On the Association between Academic Studies and Professional Training– The Case of School Counseling

Do Academic Studies Train School Counselors for Their Work, as Perceived by Them Retrospectively?

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Abstract

In the current study we sought to examine how school counselors in Israel, who have worked in the profession for several years, evaluate the association between academic studies and the professional training they received during their Master's degree in school counseling. Fifteen school counselors were interviewed regarding their Academic courses, Practical training, enjoyment of one's studies, what is missing in the training process and their experience of entering the role after the academic studies. Retrospectively, the research findings showed that the academic program was not compatible with practical training for the counselor's actual work, as perceived by the school counselors. The results also showed that many changes must be made in Master's degree programs to better train school counselors for their job. The findings of the current study reinforce the inconsistent and vague definition of the school counselor's job and accentuate the many years of academic training that is not adapted to the school counselor's role.

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

1. Introduction

1.1 School Counseling in Israel – An Overview

According to the Ministry of Education in Israel (https://meyda.education.gov.il/files/shefi/yeuts/standartim/1tfisattafkid.pdf), school counseling is a professional service located within the school and intended to advance the functioning and mental well-being of the students and educational staff. The school counselor is in charge of promoting the mental, social, academic, and professional development of the students and staff. Therefore, when school counselors advise and listen to the students they do so with a view of the entire system, and when they participate in meetings with rest of the staff, they see well-being of the students as individuals within the system. In addition, the school counselor must strive to lead processes for reducing violence in the schools and transforming them into a safe and protected environment (SHEFI(1) Israel's Psychological Educational Service).

Employment of counselors in schools: The role of school counselors in Israel is complex, intricate, and not unequivocal. Therefore, the definition of counselor's role and type of position differs and is adapted according to the needs of each school. The school counselor's employment terms and job are affiliated with the school principal and his/her patterns of counseling utilization, which are annually subject to change and negotiations (Erhard, 2014).

The counselor's areas of occupation: A study conducted by Heled and Davidovich (2020) noticed confusion concerning the definition of the counselor's role in the Israeli educational system. As stated, the role definition according to the Israeli Ministry of Education is unclear. Hence, this lack of clarity leads counselors to engage in myriad areas in school and outside. According to the definition, counselor's work primarily follows the principles of systemic conception. Namely, they must promote student's mental well-being within the educational organization while supporting all the other elements in the system (Deshevsky, 2009). School counselors are required to fulfill many roles in diverse fields of activity (Deshevsky, 2009). Counselors routinely work with a vast target populations 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, building classes, and filling out various forms. The counselor's work also includes individual therapy with struggling students and topic-focused groups (Erhard, 2014; Erhard & Klingman, 2004; Tatar, 1997; Yosifon, 1998; Perlberg-Simcha & Erhard, 2007; Cobia & Henderson, 2003). Furthermore, school counselors in Israel are also teachers, and they must teach classes (mostly "life skills (Note 1)") at school to a varying extent according to the school's regulations. Due to the complexity of their role, the counselor must balance individual work with systemic activity, and should integrate the performance of planned tasks with providing an immediate response and unexpected demands (Deshevsky, 2009).

In the study conducted by Heled and Davidovich (2020), analysis of interviews with fifteen counselors showed each school has a different definition of the counselor's role and extent of position, according to the school's needs. In the interviews, the counselors described an array of systemic, academic, and individual functions. Despite the primarily systemic role definition, the counselors related that the reason they studied this subject was emotional work with the students, but that systemic work and classroom teaching occupy most of their time. All the counselors interviewed by Heled and Davidovich (2020) had given up on their dream of personal, therapeutic, and counseling contact with students due to the lack of time and an overloaded role definition.

1.2 Training Programs in School Counseling

Counselor education programs work to develop ethical and competent counseling professionals (Swank & Lambie, 2012). Competencies are set of skills, dispositions, and behaviors that support counselors in providing ethical and effective services to all clients (Parham, 2002).

Academic curricula are outlines of general instructions regarding teaching techniques and evaluation of the knowledge and skills affiliated with a particular subject or discipline. Systems of higher education required to prove the efficacy of their teaching programs, worldwide (Davidovitch & Iram, 2009). Evaluation of higher education curricula improves these programs, particularly in the current era where academic programs are undergoing renewal and expansion in many countries (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). When these lines are being written, quality assessment of Master's degree programs in school counseling has yet to be conducted. (Note 2)

As of 2021, there are 14 programs in Israel for studying towards a Master's degree in school counseling: at universities, teacher colleges, and academic colleges. The different training institutions have a standard training core. This core includes:

- **Methodological courses** – Courses that engage in research (more methodological courses are offered at universities than at colleges).
- **Theoretical studies** – Theoretical courses in counseling and psychology, courses on the necessary skills for conducting a helping interview, the principles of consulting, and the principles of therapeutic work, which include individual, group, and systemic skills (Schwartz, 2008).
- **Practical training and the supervisory course that accompanies this training**. The core program for a Master's degree in school counseling in Israel requires training consisting of at least 300 hours of supervised fieldwork and internship (group supervision in academia) over at least two years. In Israel, the students must spend at least one day a week for two years at a school or other educational institution and accompany the school counselor (mentor).

