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**The Contribution of a Training Program for
Support-Teachers of Students with Vision
Impairment to Their Perceptions of Promoting
Students' Social Conduct**

Long Abstract

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Table of Contents

Glossary	
Abbreviations	
Abstract	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Research Background and Gap in Knowledge	1
Main Research Goals	2
Main Research Questions.....	3
CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	4
I.1 Aspects of Teachers' Role Perception and Teachers' Role Perception Regarding Students' Social Conduct.....	4
I.2 Aspects of Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy and Sense of Self-Efficacy Regarding Students' Social Conduct	4
I.3 Aspects of Teachers' Motivation and Motivation Regarding Students' Social Conduct	5
I.4 Aspects of Teachers' Professional Development and PD Addressing Students' Social Conduct	6
I.5 Literature Review of Social Skills and Social Conduct of Students with VI	7
I.6 The Israeli STs' Training Program promoting Social Conduct of Students with VI - Aims and Stages	8
I.7 Conceptual Framework.....	9
CHAPTER II – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	9
II.1 Research Paradigm: Mixed-Methods Approach	9
II.2 Research Design	9
II.3 Research Target Population.....	12
CHAPTER III – MAIN FINDINGS.....	13
III.1 Findings Emerging from Study 1: Training program's contribution to graduate STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy, motivation and professional development with regard to promoting social conduct of students with VI (qualitative study -focus group discussions).....	13
III.2 Findings Emerging from Study 2: Changes in STs' Perceptions of Their Role, Sense of Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Perceptions of students' Social Conduct, as a Result of Teachers' Participation in the Training Program (Quantitative study) ...	15
III.3 Findings emerging from study 3: Support-teachers' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their role, sense of self-efficacy, motivation, and professional development regarding promoting social conduct of students with VI	

and perceptions of changes in their students' social conduct (qualitative study – semi-structured interviews).....	21
CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	24
IV.1 Conceptual Conclusions: Rethinking and Improving STs' Training in the Social Field (STT-SF model).....	24
IV.2 Main Practical Implications and Recommendations	29
IV.3 Contribution to Knowledge	30
IV.4 Further Studies	31
IV.5 Importance of Research and Universal Contribution	32
REFERENCES.....	33

List of Tables

Table A:	Main research questions as they relate to three respective studies	3
Table II.1:	Research design	11
Table III.1:	Themes and related categories pertaining to study question 1	13
Table III.2:	Themes and related categories pertaining to study question 2	14
Table III.3:	Themes and associated categories pertaining to study question 3	14
Table III.4:	Themes and associated categories pertaining to study question 4	15
Table III.5:	Means and SDs of four categories of STs' perceptions of their role in each group	16
Table III.6:	Means and SDs of four categories of STs' perceptions of their sense of self-efficacy in each group	17
Table III.7:	Means and SDs of each type of STs' motivation	18
Table III.8:	Pearson's correlations of STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation	19
Table III.9:	Means and SD's of social dimensions and total score in each group	20
Table III.10:	Themes and related categories pertaining to study question 1	21
Table III.11:	Themes and related categories pertaining to study question 2	22
Table III.12:	Themes and related categories pertaining to study question 3	22
Table III.13:	14 types of STs' and stakeholders' perceptions of students' behavioral changes following their STs' participation in the program	23

List of Figures

Figure I.1:	The Conceptual Framework	9
Figure II.1:	Three sequential studies in the research multiphase design	10
Figure II.2:	Chronological order of applying the three research studies	10
Figure III.1:	Study 2 design	16
Figure III.2:	Means of four categories of STs' perceptions of their role by group and time in the control group	17
Figure III.3:	Means of four categories of STs' perceptions of their role by group and time in the study group	17
Figure III.4:	Means of four categories of STs' perceptions of their sense of self-efficacy by group and time in the study group	18
Figure III.5:	Means of four categories of STs' perceptions of their sense of self-efficacy by group and time in the control group	18
Figure III.6:	Means of social dimensions and total score in the study group	20
Figure III.7:	Means of social dimensions and total score in the control group	20
Figure IV.1:	PD Framework of STT-SF Model	27
Figure VI.2:	STT-SF model to improve STs' role perception, sense of self-efficacy, motivation and PD to promote the social conduct of students with VI	29

Glossary

Term	Explanation
Student with Vision Impairment	A student with vision impairment in all severity levels of the disability including complete blindness. In Israel such students learn in regular schools excluding students with additional severe disability who learn in special education schools.
Support-teacher	A professional teacher in the field of vision impairment who provides a comprehensive ongoing support for students with vision impairment in their schools. The support-teacher visits the school on regular basis a few times a week providing personal support lessons to the students on one hand and on the other collaborates with the school staff.

Abbreviations

VI – Vision Impairment

ST – Support-Teacher, an Israeli Teacher of student with Vision Impairment (local term)

TVI - Teacher of student with Vision Impairment (universal term)

SET – Special Education Teacher

PD – Professional Development

Abstract

Vision impairment (VI) has substantial implications for students' social development. Therefore, it is important teachers promote their social conduct in schools. Hence, this research explored the contribution of an Israeli training program for support-teachers (ST) of students with VI to their perceptions of their role, sense of self- efficacy, motivation and professional development (PD) promoting their students' social conduct. The research's importance is in evaluating the training program effectiveness in order to improve it, enhance other programs and encourage additional research in this significant field, which has not been explored sufficiently.

This research was conducted using a mixed methods approach comprising three studies. The first, a qualitative study, was conducted as focus group discussions with STs who had graduated from the program several years ago and was used as a foundation for structuring research tools and gathering experienced STs' perspectives. The second, a quantitative longitudinal study, used five structured questionnaires to examine STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self efficacy, motivation and social conduct of their students and teachers' personality traits. The third, a qualitative study, used semi-structured interviews with selected STs who had participated in the explored program to garner a deeper understanding of their perceptions. Additional interviews were conducted to further assess STs' and stakeholders' perceptions of changes in students' social conduct following their STs' participation in the program.

The findings revealed that the program contributed to STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy, motivation and PD, however some significant topics were not covered sufficiently in the program, e.g. practical aspect of creating teaching means and strategies, promoting sensitive social functions, fostering students who deny their VI, complicated cases of blind students and high school students. Furthermore, the program contributed to STs' perceptions of their students' social conduct, though the contribution was not the same for all dimensions of social conduct.

This has led to the design of an improved STs' Training in the Social Field, STT-SF model, an integrative model for a gradual and comprehensive PD process for STs, addressing their professional and emotional needs and the challenges, complex cases and situations they face, as raised in the research. This model could lead to a change in special education teacher training policy to promote the social conduct of students with vision impairment. The model can also be used in different countries and cultures, to promote social aspects in the work of teachers of students with VI, students in regular education and students with special needs and other disabilities.

Keywords: Students with Vision Impairment (VI), Students' social conduct, Support-teachers (STs), Training program, Teachers' role perception, Teachers' sense of self-efficacy, Teachers' Motivation and Teachers' Professional development (PD).

INTRODUCTION

Research Background and Gap in Knowledge

To encourage the integration of individuals with special needs into society, a policy of integrating students with special needs, including students with VI, into regular schools, has been adopted in many countries worldwide (Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018).

The literature about the inclusion of students with special needs including students with VI, emphasizes a great need to promote not only educational integration, but also social integration (Celeste & Grum, 2010; Giese et al., 2021; Manitsa & Doikou, 2022; Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006; Sacks & Wolffe, 2006; Vlachou et al., 2016; Whitburn, 2014). That model is manifested in the integration policy of Israel and in other countries worldwide. Though, the situation is more complex, students with disabilities including VI continue to experience social difficulties (Cook et al., 2008; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Hess, 2010; Khadka et al., 2012; Sazak & Sucuoglu, 2013;). Furthermore, the literature showed that SETs are considered to be key agents in enhancing the social growth of students with special needs. Thus, there is greater importance for teachers to advance these students' social conduct as part of the school day (Giese et al., 2021; Hess, 2015; Manitsa & Doikou, 2022; Papuda-Dolińska, 2017).

However, the literature illustrates a shortage in teachers' professional knowledge, abilities and skills required to promote students' social conduct in general and particularly those with special needs in regular schools (Dobbins, 2007; Durlak et al., 2015; Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006; Schonert-Reichl, 2017), including students with VI (Manitsa & Doikou, 2022; Sacks & Wolffe, 2006). Consequently, there is a great need to prepare and train teachers to advance students' social conduct using diverse means such as training programs for pre-service and in-service teachers, mentoring and continuous PD in this field (Brabeck et al., 2014; Greenberg et al., 2013; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

These findings are manifested also in Israel, where STs have also described a shortage in professional information, capabilities and teaching skills to advance their students' social conduct (Hess 2007, 2010, 2015). This situation led the Ministry of Education to develop a training program for in-service STs in the social field. The program is based on the conception that there is a connection between the teachers' levels of confidence and self-efficacy to promote students' social conduct and students' willingness and motivation to be proactive in the social field.

