1) is extremely important, in order to assess the school counseling programs.

(2) *Work with students*. The factor contains eight items that examine how the school counselors estimates that studies at the academy have prepared them to support, work, and care for the school's students, by systemic and educational work (i.e., 'Building intervention programs', 'strategies for increasing students' learning motivation') and personally

therapeutic (i.e., 'providing students emotional support, encouragement and help dealing with frustrations'). As mentioned before, master's degree programs in school counseling in Israel are mainly based on content in psychology, with an individual therapeutic orientation and does not focus on the systematic work with students and teachers (Erhard, 2014; Heled & Davidovitch, 2021a; Schwartz, 2008). Ben Moshe (2011), who used the same questionnaire, further reported that the novice counselors in her study complained that the academic training contributed mainly to the individual therapy, which is almost non-existent in the school counselor field.

(3) *Profession efficacy*. The factor contains six items that examine how the school counselors estimate the academy's studies as providing them to feel able to do a good job at school. Profession efficacy in counseling is the counselor's self-concept of the ability to provide professional counseling (i.e., 'Solving problems that arise during my work at the school') and to adequately perform the role (i.e., 'Providing tools for dealing with issues during my work'; (Fisherman & Weiss, 2011). In the school counselling academic training-experiences in the practicum, modelling by the training counselor, and positive feedback, were found to promote professional self-efficacy in the first stages of training (Larson & Daniels, 1998). Additionally, an environmental climate including adequate supervision and academic environmental factors was found to correlate significantly with professional counseling efficacy (Bagheri et al., 2012).

(4) *Profession knowledge*. This factor contains four items, that examine how the counselors evaluate studying at the academy and helped them in recognizing their rights and obligations in the profession (i.e., 'A deeper acquaintance with the world of school counseling'; 'knowing my rights as a school counselor in Israeli education system'). For school counseling students to become skilled counselor, they required to internalize the professional culture, language, ethics standards and to develop commitment to profession, even during their training phase (Moss et al., 2014). Studies found that students at school counselling programs have limited knowledge of profession, and they feel functional vagueness, making it hard to shape their professional identity at the beginning of their career (Asulin, 2005; Erhard, 2014; Fishman, 2002).

### 5.2 Differences between the Three Training Institutions

This study examined the differences between the three training institutions for school counsellors: Universities, education colleges, and academic colleges. A significant difference between the training institutions was found only in the training efficiency but not in professional identities. Post-hoc and follow-up analysis showed that university-trained students reported less training efficiency than students from the educational and academic college.

To assess the differences between the type of academic institutions, in the case of efficient preparation for schoolwork of the counselors, we will try to delve deeper into the differences between the institutions: As Kirsh (2014) noted, academic and education colleges are fundamentally different academic institutions from universities. The colleges are not a second-rate university, they are not inferior to the university, and does not claim to be better than it. The leading role of colleges is to train high-level professional staff and provide academic education to applicants who cannot or do not want to study at universities. The emphasis in the college is on the passing of information and not necessarily on the creation of the information as characterizes the university (Kirsh, 2014). Therefore, in colleges, the lecturers less dedicate to research on their field of work and maybe focus on passing their knowledge on the school counselling profession to the students and strengthening the students' professional identity.

At universities, the main goal of the lecturer is also essential, but it is more dedicated to research. From the school counselling perspective, the main goal of the curriculum and lecturers in colleges is to prepare the students for fieldwork in counseling. In contrast, at universities, the curriculum and lecturers have another, no less, necessary task: To turn the students into skilled researchers in their field.

It could be possible because university studies are mainly aimed at research, in vocational studies, as in school counseling, whose professional identity is shaky, lecturers do not devote enough time to preparing students for fieldwork and are more focused on research in the field. The hypothesis aligns with Weiss and Fisherman (2011) who found that the education colleges have an advantage over teacher training in universities in the term of professional identity. We assume that the case of school counseling programs is identical.

### 5.3 Professional Identity and School Counselor Training

This study assumed that the seeds of future professional identity exist in the process of training for the profession (Erhard, 2014). Studies which examined the professional identity of school counselors during their training have found that proper and meaningful fieldwork during academic studies has had a significant impact on the continued work of counselors and their professional identity (Brott & Myers, 1999; Gilbride et al., 2016; Moss et al., 2014).