  In support professions, which include school counseling, training encompasses a combination of theoretical studies in academic courses and practical studies while experiencing work in relevant settings, based on the rationale that these two worlds are complement and dependent on each other (Toombs & Tierney, 1993). In school counseling studies, practical training includes the fieldwork in the form of practical work in a school and the supervision that accompanies the students, helps them to connect the theoretical material studied with its implementation in field.

  The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016), defines practicum and internship as "supervised clinical experiences" in which trainees develop, refine, and integrate counseling knowledge and skills into the professional practice (pp. 46–47). In other words, internship and practicum are developmental learning experiences, that support school counselors in training in integrating the academic course knowledge with the daily responsibilities of a school counselor (DePue & Lambie, 2014; Hamlet & Burnes, 2013).

1.3 The Role of Academia in Developing the Professional Ability of School Counselors

Previous studies assessed, which capabilities of school counselors should acquired in the training stage (DePue & Lambie, 2014; Hamlet & Burnes, 2013; Lambie, Mullen, Swank, & Blount, 2018). Training programs for school counseling are responsible for preparing students for practical work at the school from all aspects (Ockerman & Mason, 2013). At the same time, it must be remembered that learning a work technique or professional aspects does not necessarily lead to high performance capacity (Eyler, 2009; Girvan, Conneely, & Tangney, 2016). Hence, the practical training has added value that supplements academic training (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Students study and prepare for a specific profession when they experience it in practice during their training (Granello, 2000), thus fieldwork and practical training are the best way of acquiring experience and practical understanding of the course they study (Akos & Scarborough, 2004).

Erhard (2014) contends that training in the Master's program for school counseling in Israel is deficient. She claims that school counseling as a profession is not only therapeutic but also systemic and educational. Training programs for a Master's degree in school counseling at Israeli universities and colleges are mainly based on the psychology contents with an individual therapy orientation. The training of counseling students allocates almost no room to social conceptions and social-systemic practice, such that novice counselors do not have the necessary capabilities when first time arrive at the school (Erhard, 2014).

Then again, Rosenau and Yitzhak (2010) found that counseling students note favorably courses that include learning based on personal and hands-on experience, those that nurture professional abilities, such as the courses which include a practical component. For example, classes in basic supervision and advanced supervision, the helping interview, group dynamics, and group facilitation. These classes combine theoretical material and personal experiencing, and give special attention to develop personal and professional consciousness in a guided reflective process. Gruman & Purgason (2019) Reinforce this claim by adding ―the theoretical and conceptual knowledge gleaned from books, discussion, and simulations collide with the multifaceted practice of counseling in the schools" (p. 243).

In the study conducted by Amir (2013), where the participants were counseling students, interviewees shared that despite their inexperience with teaching in particular and their unfamiliarity with the school system in general, they feel that following their study experience for a Master's degree, they have a clear and distinct perception of the counselor's role and its meaning.

In the literature review conducted for present study, no study was found that evaluates the academic programs for school counseling, according to the testimony of incumbent counselors. Therefore, in the current study, we will be the first to relate this aspect by examining the counselor perception of the academic courses, the practical training, her enjoyment of the studies, what things are missing in the training program and her experience of entering the role after she finishes the academic studies.

In the Master's degree program in school counseling, beyond their academic studies, future counselors are required to participate in practical training in schools for one day a week during their studies, as well as in an academic supervisory course accompanies with practical training. Notably, the experiential learning activities in academic program nurture necessary skills and capabilities for the profession (Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007; Ricke, 2018).

Practical training is an essential component in programs for training school counselors and it constitutes critical evaluation of the student's counseling abilities (Hamlet & Burnes, 2013). In order to become skilled counselors, they must internalize the professional culture, acquire professional language, high standards of professional ethics, and develop commitment to the profession, at the training stage for the profession (Etinberg, Hillerbrand & Claiborn, 1995; Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Internalizing the profession's values and understanding, occur mainly during the practical experience. Indeed, studies have found that practical training is critical for building the counselor's professional identity and understanding of the profession (Gilbride, Goodrich, & Luke, 2016; Moyer & Yu, 2012).

Despite the great significance of training for such a complex role, almost no studies have been conducted to evaluate the study programs and practical training of future school counselors (Lambie et al., 2018; Swank Lambie, & Witta, 2012).

Lambie and Stickl Haugen (2021) developed a measure for evaluating the satisfaction of school counseling students during their practical training. Nevertheless, the professional skills acquired by the counselors during their training as evaluated by them while already on the job have not been assessed. Therefore, in present study we will examine how

counselors who have served in the position for several years, perceive the curricula for educational counseling at universities and colleges, as assistance for the professional work after their studies and the understanding of the profession.

Asulin (2005) sought to examine the image of school counseling profession among its students. For this purpose, she compared undergraduate students with students who have Master's degree in counseling. She uncovered a similar finding as Fishman (2002): Students on both degree levels have inferior knowledge of profession. In addition, during their studies the counseling students show dissatisfaction with their future work environment, financial compensation in profession, and its status. While some discovered the variety and the array of opportunities for professional work, others interpreted this reality as functional vagueness that makes it hard for them to shape their professional identity (Asulin, 2005; Erhard, 2014; Fishman, 2002).

Except these studies, no similar study was found to evaluate the overall academic and practical preparation for the role of school counselor.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of current study was to examine how school counselors in Israel, who have been on the job for several years, evaluate the association between academic studies and professional training provided in academia as part of the Master's degree in school counseling, for the first time. We examined their satisfaction with courses, academic faculty, and with practical training, then analyzed how these factors affect their counseling self-efficacy in the field.