Moreover, the literature review also shows that positive changes in the teachers' perceptions affect and enhance the quality of their performance (Choi & Lee, 2018; Zee, de Jong & Koomen, 2016), including their functioning with regards to advancing their students' social conduct (Bossaert et al., 2013; Davies & Cooper, 2013; Robinson, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). As a result, it is crucial to explore the STs' training program's professional contribution to STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy, motivation, and PD to promote the social conduct of students with VI.

Furthermore, the literature review shows that there are insufficient studies describing training programs for teachers of students with VI in general. Most of the limited available literature addressing training programs and academic education for teachers of students with VI focuses on pedagogical not social aspects of these students' education (Celeste and Grum 2010; Dimitrova-Radojichikj 2018; Khadka et al. 2012;). Moreover, not much research was found addressing the effectiveness of training programs for teachers of students with VI in general and in particular in the social field.

It is important to note that for students with VI the social field is very challenging owing to the consequences of their disability. These students cannot acquire social skills through incidental learning mainly because many social gestures essential for social functioning develop on the base of visual cues (Giese et al. 2021; Hess 2010, 2015; Manitsa and Doikou 2022; Papuda-Dolińska 2017; Roe 2008; Sacks and Wolffe 2006). Therefore, it is critical for teachers to promote these students' social conduct. To fill this gap in knowledge, this PhD research evaluated the contribution of the Israeli STs' training program, which focuses on STs promoting the social conduct of students with VI, STs' role perception, self-efficacy, motivation, and PD.

Main Research Goals

1. To explore STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI.
2. To explore STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their PD with regard to promoting the social conduct of students with VI.
3. To examine STs' and stakeholders' perceptions of the changes in students' social conduct as a result of STs' participation in the program.

Main Research Questions

Table A below shows the research questions as they relate to the three studies conducted in this research.

Table A: Main research questions as they relate to three respective studies

Main research questions	Question 1 – What are STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI?	Question 2 – What are STS's perceptions of the training program's contribution to STs PD with regards to promoting the social conduct of students with VI?	Question 3 – What are the STs' and stakeholders' perceptions of changes in the students' social conduct as a result of STs' participation in the program?	Additional Questions
Study 1: Qualitative study – Focus group discussions with graduate STs	✓	✓		What are graduate STs' perceptions of promoting the social conduct of students with VI? What are graduate STs' ideas for improving the training program?
Study 2: Quantitative study - STs participating in the program	✓		✓	What is the association between changes in STs' role perception, sense of self-efficacy, motivation (to promote students' social conduct) and perceptions of student's social conduct? Two additional questions not directly related to the program, are listed below.
Study 3: Qualitative study – Semi-structured interviews with STs participating in the program	✓	✓	✓	What are STs' ideas for improving the training program?

CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

I.1 Aspects of Teachers' Role Perception and Teachers' Role Perception Regarding Students' Social Conduct

Role theory is a sociological theory describing role as individuals' behavior within their social interaction system. The main theme of the theory is that individuals have several roles during their life span and these roles defines on how individuals should behave (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Role theory presents individuals' attitudes toward their expectations and others' expectations of their role perception. It also presents the correlation between individuals' expectations and role performance and how they learn to accomplish their roles (Biddle, 1986; Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Current literature on role theory has focused on role behaviors or actions as part of a professional role including job requirements (Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2007; Srikanth, 2014).

The changes in the role of the teachers have been recognized worldwide and include both practical and theoretical aspects. Current teachers' role compromises more than just instruction in classrooms, it expands to tasks such as designing various learning environments, networking and collaboration with mentoring colleagues and stakeholders (Chodasová et al., 2015; Niemi et al., 2018).

Pavri and Hegwer-DiVita (2006) presented findings about teachers' role perceptions of promoting students' social conduct, consistent with findings from other studies, where teachers stated that they played a major role in their students' social development. Teachers in this study considered themselves enablers of social relations rather than social skills' instructors. In addition, according to them, general teachers focused on this role more than special education Teachers (SETs). SETs indicated that they viewed academic skills instruction as their main priority and had neither time nor training to promote social skills.

I.2 Aspects of Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy and Sense of Self-Efficacy Regarding Students' Social Conduct

The literature review showed the contribution and effectiveness of teachers' high sense of self-efficacy on students' achievements and motivation as well as on the commitment, motivation, and job satisfaction of teachers in both regular and special education. However, there are insufficient studies about the impact of STs' self-efficacy on the achievements of students with VI. Moreover, there are insufficient studies about

the impact of teachers' self-efficacy on the development of the students' social skills in regular and special education, which means that there is a gap of knowledge. This study will try to cover part of this gap by examining STs' self-efficacy in relation to the social development of students with VI.

I.3 Aspects of Teachers' Motivation and Motivation Regarding Students' Social Conduct

The term 'motivation' derives from Latin, meaning 'to move'. In other words, it describes what moves individuals to make decisions, select certain choices, engage and persist in acts etc., (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011). However, because of the complexity of motivation, there is no consensus about the understanding of motivation and there are a range of motivation theories (Han & Yin, 2016). This literature review focuses on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2008; Ryan & Deci, n.d.; Ryan et al., 1993), which offers an explanation of the processes motivating individuals to perform a specific activity or task (Mano-Israeli & Gero, 2017).

Teacher motivation is defined as a collection of factors driving individuals to pursue teaching as a career and to persist in its practice (Mano-Israeli & Gero, 2017). Sinclair (2008) presented teacher motivation by asking some general questions including: Why individuals select teaching? What attracts them to teaching? How long do they stay in the teaching profession they chose first? What is the level of their engagement with teaching profession?

The literature emphasizes that in-service teacher motivation is an essential and critical factor in improving teaching effectiveness and students' learning outcomes (Carson & Chase, 2009; Han & Yin, 2016; Orsini et al., 2020). Moreover, teachers are expected to lead, manage, and perform as motivators of their students. Teachers' motivation to teach and promote their students' learning processes and achievements enhances students' motivation in many personal aspects including social and emotional aspects (Orsini et al., 2020; Pelletier & Rocchi, 2016). However, most teachers' PD programs focus on improving teaching competencies and skills but neglect the dimension of teachers' motivation even though this is also a key component in teachers' performance and success.

I.4 Aspects of Teachers' Professional Development and PD Addressing Students' Social Conduct

Professional development (PD) is a process of continued training and education for individuals regarding their career. Its main objectives are to keep individuals updated on current trends, gain new professional knowledge and develop new skills in their professional role (Ben-Peretz & Kemer,-2019). Havea and Mohanty (2020) expanded on the definition of PD as a consciously constructed process to assist professionals to achieve professional knowledge, skills, and proficiency.

The literature has described a variety of approaches for teachers' PD and emphasized, regardless of the approach used, the importance of PD and its vast contribution to both teachers' and students' performance (Altun & Cengiz, 2012; Havea & Mohanty, 2020; Lowe et al., 2019; Lynn & Woods, 2010; Nasser et al., 2013; Patton et al., 2015). Moreover, the literature has emphasized that the goal of PD in education is not only to expand and deepen professional knowledge, skills and teaching strategies, but also to improve teachers' perceptions of their role, their professional abilities and their motivation to perform their educational role (Allameh et al., 2012; Altun & Cengiz, 2012; Beck Wells, 2016; Geijsel et al., 2009; Havea & Mohanty, 2020; Watt et al., 2016). According to Borko et al. (2010), there is a move from an in-service training approach, whereby teachers undergo a one-time workshop or course taught outside of school. This traditional approach is usually not connected enough to teachers' classroom practices and does not provide them with a complete, deep, and adjusted view.

According to this approach high-quality PD contents should be located in practice. Furthermore, the literature has presented several elements of effective teachers' PD: Content focused, Active learning, Teachers' collaboration, Models and modeling of effective practice, Coaching and expert support, Feedback and reflection, Sustained duration, Learning from successful experiences in a supportive and empowering environment and Ongoing guidance, training, and supervision processes (Aliakbari & Amoli, 2016; Bosso, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kleickmann et al., 2016).

The literature has shown that teachers' training programs are effective in providing knowledge about teaching social skills and about the use of those skills and strategies in their classroom practices (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Davies & Cooper, 2013; Sazak & Sucuoglu, 2013; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). However, schools seldom provide resources

such as courses, teaching materials and learning activities to promote teachers' instruction of social-emotional learning (SEL) (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021). According to Kettler et al. (2012) and Davies and Cooper (2013), effective training programs to promote students' SEL should include two main dimensions. The first dimension includes workshops providing knowledge, theory and best SEL practice, combined with knowledge and understanding of students' social, emotional and cognitive development. For these programs to be more effective, contents should be based on teachers' needs, expectations and interests. The second main dimension is ongoing support including resources to assist teachers to plan and implement together with observation and self-reflection sessions, which can be used as a base for peer review discussions.