The current study results indicate that the correlation of group professional identity with training efficiency was higher than the correlation of personal professional identity with training efficiency. However, the differences between the correlations were not significant. Heled et al (in review) found a significant difference between group and personal professional identity, in case of their correlation to satisfaction and commitment of the school counselor to her work. We assume that this study absence of significance is due to a smaller sample of school counselors than in Heled et al (in review). In future studies, it's important to sample a bigger group of school counselors to examine the difference between the impact of the efficiency of academic training on individual and group professional identity.

According to the results of the present study, the school counselor perception of the efficiency of academy training, more influences group professional identity, which is basically the school counselor's definition of the role in their own eyes. The findings that estimate a higher correlation between efficiency of the school counselling training to group professional identity than to personal professional identity, align with Heled and Davidovitch (2021a), who found that the training for the school counseling profession is deficient, in case of professional understanding of the students. The new counselors come to work at school when they do not know enough about the work structure and how to be involved in the school counselling field. Personal professional identity is more influenced by primary factors in the school's work, the counselor's satisfaction, and commitment to her work, as found in Heled et al (in review) study.

#### *5.4 Professional Seniority:*

As in Heled et al (in review), professional seniority was positively correlated with both professional identities. When counselors are more veteran in school field, they feel a more substantial group professional identity (more professionally involved, have a broad knowledge and positive attitude towards the profession) and better personal professional identity (feels more confidence in professional choice, feels higher professional efficacy, and has a sense of solidarity with the profession). In addition, no association was found between seniority and training efficiency since novice and veteran school counselors do not differ in their assessment of the contribution of academic training to the field preparation.

However, due to the proven importance of professional seniority of professional identity of the school counselors (Alves & Gazzola, 2011; Heled & Davidovitch, 2020) and concern of its intervening effect (confounding) would impair the validity of study findings, therefore the seniority was placed as a supervised variable in the model.

#### *5.5 training Efficiency as Mediator of Professional Identities*

The results indicate that the school counselor's academy efficiency training was positively associated with group and personal professional identity, while the seniority variable is controlled. The mediation model found that counselors who studied in two types of colleges, report higher training efficiency (compared to the counselors studied in universities), and higher training efficiency will predict a higher professional identity-personal and group.

In other words, this model found that school counseling studies in education and academic colleges predict higher levels of satisfaction with training efficiency than the universities. Higher satisfaction with the training efficiency predicts higher individual and group identity. However, it is important to note that the average academic training efficiency is also low in two typical colleges. The questionnaire measuring the efficiency of training is rated on a Likert scale between 1 to 7 (where 1 indicated 'Studies at academia did not contribute at all', and up to 7 indicated 'Studies at academia contributed me very much'. The average result for university, college and academic college counselors is 2.96 and 3.25, respectively. However, in academic colleges, where score is the highest of the three groups, the overall score for the questionnaire is average.

Studies around the world reinforced these findings, indicated that there is a gap between the ideal role of a school counselor studied in academia, and the fieldwork in school. The reality is often less ideal than the one presented to the counseling students (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Goodman-Scott, 2015; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Heled & Davidovitch, 2021a; Perusse & Goodnough, 2005; Watkinson et al., 2018). In addition, it was found that courses and training in master's degree programs of school counseling lack in-depth content. Therefore, the content studied and subject itself, contributes to overcome the gaps between preparation for the profession and working in the field (Perusse et al., 2001; Watkinson et al., 2018). It supported the fact that the inadequate preparation for school counseling, is a worldwide phenomenon.

Because professional identity development is ever evolving and involving experiential and maturational processes (Brott & Myers, 1999), it is not surprising that the professional school counselor construction of professional identity occurs most often during on-the-job experience (Henderson et al., 2007). If so, it is understandable that the

inadequate preparation in school counselors' training leads to an unstructured individual and group professional identity, to their re-learning work in the early years and to slow construction of their professional identity. The influence of academia on the professional identity of school counselor, seems to have an effect even after years in her work, as the foundations of this identity were shaky at first place. After graduation, the course of work and professional environment in school will shape professional identity of the school counselors. Therefore, design of the professional identity may seem very complex when adding all the possible factors that can affect the professional life of school counselor (Gibson et al., 2012).