3. Method

3.1 Research Population

Fifteen female school counselors from Israel, of different ages, working at different school settings, and from different residential areas, were interviewed. Namely, the group of participants was heterogeneous with respect to their demographic, professional, and personal characteristics. Of the 15 counselors interviewed, seven were novice counselors (1-4 years in the profession), five were more senior (5-9 years in the profession), and three were veterans (more than 10 years).

Five of the counselors had studied for their Master's degree at universities, five at teacher colleges, and five at academic colleges.

Ten of the counselors had been employed in the school system (pre-school and school teachers, homeroom teachers, employees of the Ministry of Education) before beginning their work in counseling, and five had no knowledge of school system before beginning of their job. Six of the counselors were working in elementary schools and eight in secondary schools. One counselor was working at more than one school. Two of the counselors were from the Arab sector and 13 from the Jewish sector. All were working at schools officially affiliated with the Ministry of Education.

3.2 Procedure

Before commencing the study, the researchers received approval from the institutional ethics committee to conduct this study.

An appeal was made through a Facebook post in a counselors' group, seeking volunteers for an interview while presenting the topic of study, its purpose, and how it would be carried out. The volunteer counselors were asked before the interview about their seniority, professional background, and type of school in which they are employed, so that they could be screened by the maximum variation sampling method. Each interviewee was offered the choice of being interviewed by telephone or in-person. All the interviewees were asked to be interviewed by telephonically and before the beginning of interview everyone described her professional and academic background. After the interviewees gave their consent to participate in the study, they were told that if the interview does not suit their views, they can interrupt it at any stage and what they said would not be used. The interviewees were promised that their answers would be presented anonymously and with no identifying details. This was followed by the interview in the format of a semi-structured interview. The interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, as customary in qualitative research.

3.3 Analysis of the Interviews

For data analysis we used a research paradigm called Grounded Theory, which is a theory constructed in the process of a study and grounded in data collected throughout (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Gibton, 2001; Shkedi, 2003). The process of grouping together data that belong to the same phenomenon is called categorization. Categorization is

based on classification and it is carried out by distinguishing and separating within the data sequence to detect the meaning of data.

4. Results

4.1 Evaluation of Academic Courses

Counselors-in-training applies knowledge and skills acquired during counseling content courses (e.g., Theories of Counseling) into their practice during professional practice courses (Practicum and Internship) within their preparation program (CACREP, 2016).

The current study, which consisted of counselors with varying seniority and employed in practice, all the counselors appear to lament that their studies had not prepared them well for the systemic and therapeutic work. Thirteen counselors reviled that they did not feel that the various courses had prepared them for the work at the conclusion of their academic studies. Two of the fifteen counselors, felt their studies had prepared them for the job in some way:

"Personally, I mainly liked the psychology classes. I liked the practical supervision in the fieldwork. I liked the lecturers very much. It had a considerable effect on our understanding of what we were going to do. I felt that there is a connection between the studies and reality. There is a truly personal connection with the lecturers. There were some classes that I didn't like because they were boring, but that's it".

1(a). As for the thirteen counselors who felt dissatisfied with the courses in the academy, we shall divide the counselor's dissatisfaction with the academic courses into several points:

It seems that almost all the counselors are agreed as to the large number and topics of the theoretical courses: *"In fact, they teach unrelated theories… I thought that it is not practical. Students construct their schedule on their own, and there is no sense of group and togetherness. The studies are very remote from the practice, very remote from the field".* Another counselor reinforces this: *"I didn't like it that there were courses that disregarded the practice. There were lots of theoretical courses… but we weren't prepared for systemic work at all".* Another counselor summarizes: *"About a third of the classes were not relevant for me, for instance multiple cultures. It has nothing to do with me. The studies are research-oriented and that's not relevant for the field. I didn't feel that the courses gave me much".*

Limited systemic studies: *"I didn't learn anything about the entire systemic and organizational topic as a counselor… We are only given therapeutic tools, I was not prepared at all for work as a counselor. I was prepared for work with parents and children, which hardly exists in the actual job. We didn't learn how to teach "Life skills"… I didn't even understand what that is. Former teachers, who study to be future counselors, understand a little more".* Another counselor further specified: *"I was not prepared for systemic work. The courses were theoretical. There was a lack of experiential courses regarding the field, difficulties of counselors in the field".* Another added: *"We didn't learn about systemic work at all. We only learned about individual counselor or small-group counseling and we learned a little how to teach "life skills"".* Another counselor, who has been on the job for many years, summarized: *"We didn't learn anything about systemic work, I learned everything alone in the field. The practical course prepared me for the individual work with children but not at all for systemic work at school".*

General dissatisfaction with studies: *"After concluding my studies, I arrived at a school as a new counselor without much knowledge. I didn't understand anything. I didn't like not having received therapeutic tools. That is missing. I arrived at a therapeutic profession, but I hadn't learned anything. There is a lack of courses that are connected to the field…"* Another added about the lack of preparation for "life skills" classes, which counselors in Israeli schools must teach: *"You don't learn how to teach, not "life skills" and other … how to talk to parents, teachers and students… Less should be taught about the philosophy of the profession. Counseling varies a lot between different schools. I didn't understand what was expected of me at all. I constantly tried to understand what they want me to know".* A third counselor summarized: *"I didn't learn the profession at academy… there was no learning about what the job entails [regarding working] with other figures. Everything was theoretical; although they tried to make it practical, that's not something you can learn".*

Our findings align with Amir (2013), who found that the absolute majority of the respondents indicate dissatisfaction with the theoretical courses, claiming that most of the class topics were not compatible with the subjects in fieldwork or perceived as essential for the counselor's work.