I.5 Literature Review of Social Skills and Social Conduct of Students with VI

Social skills' learning is an on-going process starting with the initial bonding between parents and their child, which is the first significant step towards social interactions and later social success (Aviles et al., 2006; Koller et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Vlachou et al., 2016). Social skills' development differs between children in general. Moreover, children with disabilities tend to have gaps in the social field (D'Allura, 2002; Durlak et al., 2015; Khadka et al., 2012) and their social integration in inclusive schools is more challenging (Reiter & Schalock, 2008; Sazak & Sucuoglu, 2013). They may have social difficulties in creating relationships with and being accepted by peers (Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Early social communication with peers is characterized by several nonverbal behaviors, such as observing and imitating peers and offering items to initiate contact with them (Khadka et al., 2012; Roe, 2008). Owing to a lack of visual information, children with VI may use other indications such as tone of voice to understand other people's feelings, but there are a range of nonverbal behaviors and facial expressions they miss (Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018). The literature shows that VI has substantial implications on the social development of children with VI: students with VI have difficulties acquiring social skills and developing autonomy and independence (Giese et al., 2021; Hess, 2010, 2015; Manitsa & Doikou, 2022; Sacks & Wolffe, 2006). They also often have difficulties establishing and nurturing interpersonal relationships with peers and especially sighted peers. Due to that, children with VI initiate interactions

less frequently than their sighted peers (D'Allura, 2002; Giese et al., 2021; Hess, 2015; Khadka et al., 2012; Manitsa & Doikou, 2022; Perkins, n.d).

I.6 The Israeli STs' Training Program promoting Social Conduct of Students with VI - Aims and Stages

The main goal of the training program is to offer structured and comprehensive preparation allowing teachers to enhance the social behavior of students with VI, while addressing the various difficulties and needs of the teachers in this specific role. In other words, the purpose of the program is to clarify for STs their unique role in promoting the social conduct of students with VI, to elaborate, explain and illuminate role requirements, so that this important role becomes clearer for STs and be perceived by them as a role one can perform successfully. To achieve this goal, the program targets two main domains: firstly, providing extensive knowledge, teaching skills and tools to promote the social conduct of students with VI. Secondly, to encourage significant teacher empowerment by developing teachers' self-awareness of their beliefs, difficulties, needs and doubts with regards to promoting students' social conduct. The aim of this important procedure is to empower and develop the teachers' perceptions of their role, sense of self efficacy and motivation to promote the social skills of students with VI. In addition, the program is based on combining theoretical and practical aspects, thus during the program, teachers implement their acquired knowledge and tools with a student with VI. The program includes the following stages:

- Stage one - Program overview
- Stage two - A workshop to advance STs' self-awareness of the significance of social aspects in their lives and characteristics of their social behavior
- Stage three - A workshop to explore the STs' perceptions of advancing the social behavior of students with VI
- Stage Four - Overview to social behavior of students with VI
- Stage five - Main support principles and recommended models for promoting the social conduct of the students
- Stage six - Assessing the social conduct of students with VI, including construction of their social profiles
- Stage seven - Selection of a social goal using the questionnaire results
- Stage eight - Designing a support program focused on achieving a social goal
- Stage nine - Choosing suitable teaching tools, strategies and learning activities

- Stage ten - Principals for measuring the success of the support work program
- Stage eleven - Presenting various graduate students' success stories to STs
- Stage twelve - A peer learning process for personal reflections and summaries

I.7 Conceptual Framework

Further to the main research aims and questions, the conceptual framework chosen to guide this study included the concepts presented in Figure I.1.

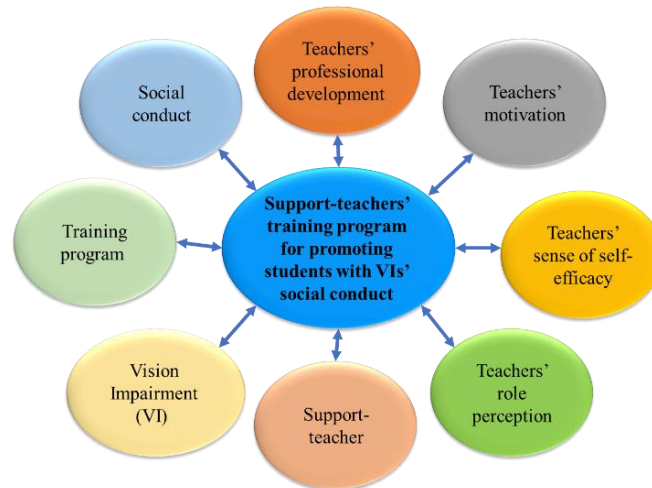


Figure I.1: The Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER II – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

II.1 Research Paradigm: Mixed-Methods Approach

The research used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. This "mixing" of data from both methods provides a stronger understanding of a research topic than using only quantitative or qualitative method separately (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fetters & Freshwater, 2015). The research includes three studies in which data was collected sequentially from both quantitative and qualitative methods. Triangulation of all qualitative and quantitative findings emerging from the various studies illuminated insights, expanded and deepened understanding of the findings and the investigated phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

II.2 Research Design

In cases of exploring intervention programs, Creswell and Plano (2017) recommended using mixed methods evaluation research, which includes a multiphase design. Figure II.1 presents the three sequential studies in this research's multiphase design.

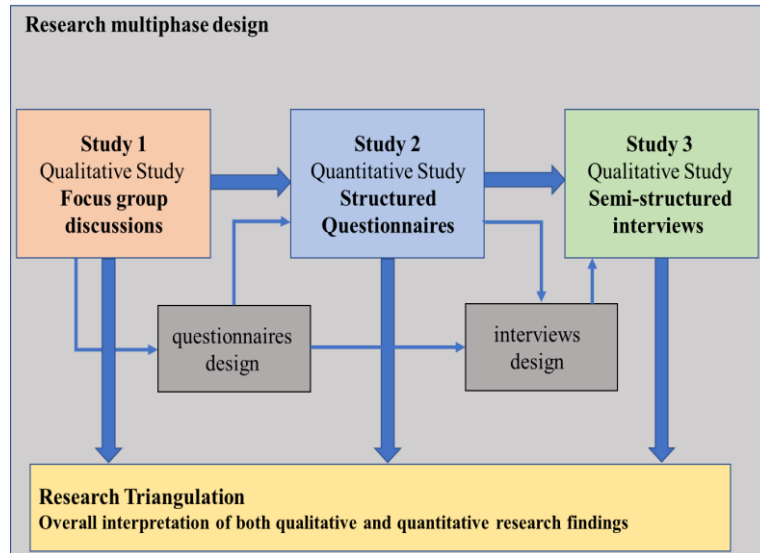


Figure II.1: Three sequential studies in the research multiphase design

As shown in Figure II.1, Study 1 provided preliminary and extensive qualitative data, which was used as a foundation for structuring the questionnaires of Study 2 and the interview guides for Study 3. Moreover, the quantitative findings of Study 2 were also used in the process to structure the two interview guides for Study 3. The three studies were carried out during the years 2019 to 2021 as longitudinal research.

Figure II.2 shows the chronological order of applying the three research studies.

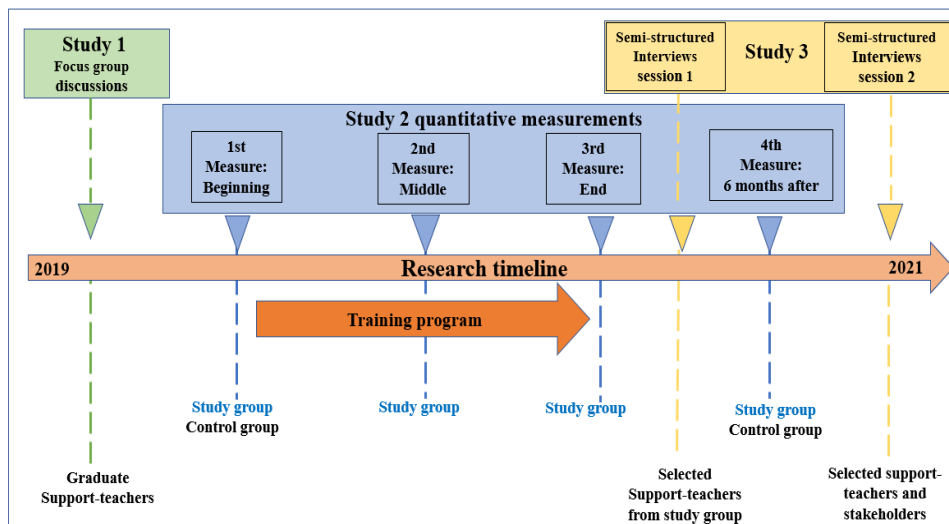


Figure II.2: Chronological order of applying the three research studies

As shown in Figure II.2, the research included three sequential studies, each of which added findings and insights with regard to the main research questions.