## 6. Conclusions

School counseling preparation programs have a responsibility to prepare school counselor trainees for preparing students for practical work from all aspects and becoming effective advocates and social justice change agents (Ockerman & Mason, 2012). The research findings raised pointed questions about the efficiency of training for school counselors in general in academia, in all educational institutions. Therefore, our conclusions regarding school counseling curricula pertain to the three types of educational institutions both in terms of curriculum and encouraging the development of personal and group professional identity of future counselors:

The planners of school counseling programs are doing their best to train counselors for optimal work and curriculum of the training programs, combining theory studies with tools from the field of professional practice. However, the current and many of previous studies showed that the training is insufficient (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Goodman-Scott, 2015; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Heled & Davidovitch, 2021a; Perusse & Goodnough, 2005; Watkinson et al., 2018). In Israel, most school counselors' work is mainly systematic. However, as Heled and Davidovitch (2021a) found, there is no reference to this in the training program. School counselors work in complex school settings with unique job requirements. The State Comptroller Report (2014) unequivocally emphasizes the discrepancy between the schooling, training of school counselors, distorted and unregulated structure of employment, causes frustration and sometimes even attrition among counselors.

As noted earlier, Heled and Davidovitch (2020) found that there is a discrepancy between definition of the role of counselor according to the Ministry of Education and position itself. School counselors are required to take responsibility for pedagogical, systemic, administrative, and therapeutic roles. From this, it can be concluded that the academic programs for the study of counseling in schools are not suitable for this role, which is not clear at the first place and often changes between schools. Perhaps when the profession receives a clear professional identity, an accurate and uniform work model in all schools, at that time the training for the profession will also adopt a uniform model and a curriculum compatible with the actual fieldwork.

The current study is a part of a series of studies concerning the personal and group identity of school counselors in Israel, demonstrating development process, effect of job definition and the actual fieldwork on these two professional identities. Thus, we can conclude that the perception of school counselor training efficiency, is attached to their group and personal professional identity, even years ahead. Therefore, adapting the curricula to the actual role of school counselor and directing it to develop professional identity of the future counselor is critical.

## 7. Recommendations

Developing required consulting skills of a school counselor is a complex process. Therefore, it is necessary to develop an assessment of students during their master's degree in counseling to test their professional understanding and examine the effectiveness of training for the development of necessary counseling skills in schools (CACREP, 2016; Lambie & Ascher, 2016; Swank et al., 2012). Furthermore, academic programs for school counseling must meet uniform standards and develop measurable learning metrics. The abilities of future school counselors in all areas of their expertise and work must be evaluated during their study period (CACREP, 2016).

Previous studies evaluated what skills should be taught in counseling training programs (DePue & Lambie, 2014; Hamlet & Burnes, 2013; Lambie et al., 2018). For example, future school counselors need to learn how to implement a school or government counseling program in order to meet the needs of individual students (ASCA, 2010; CACREP, 2009). Moreover, students need to be familiar with methods for implementing comprehensive counseling programs in school (Murphy & Kaffenberg, 2007) and must understand how to develop intervention programs and critical methods and how to evaluate their results (Brott, 2006).

Therefore, as Kozlowski and Huss (2013) suggested, future school counselors need to be trained in a large workload and collaborate in establishing or implementing school counseling programs. Training should include practice, combine consultation and collaboration with various factors present in school. While at the same time, training demonstrates ways to integrate the counseling program into the school system. The writers also noted that school

counselors should first understand the differences between the role of a teacher, who can help and advise the student in certain areas, and role of the school counselor. Focusing on refining the role in academia will help to clarify the role of school counselor and develop the group professional identity of students.

## 8. Limitations

As noted, the current study involved 158 counselors from three different research groups. However, due to the small sample size some findings may not found to be significant. For future studies, we recommend that beyond the larger sample size, it is advisable to keep an equal number within the groups, as well as an equal number of counselors from each educational institution, so that the difference can be assessed within and between the groups. In addition, due to the seniority variable that affects the school counselors' professional identity, in future studies the seniority in profession should be considered and therefore place each research group with similar seniority level to reduce the differences between groups.

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