In addition, Ben Moshe (2011) found that school counselors who are new in profession reported the first year of their work in the field is mainly utilized to become familiar with the system and how the counseling profession is executed in practice, learning about the job, the organization, and its surroundings. The counselors attested that the contribution of academic training was primarily in personal areas. The counselors attributed academic training a

moderate contribution and contended that many courses are not relevant for the counselor's job and that there is a discrepancy between academic training and fieldwork. Nevertheless, Ben Moshe (2011) also stated counselors with educational experience, who had previously been teachers, are more familiar with the counseling work and manage to fit into this job better than those who have no or less teaching experience.

1(b). Evaluation of the academic faculty

Some of the incompatibility between the topics taught in the training courses for school counselors to the actual profession in the field may stem from the faculty's lack of knowledge or professionalism in school counseling tracks, as most of the lecturers do not come from this field. Study programs for an academic degree in other countries also focus more on clinical counseling for mental health than on school counseling (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Watkinson, Goodman-Scott, Martin, & Biles, 2018). Most of the lecturers in the school counseling track do not come from the field of counseling and have no experience in schools and therefore do not significantly ascribe to the current trends in school counseling or in methods employed in the courses. Therefore, many courses in Master's degree studies in school counseling were found to lack depth in the contents they impart to future counselors. They also contribute to the discrepancy between preparations for the profession and the actual job (Perusse, Goodnough, & Noel, 2001; Watkinson et al., 2018). As attested by the counselors in the current study:

"From all of our teachers at the academy, only the lecturer on the school practicum haɔe been a school counselor in the past… all the rest were lecturers from [the field of] psychology. It is a problem that no one in the program is from the field of counseling… in all other courses the lecturers have no connection with counseling, or with education, and sometimes not even with psychology. Unclear courses, irrelevant and unnecessary study materials". Another counselor further stated: *"The studies were merely theoretical, we didn't study the profession. I wasn't taught counseling at all. The contents are interesting but there is a need for a course that is relevant for the field; to understand what you do in the profession in practice. Only when I was part of the profession did I learn what it actually involves".*

4.2 Practical Training/ Internship/ Fieldwork

Training and fieldwork in the Master's program are developmental learning experience that develop the counseling tools provided to school counselors as part of their training to integrate the knowledge they obtained in theoretical courses with the daily responsibility of the counselor at the school (DePue & Lambie, 2014; Hamlet & Burnes, 2013).

while training at the school, the students counseling experience, serve as a critical period of transition to develop skills and learn how to navigate the many aspects of counseling programs at the school. A good practical training builds the foundations of a successful career. The hours which students spend at school in fieldwork are the moments when the theoretical knowledge from books, discussions, and simulations in the classroom applied in practicing counseling in the schools (Gruman & Purgason, 2019; Lambie & Haugen, 2021).

The core program for a Master's degree in school counseling in Israel requires training encompassing at least 300 hours of supervised fieldwork and internship (group and personal supervision) over at least two years. In Israel, students must spend at least one day a week for two years at a school or other educational institution, and accompany the work of the school counselor (the mentor). In each educational institution, the nature of the fieldwork differs as do the students' assignments. Moreover, in all counseling tracks in Israel, searching for mentors is considered a complex and even problematic, due to the lack of suitable compensation, allocation of hours, recognition of the mentor's status, lack of unique training, and more. Mentors are often chosen incidentally or because of limited choice (Lazovsky, Shimoni, & Yitzhak-Monsonego, 2003).

It is hard to measure the impact of practical training on counseling students. However, studies have found that practical fieldwork leads to a rise in the counselor's self-efficacy, self-consciousness, and job commitment (Cashwell & Dooley, 2001; Leherman-Waterman, & Ladany, 2001). Fieldwork also helps novice counselors to develop their professional identity and their role definition as conselors (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006).

The respondent's views regarding practical training and its supervision during their academic studies varied in the current study . Some said, the training was beneficial and meaningful to begin work in the profession, while others felt that they had not achieved their goal. Also, opinions were divided regarding supervision in academia–the course that accompanies the practical training. The two counselors who were satisfied both with the practical training and with the accompanying supervision in academia related:

"Only the fieldwork enabled me well to be a school counselor. The supervision was excellent from a systemic perspective as well. We received an explanation of counseling values, the skills of the school counselor, we learned

about it… so when I began to work I felt that I was ready. I was trained to think outside the box". Another counselor added: *"The fieldwork prepared me for work as a counselor. But only one of the two years of the fieldwork was sufficient. As the good year progressed… it was truly [about] the work of a counselor… the supervision at the university was good as well, the lecturers were counselor's themselves".*

These counselors confirmed that they satisfied with the practical training and the accompanying supervision. One favorably mentioned the preparation for systemic work is crucial to work as a counselor. For another counselor it was significant to note the importance of the fieldwork for the preparation – when training was given sufficient and adequate attention and she was charged with actual counseling work, the supervision too was appropriate and prepared her for the job.