The research design presented in Table II.1 depicting this research procedure and presents the three studies in relation to three points in time – before the program, during the program including follow up, and after the program.

Table II.1: Research Design

Study 1: Before the Program	
Study Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To explore graduate STs' perceptions of promoting the social conduct of students with VI. 2. To explore graduate STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their role perception, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI. 3. To explore graduate STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their PD with regard to promoting the social conduct of students with VI. 4. To explore graduate STs' ideas for improving the training program.
Study Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are graduate STs' perceptions of promoting the social conduct of students with VI? 2. What are graduate STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their role perception, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI? 3. What are graduate STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their PD with regard to promoting the social conduct of students with VI? 4. What are graduate STs' ideas for improving the training program?
Study Tools	2 Focus group discussions based on a set of open-ended questions
Study Participants	7 graduate STs
Data Analysis Method	Content Analysis
Study 2: During the Program + Follow Up	
Study Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To explore changes in STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI as a result of their participation in the training program. 2. To explore changes in STs' perceptions of students' social conduct as a result of teachers' participation in the training program. 3. To explore the relations between changes in STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation (to promote students' social conduct) and changes in their perceptions of students' social conduct. <p>Two additional aims (not directly related to the program):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. To explore associations between STs' socio-demographic characteristics (gender, sector, and years of experience in education) and their perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote students' social conduct. 5. To explore associations between STs' personality traits and their perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote students' social conduct.
Study Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does participation in the training program affect STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI? 2. How does STs' participations in the training program affect their perceptions of their student's social conduct? 3. What associations are found between changes in STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote students' social conduct and the changes in their perceptions of students' social conduct? <p>Two additional questions (not directly related to the program):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. What associations are found between STs' characteristics i.e., gender, professional experience and sector, and their perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote students' social conduct?

	5. What associations are found between STs' personality traits and their perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote students' social conduct?
Study Tools	Set of structured questionnaires: 1. STs' perceptions of their role in promoting the social conduct of students with VI questionnaire (Habók & Nagy, 2016) 2. STs' perceptions of their sense of self-efficacy to promote the social conduct of students with VI questionnaire (Fridman & Kess, 2000) 3. STs' perceptions of their motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI questionnaire (Mano-Israeli & Gero, 2017) 4. STs' perceptions of the social conduct of students with VI questionnaire (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2011). 5. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) Questionnaire (McCrae & John, 1992).
Study Participants	65 STs: 27 teachers in the study group and 38 teachers in the control group
Data Analysis Method	Statistical Analysis
Study 3: After the Program	
Study Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To explore STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI. To explore STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their PD with regard to promoting the social conduct of students with VI. To explore STs' ideas for improving the training program. To explore STs' and stakeholders' perceptions of changes in students' social conduct as a result of their STs' participation in the program.
Study Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What are STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI? What are STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their PD with regard to promoting the social conduct of students with VI? What are STs' ideas for improving the training program? What are STs' and stakeholders' perceptions of changes in students' social conduct as a result of their STs' participation in the program?
Study Tools	Interview guide for session 1 of semi-structured interviews Interview guide for session 2 of semi-structured interviews
Study Participants	Session 1- 11 STs Session 2 – 4 STs and 3 stakeholders
Data Analysis Method	Content Analysis

II.3 Research Target Population

The research target population was in-service STs of students with VI, at the beginning of their career in the Israeli Ministry of Education (two to three years' experience teaching students with VI).

Research participants were STs with diverse professional experience levels in the field: Experienced STs who completed the explored program several years ago (Focus group discussion, Study 1), STs at the beginning of their career who were at the time the research was conducted participating in the explored training program (study group,

Study 2 and Study 3), STs at the beginning of their career who had not yet participated in the program yet (control group, Study 2).

Israeli STs come from various sectors throughout the country: Jewish religious, Jewish secular, and Arabs. Therefore, the selection of STs, to participate in the studies of this research, represented these various sectors.

CHAPTER III – MAIN FINDINGS

III.1 Findings Emerging from Study 1: Training program's contribution to graduate STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy, motivation and professional development with regard to promoting social conduct of students with VI (qualitative study -focus group discussions)

Findings Emerging from Research Question 1: What are graduate STs' perceptions of promoting the social conduct of students with VI?

Table III.1: Themes and related categories pertaining to study question 1

Theme	Category	Sample Evidence
1. Significance of teachers' role in promoting students' social conduct	1. Critical to promoting students' social inclusion	"... greatly contributes to the progress of the student's social inclusion" (Participant A, March 15, 2020).
	2. Answers students' objective needs and difficulties	"... students with VI are usually less accepted in their class" (Participant G, March 15, 2020).
	3. Critical to promoting students' ability to join and integrate into a group	"...I also try to suggest to my students to invite a friend or two to some of our lessons... " (Participant B, March 15,2020).
2. Intricacy and difficulty of the role	1. Professionally more difficult than promoting learning aspects	"...the social field is much more complex than the academic field, " (Participant A, March 15, 2020).
	2. Emotionally difficult	"... this is a completely different field, it is also emotionally difficult" (Participant C, March 22, 2020).
	3. Particularly difficult with complete blindness	"...Especially with blind students. It is very difficult for them socially..." (Participant C, March 15, 2020).
	4. Particularly difficult when family denies the impairment	"... But she and her parents still do not accept her disability and do not permit any explanation process to be conducted..." (Participant G, March 15, 2020).

Findings Emerging from Research Question 2: What are graduate STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their role perception, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI?

Table III.2: Themes and related categories pertaining to study question 2

Theme	Category	Sample Evidence
1. Improving role perception	Role perceived as wider and more comprehensive	"... The role includes many parts, that it is a complex process..."(Participant E, March 22, 2020).
2. No improvement in role perception	Role perceived as not developing enough teaching tools and strategies	"... less clear to me, for example: how to develop teaching strategies" (Participant E, March 22, 2020).
3. Improving self-efficacy	1. Self-efficacy perceived as acquiring knowledge and understanding of the social aspect	"I feel I know more, I understand the social field better, it's less foreign to me" (Participant B, March 22, 2020).
	2. Self-efficacy perceived as daring to cope with students' intricate social situations	" I see that there are small successes even with students which have complex social situations" (Participant C, March 22, 2020).
4. No improvement in self-efficacy	1. Self-efficacy perceived as not developing teaching tools and strategies	"I still do not know enough how to create learning opportunities to promote social functioning at different ages" (Participant G, March 22, 2020).
	2. Self-efficacy perceived as not coping with students who deny their impairment	"As for students whose families deny the disability, I feel I have no tools" (Participant B, March 22, 2020).
5. Improving motivation	Motivation perceived as showing more initiative and proactivity with parents and teaching teams	" I initiate processes with parents, staff and anyone who can contribute" (Participant A, March 22, 2020).
6. Factors decreasing motivation after the program ended	1. Decreased motivation as a result of students' difficult social situations	"... but the cases, especially blind students are so complicated and even frustrating " (Participant A, March 22, 2020).
	2. Decreased motivation as a result of not enough cooperation with parents	"Cases of disability denial are very difficult... in these cases my motivation decreases" (Participant B, March 22, 2020).
	3. Decreased motivation as a result of pressure for study achievements	"There are many learning tasks that need to be completed and this decreases my motivation ... " (Participant D, March 22, 2020).

Findings Emerging from Research Question 3: What are graduate STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their PD with regard to promoting the social conduct of students with VI?

Table III.3: Themes and associated categories pertaining to study question 3

Theme	Category	Sample Evidence
1. Ability to promote significant processes in the social area with students	1. Promoting social conduct as an ongoing process	"... a long and complex process, which I have to promote systematically" (Participant A, March 15, 2020).
	2. Effective use of professional tools	"Specific tools... help me greatly feel that I am promoting a professional process tailored to the needs of each student" (Participant B, March 15, 2020). "... it is still not easy for me to create learning tools, and activities ... " (Participant D, March 22, 2020).
	3. Pre-plan an annual program in the social area	" ...without designing an organized work plan ...it will not progress" (Participant A, March 15, 2020).
	4. Students at the center as main partners in promoting social conduct	"I realized that... it should be done through ongoing dialogue with each student according to his/her age..." (Participant F, March 15, 2020).

2. Promoting work with stakeholders	1. Develop work with parents	"... I involve them and share with them every success... it gives them hope... " (Participant A, March 15, 2020). " It is most difficult for me to work with parents who deny the disabilities..."(Participant E, March 22, 2020).
	2. Develop work with school teaching team	"It is a slow process that needs to be worked on with his homeroom teacher and his educational staff" (Participant D, March 15,2020).

Findings Emerging from Question 4 - What are the graduate STs' ideas for improving the training program?

Table III.4: Themes and associated categories pertaining to study question 4

Theme	Category	Sample Evidence
1. Ideas for improving program contents	1. Add ways to advance social goals of blind students	"I would be happy if the program had a study unit focusing on blind students " (Participant B, March 15,2020).
	2. Add a workshop to prepare teachers emotionally and mentally to work with 'more complex' students	" ... I believe it would have been easier for me if the program had prepared me for it, giving me tools that would help me emotionally..." (Participant A, March 22,2020).
	3. Provide more guidance addressing the development of teaching strategies and tools in the social field	"My problem is means of learning, how to promote it, I do not have sufficient ability to do this" (Participant C, March 15, 2020).
	4. Add work within the program addressing how to cope with the pressure of academic achievements while promoting the social area	" The academic domain 'takes over' support time " (Participant F, March 22, 2020).
2. Ideas for improving program structure	1. Extend program length	"I would recommend, if possible, extending the program... more time to learn and practice" (Participant G, March 22, 2020).
	2. Add a continuation program	"A onetime program is not enough. We need to refresh and strengthen... on an ongoing basis after completing the program" (Participant B, March 22, 2020).

III.2 Findings Emerging from Study 2: Changes in STs' Perceptions of Their Role, Sense of Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Perceptions of students' Social Conduct, as a Result of Teachers' Participation in the Training Program (Quantitative study)

Study Design

Based on the 'longitudinal study' (Coolican, 2014) i.e. participants are measured over time to examine changes owing to an intervention, Figure III.1 presents the design of Study 2, including measurements taken during the study in both groups. Figure III.1 shows that in this study participants in the training program, the 'study group', were examined four times over a time period using the same set of questionnaires: before, in the middle, at the end and six months after the program. Study group results were

compared with the results of the 'control group', which were used as a baseline measure of behavior without treatment (Coolican, 2014).

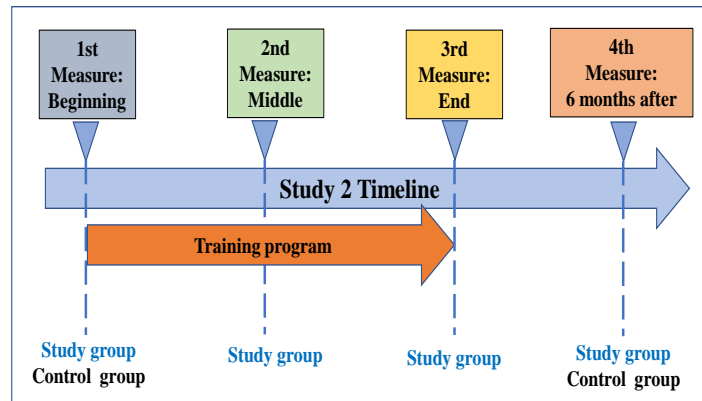


Figure III.1: Study 2 design

The 'control group' was examined using the same set of questionnaires at two points in time: before and six months and after the end of the program. For each hypothesis in this study, a questionnaire with closed questions (Shaughnessy et al., 2012) and response scale (Coolican, 2014) was constructed specifically and used.

Findings Emerging from Research Question 1: How does participation in the training program affect STs' Perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI?

Question 1 Hypothesis – There will be positive changes in the STs' perceptions of their role, self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI following their participation in the training program. STs' perceptions will grow.

Question 1 findings are presented according to each type of STs' perceptions first, followed by associations between the three types of perceptions.

STs' Role Perception Comparison

Table III.5: Means and SDs of four categories of STs' perceptions of their role in each group

Category	Group	N	Time I		Time IV		DF	F
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Role perception	Study	25	5.10	.32	5.39	.48	1,46	5.91*
life preparation	Control	37	4.97	.61	4.95	.70	1,70	0.03
Role perception	Study	25	5.15	.36	5.48	.42	1,46	8.75**
self-awareness	Control	37	5.07	.64	5.16	.60	1,70	0.35
Role perception	Study	25	5.15	.42	5.52	.32	1,46	11.77**
meaningful relationship	Control	37	4.97	.61	5.04	.73	1,70	0.23
Role perception	Study	25	5.05	.43	5.29	.47	1,46	3.45 ¹
teaching strategies	Control	37	4.82	.58	4.94	.75	1,70	0.53
Role perception	Study	25	5.11	.33	5.42	.36	1,46	9.63**
Questionnaire – Total	Control	37	4.96	.57	5.02	.66	1,70	0.19

¹ P < .10* p < .05 ** P < .01

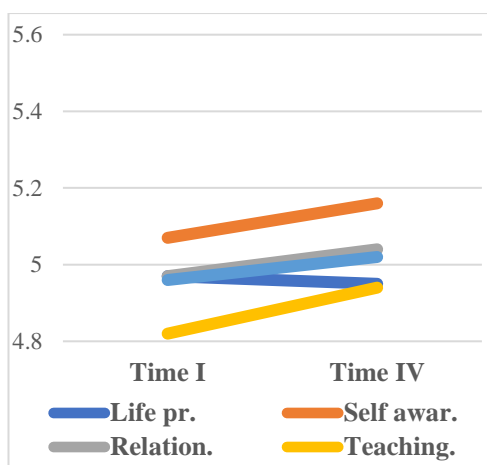


Figure III.2: Means of four categories of STs' perceptions of their role by group and time in the control group

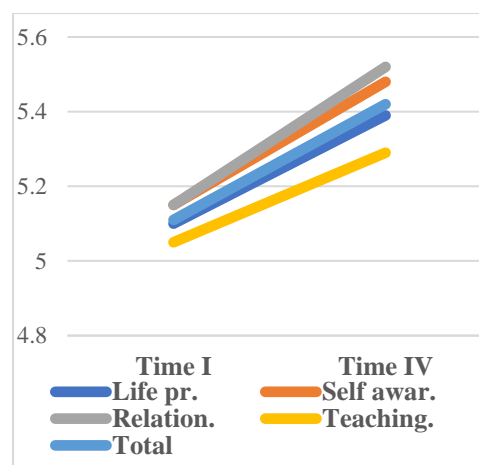


Figure III.3: Means of four categories of STs' perceptions of their role by group and time in the study group

Table III.5 shows the means and SD of each category, by group and time and the results of the ANOVA. The means are also presented in Figures III.2 and III.3.

Results revealed a different pattern in the two groups. In the study group, there was a significant increase in life preparation, self-awareness, relationship and total score, with no significant increase in the teaching strategies category. In the control group, no significant changes were found between the two time measurement, in all categories and the total score.

STs' Sense of Self-efficacy Comparison

Means and SD of the four categories of support-teachers' perceptions of sense of self-efficacy are presented in Table III.6 and Figures III.4 and III.5.

Table III.6: Means and SDs of four categories of STs' perceptions of their sense of self-efficacy in each group

Category	Group	N	Time 1		Time IV		DF	F
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Sense of self-efficacy	Study	25	4.29	.51	4.82	.65	1,46	10.61**
life preparation	Control	37	4.35	.71	4.59	.74	1,70	1.88
Sense of self-efficacy	Study	25	4.34	.49	4.80	.57	1,46	9.01**
self-awareness	Control	37	4.35	.68	4.66	.70	1,70	3.77*
Sense of self-efficacy	Study	25	4.60	.55	5.01	.69	1,46	5.22*
meaningful relationship	Control	37	4.60	.70	4.72	.76	1,70	0.46
Sense of self-efficacy	Study	25	4.32	.48	4.88	.62	1,46	12.30**
Teaching strategies	Control	37	4.41	.82	4.59	.76	1,70	.94
Sense of self-efficacy	Study	25	4.40	.41	4.89	.56	1,46	11.71**
Questionnaire - Total	Control	37	4.44	.64	4.64	.69	1,70	1.53

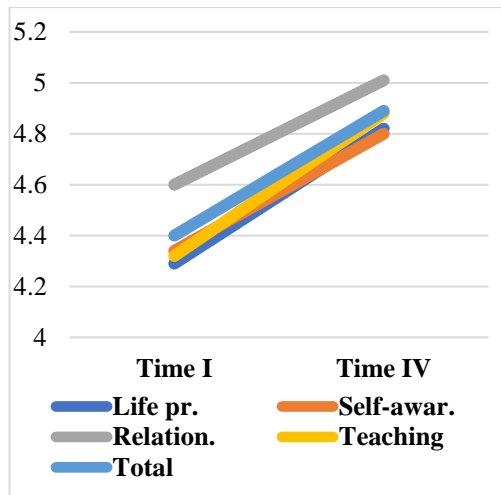


Figure III.4: Means of four categories of STs' perceptions of their sense of self-efficacy by group and time in the Study group

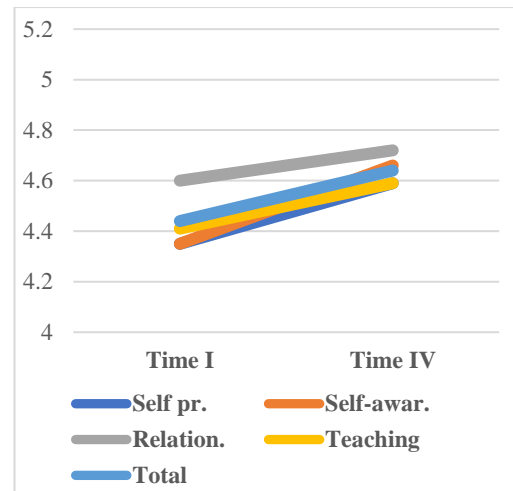


Figure III.5: Means of four categories of STs' perceptions of their sense of self-efficacy by group and time in the Control group

Results revealed a different pattern in the two groups. In the study group, there is a significant increase in life preparation, self-awareness, relationship, teaching strategies and the total score. In the control group, no significant change was found between the two measurement times, in all categories and in the total score, except a moderate in the category of self-awareness.