2(a). Counselor's dissatisfaction with the contribution of the practical training and supervision in academia could be divided in several subcategories:

Role of the practical training:

"Only the fieldwork gave some sort of preparation… and the supervision for the fieldwork… in the supervision at the academy we filled out reports and spoke about what was happening in the fieldwork. It wasn't meaningful. My practical training was with a good counselor trainee… but it was in an elementary school and I am currently working in a junior high, so the experiencing was not compatible at all with the present job. Before beginning work as a counselor, I studied the work itself with an actual counselor the previous summer… she taught me the job and explained the profession. She taught me everything I knew. I'm doing the same thing at present with other counselors who are beginning their work at the school, because I know that the training they got in the academy isn't sufficient".

The work of school counselors in elementary schools differs significantly from their work in junior high schools and high schools. At each school level, the students and teachers have entirely different needs, so the work is very different. At the same time, during the academic studies students do not know where they will work in the future and thus it seems preferable to experience several school levels during the two years of fieldwork.

Another counselor related that in one of the two years of fieldwork, she had to be in an informal setting, although in Israel the absolute majority of school counselors work in formal settings affiliated with the Ministry of Education. In some academic institutions, prerequisite for fieldwork, so that future counselors can experience a variety of educational possibilities:

"studies can't really prepare one for the work. Studies prepare only to a certain degree. I had to work one year in a high school and one year in an informal system. The fieldwork was in a hostel rather than in a mainstream school… which is a limited and specific area. And it does not prepare, does not have any effect, and does not reflect the counselor's job. Fieldwork is important but it should be at a school that gives some idea of the job".

The contents experienced in fieldwork:

"There is a big difference between fieldwork and counselor's work… In the first year of fieldwork, I was accompanied by a counselor at an elementary school for four hours a week, and in the second year I worked in a high school. Yes… you do learn something because we observe and show enthusiasm, but it's a drop in the sea…"

As Heled and Davidovich (2020) described, the work of school counselors in Israel is intricate, covers many areas, and varies by the school according to the management's needs. The counselors interviewed in the current study complain that the fieldwork during their studies was too short, too focused, and cannot genuinely simulate the work of the school counselor. As well explained by one of the counselors:

"In fieldwork Sometimes, the student experiences individual therapy or group facilitation on a particular topic … this is a process that is disconnected from the work of the school counselor… and therefore it is tough to understand the school system in one year, especially when you are at the school once a week. Even if the counselor try very hard, ultimately once a week is not enough. Its not connected to reality".

Another counselor added: *"The fieldwork prepared me more than the courses taught at the university… although it's completely different from the real work of the counselor, when you come to the school only on a certain day… because the atmosphere at the school varies each time. The moment you work at a school, the work is different. As a student, you see very specific things and you can't see the full picture".*

"The fieldwork prepared me in some way… The problem is that you can see only one model of counselor, how she works, what are the expectations and demands at this specific school. In each school the work is different".

The on-site mentor in fieldwork:

It is evident that the satisfaction with fieldwork is strongly affected by the mentor. According to the Psychological Educational Service (SHEFI (3)) in Israel, mentors are certified counselors with various levels of seniority who have a good command of knowledge about school counseling and ethical code as well as proven professional experience. A school counselor must assume responsibility for mentoring students only if she meets these requirements and shall see herself as a professional and ethical role model for the students. Nevertheless, school counselors who mentor students were found to receive only limited training for providing supervision, making it hard for students to train properly to develop as counselors and maximize their training experience (Neyland-Brown, Laux, Reynolds, Kozlowski & Piazza, 2019).

"In the fieldwork I was attached to a counselor in elementary school and I was very eager to work with the children… But I had to design a curriculum for "life skills" classes for sixth graders and that was it. In the school in the second year the counselor told me that I don't have to come. And she didn't teach me anything. Ultimately, I took two or three students and gave them group supervision on test anxiety… It was at my own initiative. The fieldwork was no good".

In practice, from the interviews it seems that counselors complain that the mentors lack training and supervision by the academic institution and the supervising elements, on how to accompany their fieldwork. In addition, some counselors described a situation where it is very difficult to find a counselor who will agree to accompany them, due to the heavy load carried by school counselors to begin with or the mentors receive a negligent sum for their work with the students. Moreover, Bernard and Goodyear (2014) claimed the training of mentors does not give mentors an opportunity to practice and understand how to work with students in fieldwork.

As related by another counselor: *"I spent the first year of fieldwork in a high school. I learned nothing there. The counselor was great but she had no time to supervise students. She also didn't allow me to be present in work conversations and to see how the work is done in practice".*

2(b). Supervision of fieldwork in the academic institution

Fieldwork in the educational institution is accompanied by group supervision at the academic institution once a week, by a faculty member from the school counseling track. The purpose of the supervision is to enable processing and analysis of the fieldwork on the cognitive and emotional level. The students carry out professional and personal reflection, both on the knowledge received and its implementation, as well as on oneself as a professional (Holloway, 1995; Smith, 2009). This supervision, provided before the fieldwork, for its duration and subsequently, is a central component in the professionalization of school counselors. Supervision in academia is usually (but not necessarily) provided by a professional experienced in school counseling as the supervisor determines the contents of the course and how it is conveyed to the students.