STs' Motivation Comparison

Table III.7 shows the means and SDs for each type, by group and time and the result of the ANOVA.

Table III.7: Means and SDs of each type of support-teachers' motivation

Type	Group	N	Time I		Time IV		F
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Intrinsic motivation	Study	25	3.60	.79	3.65	.91	0.04
	Control	37	3.65	.72	3.86	.80	1.24
Identified motivation	Study	25	4.57	.38	4.68	.47	0.80
	Control	37	4.67	.35	4.68	.54	0.02
Introjected motivation	Study	25	2.40	.66	2.14	.71	1.72
	Control	37	2.67	.80	2.34	.99	2.27
Extrinsic motivation	Study	25	2.36	.75	2.28	.66	0.18
	Control	37	2.68	.77	2.52	.89	0.21
Total - motivation	Study	25	3.28	.40	3.23	.49	0.18
	Control	37	3.47	.43	3.38	.59	0.46

Analysis revealed no significant changes in levels of STs' perceptions of their motivation between the two points of time, in each of the motivation types and the total score. This result was found in both the study and control groups.

To sum up, findings addressing the first question revealed an increase in the STs' perceptions of their role and sense of self-efficacy, and no change in motivation.

Associations between Changes in the Three Support-Teachers' Perceptions

To review associations between changes in STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with VI, Pearson correlations were computed for the changes (difference scores) of the total score of each perception. Analysis results are presented in Table III.8.

Table III.8: Pearson's correlations of STs' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation (N= 80)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Role perception - Total	-		
2. Self-efficacy - Total	.41**	-	
3. Motivation – Total	.04	.22	-

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Analysis revealed a significant positive correlation at a medium level ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) between STs' perceptions of their sense of self-efficacy and STs' perceptions of their role. An increase in perceived importance of the teachers' role is associated with an increase in their perceptions of their sense of self-efficacy. Teachers' perceptions of their motivation were not significantly associated with their perceptions of their sense of self-efficacy ($r = 0.22$, $P > .05$) nor their role perception ($r = 0.04$, $P > .05$).

A closer examination of associations between STs' perceptions of their motivation and the two other perceptions was conducted using correlations between each category of motivation and the total score of STs' role perception and sense of self-efficacy.

Results showed significant correlations between changes in the category of **identified motivation** and **changes in sense of self-efficacy** ($r = 0.20$, $P < .05$) and changes in **role perception** ($r = 0.29$, $P < .05$). These results showed that STs who increased their identification with the values and aims of their role following the program, exhibited higher increases in their role perception and sense of self-efficacy.

Findings Emerging from Question 2: How does STs' participation in the training program affect their perceptions of student's social conduct?

Question 2 Hypothesis – There will be a positive change in STs' perceptions of their students' social conduct, following their participation in the training program.

To compare changes in STs' perceptions one-way ANOVA was conducted, comparing two measurements: Time I, before the program and Time IV, follow up between the study and control groups. Table III.9 shows the means and standard deviations of each dimension, by group and time and the result of the ANOVA. The means are also presented in Figures III.6 and III.7.

Table III.9: Means and SDs of social dimensions and total score in each group

Dimensions	Group	Time I			Time IV		F(1,57)
		N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Social knowledge and skills (16 items)	Study	24	1.55	.30	1.74	.44	2.77*
	Control	36	1.78	.67	1.82	.66	
Normative life-skills (5 items)	Study	24	2.12	.61	2.31	.57	1.16
	Control	36	2.35	.68	2.37	.77	
Self-advocacy skills (5 items)	Study	24	1.55	.62	1.97	.76	.48
	Control	36	1.48	.64	1.52	.59	
Total	Study	24	1.69	.40	1.86	.47	.22
	Control	36	1.88	.56	1.91	.67	



Figure III.6: Means of social dimensions and total score in the study group

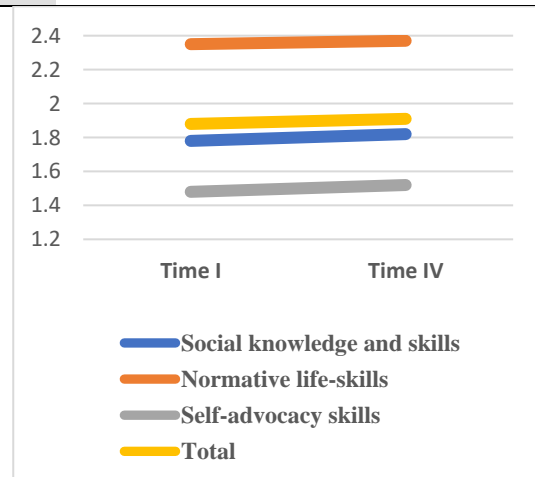


Figure III.7: Means of social dimensions and total score in the control group

The ANOVA yielded a significant increase in the dimension of social knowledge and skills between the two times in the study group, and no increase was found in the control group. No significant increase was found between the two times in the other dimensions, in the study

group and in the control group. It should be noted that the dimension of social knowledge and skills is the major dimension in the questionnaire, and it includes 16 items, out of 21 items of the questionnaire.

III.3 Findings emerging from study 3: Support-teachers' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their role, sense of self-efficacy, motivation, and professional development regarding promoting social conduct of students with VI and perceptions of changes in their students' social conduct (qualitative study – semi-structured interviews)

Findings emerging from research question 1: What are STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote the social conduct of students with vi?

Table III.10: Themes and related categories pertaining to study question 1

Theme	Category	Sample Evidence
1. Improved role perception	1. Clarified role perception as a result of the program	"The program sharpened and contributed to my understanding ... what I actually need to do..."(ST 4, February 19,2020).
	2. Structured, staged, and organized role perception	"... as we learned in the program, step by step (ST 2, February 17, 2020).
2. Implications of improved role perception	1. Improved empathy with students' difficulties	"The program helped me understand my students better and be more empathetic towards them" (ST 8, February 24, 2020).
	2. Enhanced ability to evaluate and set social goals	" ... Using the social conduct assessment tool and choosing the most relevant goal for each student"(ST 10, February 27, 2020).
3. Sources facilitating sense of self-efficacy	1. Practice and implementation throughout the program	"The practice throughout the program... greatly strengthened my professional self-confidence in the social field" (ST 13, February 24, 2020).
	2. Ongoing guidance including positive reinforcement throughout the program	"The guidance throughout the program and reinforcement facilitators gave me ... greatly empowered me and strengthened my self-perception" (ST 12, February 24, 2020).
4. Sources for increased motivation	1. Understanding the impact of the role on students' quality of life	" ... because I know I will contribute a lot and greatly affect their development and functioning in the future ..." (ST 2, February 17, 2020).
	2. Acquiring unique professional knowledge, skills, and tools	"Today ... I know how to promote the social field, so my motivation is also higher..." (ST 6, February 20, 2020).
	3. Success in practicing knowledge and skills acquired throughout the program	"... I personally felt successful in practice ... and it greatly increased my motivation " (ST 11, February 27, 2020).

Findings Emerging from Research Question 2: What are STs' perceptions of the training program's contribution to their PD promoting the social conduct of students with VI?

Table III.11: Themes and related categories pertaining to study question 2

Theme	Category	Sample Evidence
1. Sources for improved PD	1. Understanding social conduct characteristics of students with VI, led to empathy from and trust in STs and promoted students' cooperation with them	" I am more empathetic and more understanding of the source of my students' social difficulties, they feel more comfortable with me and trust me more" (ST 4, February 19, 2020).
	2. Adopting the humanist approach as basis for supporting students	" ... I have been paying more attention to every good thing in the student, to every little step he takes, and I greatly reinforce him for that..." (ST 11, February 27, 2020).
2. Improved educational praxis in the social area	1. Set specific goals to promote students' social conduct and achieve them through systematic daily support	"... The annual support program has goals and operational targets in the social field, and accordingly, support lessons are constructed " (ST 3, February 18, 2020). " It seems simple, but it's not... I would be happy to have more practice" (ST 8, February 24, 2020).
	2. Expanding collaboration with students' educational staff and parents	"...a large part of my work... is through school staff and the peer group. I'm assisted by them, share information ..."(ST 2, February 27, 2020). "... But there are cases where there is no collaboration, and I feel I don't have enough tools to promote it" (ST 3, February 18, 2020).
	3. Encouraging students to join peer groups of students with VI	" I repeatedly try to encourage connections to their peer group, in the end, when they try, they enjoy it very much " (ST 7, February 24, 2020).
	4. Using social scenarios as opportunities for social learning in which students experience difficulties	" ... but I'm also trying to use experiences the student has in classes as a basis for social learning..." (ST 7, February 24, 2020). "... But I don't always succeed, and I would like to be more skilled at it ..." (ST 11, February 27, 2020).