Judging by the interviews, supervision in academia can focus both on fieldwork in the schools and on contents raised by the students; it also can be limited to theories in consulting or other theoretical contents and can also focus on personal emotional development of the students, in order to prepare them for work in counseling. Nonetheless, the supervisor in academia can also construct the course that teaches about the essence of the counseling role, primarily on the systemic dimension which receives little attention in the various courses, as seen previously. As evident from the reports of the counselors – each told a different story:

There were school counselors who saw the class attendant in the academy as worthless: *"Supervision at the college includes discussions on the fieldwork, but nothing serious".* Another counselor added: *"Supervision of the fieldwork was not good. We weren't given tools about our work at school and received no explanation about the essence of the role of school counselor".* Another counselor was more resolute: *"The supervision [provided] in academia regarding the fieldwork was terrible. I didn't know what the work would truly entail. I didn't even know before I began work that I have to teach classes".*

In contrast, some counselors have been ambivalent about facilitation in academia: *"The supervision in the academy was okay. It was good in total. We raised issues from the field of counseling. The classes were specific and each dealt with a different topic associated with counseling and not about our fieldwork at the schools". One added: "Supervision of the fieldwork included discussions on what we had experienced at school. But it was not enough and we were not given tools. Also, so long as the fieldwork does not include what the counselor really does, then we don't receive appropriate supervision if the fieldwork does not involve doing the counselor's work".*

There were also some school counselors who were very satisfied with the academic guidance: *"The supervision was interesting and the classes were enjoyable, although we weren't taught what the counselor does in practice from a systemic point of view"*.

One of the counselors was whole-hearted: *"During the course that accompanies the fieldwork, we met school counselors who volunteered to come and tell us about the actual job. It was great"*.

5. Enjoyment of Studies

Although almost all the counselors complained to some extent about preparation for the profession in academia, most counselors spoke about how much they had enjoyed their Master's degree studies. They all noted that they would recommend other study where they did, aside from two counselors. One of them summarized: *"I wouldn't recommend studying at the same university I did… Also, the other students who studied with me had their dreams shattered. They wanted to work as counselors and after the first year of studies they despaired. If I could go back I would go [study] elsewhere"*.

Almost all noted the sense of closeness to the other students of their group in Master's studies. Except three counselors who went to university who did not feel so. The counselors who studied in colleges were grateful for combining work and studies, as studies at a college are concentrated in one or two days a week each semester. Some decided to study at a college rather than university for this reason.

6. What the Studies Lack

Ben Moshe (2011) conducted interviews with counselors in their first year of job. The interviewees mentioned that the areas that should be stressed in academic studies are systemic counseling, counseling principals or teachers, working with role partners outside the school, and referrals to various support elements in the community. They also emphasized it is necessary to prepare future counselors regarding learning disabilities and study accommodations. They said changes should be made in the academic curriculum to allow better exposure to the counselor's actual job, preliminary acquaintance with "life skills" programs, and coordinating expectations towards beginning work.

The counselors in the current study added to the findings of Ben Moshe (2011) and further clarified them:

"In my opinion, during the study period there is a need for more orientation towards the challenges and problems of the system of school counselling. What happens in practice, is that in academia students are sold the fantasy that counselors are very significant for the school and for the school system … and everything is great in the profession … they are not told about the difficulties with the school principal, the shortcomings of counseling, the difficulty within the system. It is imperative to discuss the difficulties so that we can think creatively, both in school and at work, rather than only talking about the positive sides of the profession. Regretfully, we were not taught by any counselors from the field in any of the courses…. Only in supervising the fieldwork, and that's certainly not enough".

One of the counselors highlighted the disadvantage of the program in academia in preparation for workload: *"I was a teacher before these studies, so I was familiar with the role of the counselor. But I didn't really know how overloaded the role is. There is no preparation for the essence of the job, for what you do in practice in daily work, there is no preparation for the incredible overload"*.

Another counselor emphasized the lack of connection between the program curricula and the field: *"I began teaching in a class with no training. We were not prepared to teach "life skills" lessons. We weren't told that we would have to teach. The studies also lack connection to the field… and familiarization with the school system. What is the theme of the school… how to handle problems and behavior disorders and how to form connections with the staff and with the principal". As* one added*: "Beyond the theory there was need for more experiencing in the field. Throughout the studies, systemic work was mentioned here and there, but I thought that there is more individual and therapeutic work – because that is the majority of the studies. In practice… the emphasis in the field is on systemic work and work with staff, that is not taught at all"*.

One of the counselors mentioned the lack of learning about working with other factors and stakeholders inside the school*: "It is a pity that there is no teaching about the other figures at the school and how to get along with them. I was a homeroom teacher myself before I become a school counselor. Therefore, I know what there are dealing with and I know how to work and consult them. If I had not been a homeroom teacher I would have been much more judgmental towards them"*.

Another counselor summarized differently than the others. She said something surprising: *"I don't know what's missing in the academic studies… because only when you get into it yourself can you understand the pressure and load placed on the counselor… you can't truly prepare for this job"*.