Findings Emerging from Research Question 3: What are support-teachers' ideas for improving the training program?

Table III.12: Themes and related categories pertaining to study question 3

Theme	Category	Sample Evidence
1. Ideas for improving program contents	1. Consolidating discussions about high school students' social conduct, including how to promote meaningful dialogue on social topics	"The program should have more examples about high school students, because with them it is harder, more complex" (ST 8, February 24, 2020).
	2. Consolidating discussions about blind students' social conduct characteristics and how to support them	"There were examples, but not enough...especially for students who are totally blind" (ST 2, February 17, 2020).
	3. Addressing social aspects of students with VI who have an additional primary disability	" ... I would recommend adding more discussions on social aspects of students in special education, whose VI is their secondary disability" (ST 3, February 18, 2020).
2. Ideas for improving	1. Extending the duration of the program to include more case studies	"...but I do think it was too short for me, meaning I would be happy if it was longer ... "(ST 2, February 17, 2020).

program structure	2. Receiving guidance in the social field after the program ends	" ... continue to receive training from program lecturers on implementation in the field, it would have contributed to me greatly" (ST 5, February 20, 2020).
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Findings Emerging from Research Question 4: What are the STs and stakeholders' perceptions of changes in students' social conduct as a result of STs' participation in the program?

Table III.13: 14 types of STs and stakeholders' perceptions of students' behavioral changes following their STs' participation in the program

No.	Perceptions of behavioral changes related to social functioning	2 nd grade student (Reported by ST and mother)	3 rd grade student (Reported by ST and homeroom teacher)	6 th grade student (Reported by ST and mother)	11 th grade student (Reported by ST)
1.	Shares social experiences and dilemmas in support lessons	+	+	+	+
2.	Goes out of class at breaks more often	+	+		+
3.	Turns and asks others to complete information he lacks to understand social scenarios			+	
4.	Makes an effort to better understand social scenarios		+	+	
5.	Shows greater respect for the personal space of other people with whom he plays / converses	+			
6.	Tries to join games / conversations more often with groups of children		+	+	+
7.	Better presents his needs in the context of his disability at school	+	+		+
8.	More aware of his social conduct and tries to respond in additional ways			+	
9.	Develops a social connection with a student in the class.	+		+	
10.	More aware of and better maintains his own hygiene and aesthetics	+			
11.	Stands up for himself more and does not give up immediately in a conflict with a friend		+	+	
12.	Suggests additional possible solutions in case of conflict with a friend		+	+	
13.	Joins a social activity in peer group in leisure time		+	+	+
14.	Tries to act more independently	+	+		+

Analysis of the 14 findings showed that perceptions of behavioral changes in students' social behavior can be classified into seven broad categories of perceptions regarding actual changes. These categories corresponded to those learned in the teachers'

program. Each one of the seven categories is connected to one or more of the three dimensions of the social conduct of students with VI: social knowledge and skills, advocacy skills, life skills.

Finally, even though there had been behavioral changes within the social conduct of the students with VI, whose STs' had participated in the program, the change was not inclusive in all cases. Moreover, in significant areas where there had been almost no real improvement, such as social life skills and self-awareness and awareness of others, it might be concluded that the program had not provided STs with sufficient professional tools to promote their students.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IV.1 Conceptual Conclusions: Rethinking and Improving STs' Training in the Social Field (STT-SF model)

The factual conclusions emerging from the discussions of the three research studies' findings enabled to advance of an evidence-based model of improved **ST Training in the Social Field (STT-SF model)**. In other words, based on the findings emerging from the research, the STT-SF model includes critical components for achieving improved program objectives i.e., promoting STs' role perception, sense of self-efficacy, motivation and PD to promote the social conduct of students with VI, who are studying in the regular education system. The model developed is presented in two figures, the first figure presents the foundation of the STT-SF model, i.e. improved PD framework of the STT-SF model, while the second figure presents the complete STT-SF model.

Figure IV.1 illustrates the improved PD framework of the STT-SF model, describing components required to achieve effective STs' PD in the social field of VI's students. The improved PD framework comprises three major components: basic training program for STs, ongoing guidance and supervision processes after completing the basic program and an advanced training program in the social field in which teachers will participate approximately two to three years after completing of basic program.

The basic training program includes three central parts carried out in parallel to provide one comprehensive process of teacher education and empowerment: The first part focuses on acquisition of theoretical knowledge, professional tools and teaching skills required to perform each stage of STs' role promoting their students' social conduct.

The second part is implementation and practice of learned knowledge and skills on a student with VI. The third part includes an empowerment workshop accompanying the implementation process, in which STs present their implementation findings together with personal insights from their practice, difficulties, questions and dilemmas.

The theoretical knowledge, professional tools and teaching skills' part contains significant theoretical topics such as: the importance of the social aspect and its impact on students' development and quality of life now and in the future, the impact of VI on students' social development and functioning, difficulties and social characteristics of blind students versus those with VI, parents' and students' denial of VI and its implications on students' functioning including how to cope with this phenomenon. Additional issues include the positive humanist educational approach as an empowering approach to enhance students' social development that places students in the center as main partners in the process, the importance of collaboration with significant stakeholders in promoting students' social conduct and how to achieve it, the value of peer groups for the social and emotional development of students with VI.

Moreover, this part also clarifies all the unique, critical social skills to be promoted among students with VI and blind students. In other words, it is important to deepen and expand discussion on all social goals included in the three dimensions of the student with VI's Social Conduct Assessment Questionnaire: knowledge and social skills, advocacy skills and social life skills, because these are the foundations for promoting students' social conduct. Furthermore, evidence shows it was important to maintain a balance between the goals from the three social dimensions during program discussions. As a result, goals from advocacy skills and social life skills dimensions should be discussed and practiced more broadly throughout the program, despite their limited numbers in the assessment questionnaire.

In addition, it is essential to expand and deepen discussions about specific significant complicated and sensitive goals in the three social dimensions such as students' awareness of their disability, consequences on their hygiene, adapting their behavior to complex and challenging social situations, awareness of their own and others' social conduct in social scenarios. Moreover, this theoretical part also includes a structured definition of STs' role in the social field including clear and sequential work stages.

Each stage of the ST's role includes a detailed description of employing unique professional tools and skills required.

Furthermore, in all three parts of the improved training program, i.e., imparting knowledge and tools, teachers' implementation on a student with VI and teachers' empowerment workshop, it is crucial to expand and deepen teachers' training in both developing lesson plans in the social field and creating social learning opportunities, tools and strategies, adapted to a student's age and needs, including the use of social scenarios in which a student experiences difficulties as opportunities for social learning. It is also crucial that all three parts of the basic training program include demonstration of different and varied cases, including diverse severity of VI. In other words, it is essential to provide STs with examples both of students with various VIs and blind students. In addition, it is crucial to provide examples of students with VI with unique and complicated characteristics such as: adolescent students with VI in high school, who find it difficult to cooperate in the social arena, students and parents who deny disability.

Moreover, throughout the improved training program it is important to emphasize two parallel and complementary ways to promote students' social conduct, which should be performed systematically during the school year. The first way is individual work with a student in support lessons, and the second is collaborative work with stakeholders: parents, school staff, peer group staff and any other relevant stakeholders.

Research findings also showed that STs encounter cases of resistance from parents, especially parents who deny their child's disability, or resistance from educational staff to cooperate. Therefore, the program should also prepare STs for cases where there is such resistance and provide them with skills and strategies to address it.

The empowerment workshop, which is a significant part of the improved program, includes two dimensions. The first relates to teachers' collaboration i.e. a peer learning process, in which STs learn from one another's experiences, and from feedback they receive from their colleagues. The second one is a process of supervision, feedback, positive reinforcement and empowerment of STs' professional capabilities to promote their students' social conduct given by program facilitators who are experts in this field.