Starting work as counselors at the school after graduating

Once a student completes her academic obligations (aside from the degree in counseling, she must also earn a teacher's certificate), she begins to work in a school as a counselor with a temporary license for at least two years. Since most of the counselors complain that the academic studies do not train them for work as a counselor, it is not surprising that they feel unprepared for work in the field:

"There is a huge difference between school and the field. In the first year at work I felt lost… In the courses, the fieldwork, and the supervision, they don't teach about what the counselor does at school. In fieldwork too, I didn't understand at all how much of the work is systemic… I knew nothing about the welfare system, the school psychologist… we didn't learn anything. We didn't learn anything that has to do with school counseling".

Another counselor added:

"After university, when I began my first year, I was constantly crying… I felt drained. Only several years later I begin to learn to like the profession".

7. Discussion

In the current study, we sought to examine how school counselors in Israel who have been on job for several years evaluate the association between academic studies and the professional training they received in Master's degree in school counseling. We examined their satisfaction with the courses, the academic faculty, and the practical training, and how these affected their sense of counseling self-efficacy in the field.

The field of school counseling is practical, therefore, some claim that academic training programs for school counseling are in charge of preparing students for all aspects of work in schools (Ockerman & Mason, 2012). To date, both in Israel and elsewhere, almost no research has been held to evaluate study and fieldwork programs in the Master's degree for school counselors about the preparation they provide for job (Lambie et al., 2018; Swank et al., 2012).

The findings of the current study corroborate with the claim made by Erhard (2014), whereby training for school counseling in Israel is deficient. However, the results regarding the preparation of school counselors in academic Master's degree programs in counseling are disturbing. The absolute majority of the research interviewees clearly indicate dissatisfaction with their academic studies associated to their preparation for the job.

Moreover, the current study raised several categories for evaluating academic training to accomplish the role of a counselor.

The first category examined the counselor's satisfaction with the theoretical courses in the Master's degree program and whether they train students well for work in the field. The research findings indicate dismal findings, where the absolute majority of the counselors indicated that courses for the Master's degree are not compatible with the counselor's actual work and are completely incapable of training students for their job.

Other studies from around the world also noted disparities between the academic training of school counselors and the reality of school counseling (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Goodman-Scott, 2015; Goodman-Scott, Watkinson, Martin, & Biles, 2016; Perusse & Goodnough, 2005; Watkinson et al., 2018). Additionally, many courses in Master's programs in school counseling were found lack in depth contents they imparted to future counselors. They also contribute to the discrepancies between preparation for the job and the actual work (Perusse et al., 2001; Watkinson et al., 2018). Hence it seems inadequate preparation for school counseling, worldwide.

The worldwide discrepancies found in studies include disparities between the ideal role of school counselor learned in academia, and the actual reality of job, which is often less ideal than presented to the students (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Watkinson et al., 2018). Importantly, the school counselors reported that they feel not ready for the job, as some of the courses they studied dring Master's degree were entirely irrelevant for the job (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Perusse & Goodnough, 2005). The current study reinforces these claims and counselors further clarify that although the role of the school counselor is primarily systemic, there is no reference to this at all in the training program. Thus, academy graduates are not professionally prepared for work in schools. Besides, counselors also added that although they must teach classes at the school ("life skills") or guide homeroom teachers, no reference is made to this in academia, as well as the direction on how to teach them in particular. Therefore, novice counselors feel lost in their first years on the job due to a lack of orientation in academia. Ben Moshe (2011) reinforces this

contention in her study on new counselors on the job, who reported that the first year of their actual work is usually utilized to become acquainted with the system and with how the counseling profession is performed in practice, learning about the job, the organization, and the environment. The counselors in her study complained that the academic training contributed mainly to individual therapy at school, an area that is almost nonexistent in the field.

Beyond examining the topics and contents of the school counselor training programs, the current study raised an essential question, whether the counselors were satisfied with the lecturers in the courses in the academy and their contribution to preparation of the counselors. Lecturers in school counseling programs have a difficult task shaping the future generation of counselors in a profession that lacks a consistent definition (Havlik, Ciarletta, & Crawford, 2019). The counselors interviewed in the current study consistently complain that most of the lecturers do not come from school counseling background and therefore could not train them for the actual job. This finding is similar with other countries, as the study program in school counseling mainly focuses on clinical counseling for mental health than on school counseling (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Watkinson et al., 2018) due to a lack of lecturers from the actual field.

At the same time Perusse, Poynton, Parzych and Goodnough (2015), who surveyed Master's programs for school counseling in the US, compared to previous surveys it was found that almost all programs include at least one lecturer who served as a school counselor in past, and their number was increased by 13.9 percent relative to previous years. Hence, there seems to be some improvement around the world, and it would be interesting to clarify whether this trend also exists in Israel. Nonetheless, it is necessary to examine whether this raise in number of lecturers come from school counseling is indeed meaningful and contributes to structuring counseling efficacy and preparation for the role in academia.

In addition, the quality of practical training required in academia and accompanying supervision should be examined. In order for students to become skilled counselors, they are required to internalize the professional culture, acquire the professional language and standards of professional ethics, and develop a commitment to the profession even at training stage (Etinberg et al., 1995; Moss et al., 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Internalizing the profession's values and understanding it occurs mainly during fieldwork in the schools. Practical training was found critical for constructing the counselor's professional identity and understanding of the profession (Gilbride et al., 2016; Moyer & Yu, 2012). Studies that explored the professional identity of school counselors during their training found that proper and meaningful fieldwork during academic studies induced significant impact on counselor's further work and their professional identity (Brott & Myers, 1999; Gilbridge et al., 2016; Moss et al., 2014; Moyer & Yu, 2012;). Furr and Carroll (2003) found that the preferred strategy of counseling students is personal experience. The meaningful incidents during training based on the immediate application of theoretical knowledge, are perceived by counselors to affect future counseling behavior (Toporek, Ortega-Villalobos, & Pope-Davis, 2004).

Rosenau and Yitzhak (2010) investigated the impact of meaningful learning incidents during the Master's degree in school counseling on issues related to the consolidation of one's professional identity, acquiring counseling knowledge, and personal learning about themselves as future counselors. The significance of the association and mutual relations between academia and field, is manifested conspicuously in the description of incidents by counseling students. Most of the students chose fieldwork as the source of the most influential learning incident during their Master's degree studies. The most common type of incident was found to be one that describes counseling interventions in fieldwork, means an action taken by the counselor to provide a prompt or continueous response to a problem.

In the current study, although most of the counselors remembered the practical training during their studies for the degree, as a positive experience and as one that had prepared them to a certain degree for their work in the field, they experienced various failures during training: The first is the fieldwork setting. Counseling students can train in an elementary school, junior high, or high school. Sometimes, students must do one of their two years of fieldwork in an informal setting (for instance, children's home, hospital, hotel). As there is a lack of mentors and therefore of fieldwork sites, there is almost no option of choosing one's fieldwork and students do not always work in the same setting as their ultimate job after graduation. The work of counselors in elementary schools differs considerably from work in junior highs and high schools. Each of the school levels has completely different needs for students and teachers, and therefore the actual work is very different. Thus, fieldwork is often not compatible with the counselor's actual work.

Furthermore, the contents that students must experience in their fieldwork are not compatible with the counselor's actual work. Students are mainly required to guide a group on a particular subject, accompany a struggling child, and

are sometimes permitted to accompany the mentor in their work. Even in the fieldwork, there is no exposure to the systemic work required of the counselor, nor the guidance of the school staff, as indicated in the current study.

Moreover, the counselors attest that the mentor strongly influences satisfaction with the practical training. School counselors who serve as mentors found to receive poor training in supervision or to accompany the students with no supervision or outline for practical training of students, which makes it hard for students to properly train in order to develop as counselors and maximize their training experience to understand how to supervise students (Neyland-Brown et al., 2019).

The practical work at educational institution is accompanied by group supervision once a week by a faculty member from the school counseling track. Supervision in academia is usually provided by professional personnel experienced in school counseling (but not necessarily so). The supervisor determines the course contents and how it conveyed to the students. The counselors in the current study disagreed with supervision in academia, and their experience depend on the supervisor, professional experience, and how they plan annual course. Since there is no clear outline regarding the necessary skills for fieldwork in schools nor a uniform outline for the accompanying supervision in academia (no agreement between interviewee's counselors on this matter.)

Noticeably, despite these claims concerning the quality of training and the experience of commencing work at school, most of the counselors included in the study demonstrated their study experience as very positive, empowering, and enjoyable.

Developing counseling abilities is a complex process. Therefore, it is necessary to develop an evaluation of counseling students during their training to support their professional growth and development of counseling skills in schools (CACREP, 2016; Lambie & Ascher, 2016; Swank et al., 2012). Master's degree programs for school counseling must meet specific standards, develop measurable learning outcomes for students, and capabilities of future counselors must be evaluated and explored in every area of their work, accordingly (CACREP, 2016). Previous studies evaluated the skills needed for the school counselor must be taught in the training programs (DePue & Lambie, 2014; Hamlet & Burnes, 2013; Lambie et al., 2018), but Heled and Davidovich (2020) found that there is confusion regarding the definition of the counselor's role in Israel's school system and counselors are required to take responsibility for systemic, pedagogic, administrative, and therapeutic roles. Hence, it may be concluded that Israel's study programs in school counseling are not adequate for this role, which is unclear to begin with and changes frequently. Perhaps, when the profession will receive a clear professional identity and a precise or uniform work model in all schools, then training for the profession will also embrace a uniform model and a compatible study program with the actual role. In addition, the interviews in current study highlighted the counselors complain that mentors lack training and supervision on how to accompany them in their fieldwork. There may be a need for an outline for practical training must include academia and the Ministry of Education, to guide both mentor and students.

Notes

Note 1. In all schools the counselor is responsible for and teaches the "Life Skills" program. The program focuses on learning intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, clarifying values and developing skills in topics such as various related to children's daily lives and optional dangers. The program offers each age group to have conversations with students about their lives, their experience in age tasks, the formation of their identity, their sexuality, their encounter with risk behaviors and the different life situations in which they experience (SHEFI (3)). In addition, the school counselor is also a class teacher or a teacher of a particular profession, depending on the requirements of the school where she works in.

Note 2. The training of school counselors began in Israel in 1962, with the first programs for diploma studies for teacher-counselors at three universities: Hebrew University, Bar-Ilan University, and Tel-Aviv University. In time, the training framework was expanded and students were awarded a Bachelor's degree in school counseling. At the same time, Master's degree programs evolved at research universities. Nevertheless, for more than four decades counselors with a diploma in counseling, a Bachelor's degree in counseling, and a Master's degree in counseling worked side by side. Since 2005, a Master's degree in counseling is required in order to work as a school counselor (Erhard, 2008).

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