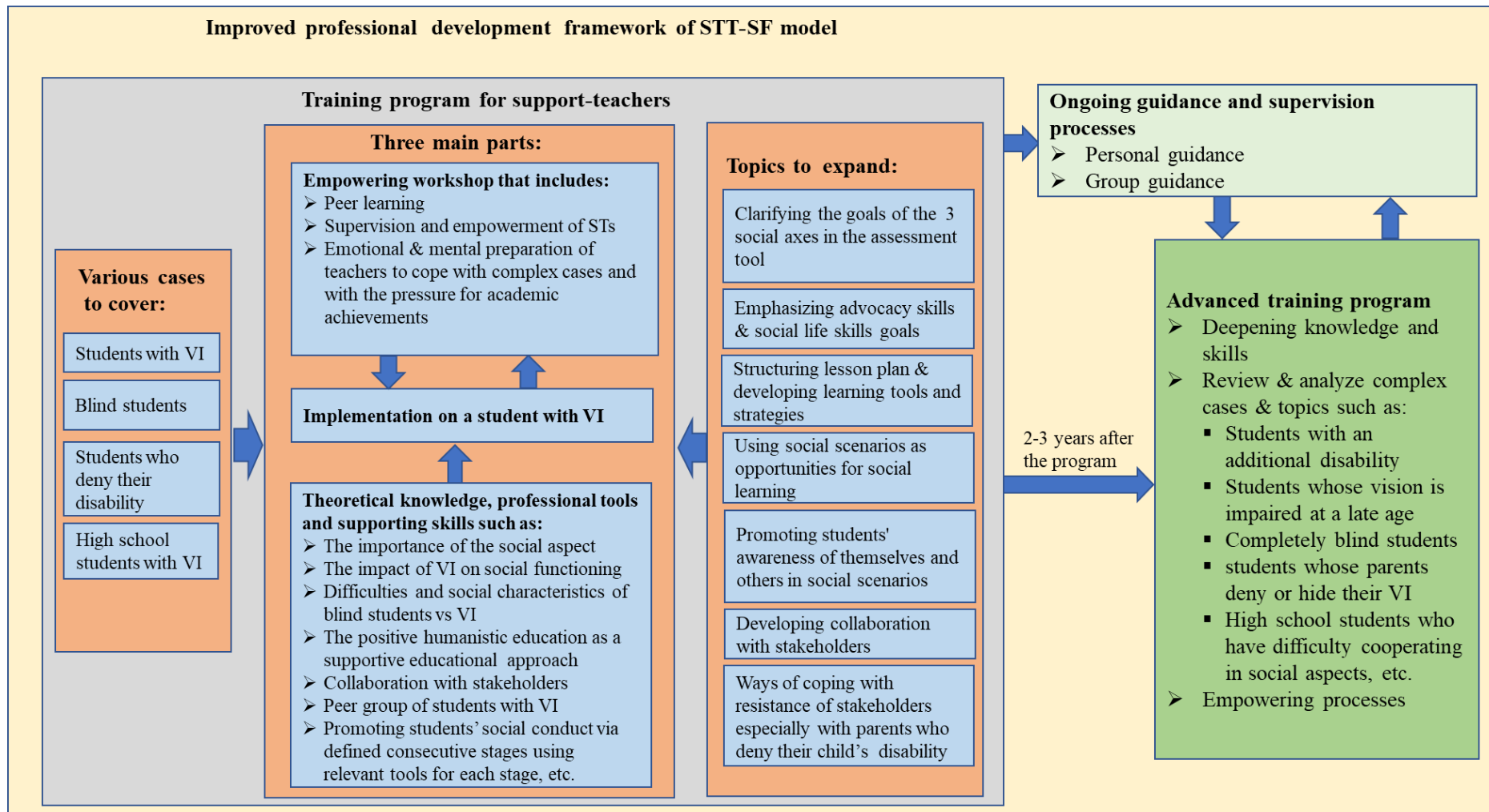


Figure IV.1: PD Framework of STT-SF Model

This feedback addresses STs' implementation and practice, findings and insights. In addition, it is important for this workshop to deepen and expand STs preparation for mental and emotional aspects, i.e., coping with a variety of complex and sensitive cases and addressing diverse challenging situations, including high pressure on students' academic achievements while making attempts to promote their social conduct.

Additionally, the evidence showed that owing to the complexity of cases, challenges and pressures exerted on STs, and to assimilate learned material and maintain STs' motivation to promote VI's students' social conduct, there is a need for STs to continue their professional learning process in the social field after completing the improved training program through two PD settings.

The first is a structured ongoing guidance and supervision process conducted both individually and in groups providing support, strengthening and empowering STs regarding their practice and efforts to advance their students' social conduct throughout their career. This setting would allow STs to share their feelings, difficulties, conflicts, successes, and frustrations, raise questions and topics of concern for conducting in-depth professional discussions with supervisors. As part of these processes, STs will continue to receive reinforcement and feedback and reflect on their practice on the one hand, and advice, ideas and recommendations for improving their practice on the other.

The second setting is an advanced training program focusing on deepening and expanding teachers' PD and reinforcing assimilation of knowledge, skills and unique tools STs need to work with complex cases and sensitive topics including students with VI who have an additional primary disability and totally blind students.

Another major purpose of the advanced training program is to continue to strengthen the teachers' perceptions of their role, sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote students' social conduct in such complex and sensitive cases. Figure IV.2 presents the complete STT-SF model to improve STs' role perception, sense of self-efficacy, motivation and PD to promote the social conduct of students with VI. **STs' active participation in PD** framework of the STT-SF model raises their sense of self-efficacy and motivation to promote their students' social conduct. In turn, progress in STs' sense of self-efficacy and motivation strengthens their role perception and creates a synergy

that leads to improving and reinforcing STs' PD promoting the social conduct of students with VI.

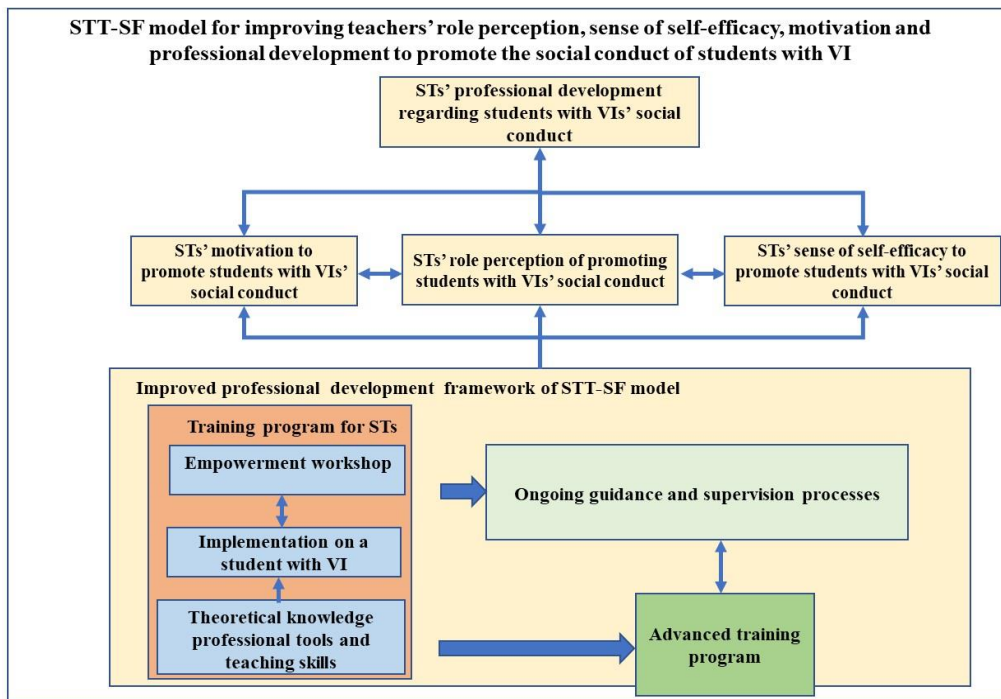


Figure IV.2: STT-SF model to improve STs' role perception, sense of self-efficacy, motivation and PD to promote the social conduct of students with VI

IV.2 Main Practical Implications and Recommendations

The STT-SF model, based on the conclusions drawn from this research, offers practical implications and recommendations to policy makers, academic institutions worldwide that prepare teachers to work with VI students, team leaders of STs and STs themselves.

Main Practical Implications for Policymakers

1. Allocate resources needed to extend the duration of a basic training program and expand its scope to provide a more comprehensive, in-depth, and exhaustive response to the needs of STs who are at the beginning of their professional career.
2. Construct a training process for mentors to provide ongoing guidance and supervision in social aspects to STs who have completed the basic program.

Main Practical Implications for Academic Institutions

1. At a local level, to examine the possibility of expanding PD in social aspects for STs within the framework of a master's degree at one of the universities in Israel, and not only in the framework of professional training, as is currently the case.

2. At a global level, to incorporate in academic programs, preparing teachers to work with students with VI, with at least one in-depth annual course addressing the role of teachers in promoting the social conduct of students with VI.

Main Practical implications for STs who teach students with VI and their team leaders

1. Encourage teachers to participate in PD programs in the social field designed for STs beyond the basic program.
2. Participate in individual and peer group coaching framework focusing on supporting students social conduct and use these settings to address needs and difficulties teachers face in this field and learn from the experience of other teachers.

IV.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Contribution to Theoretical Knowledge

The STT-SF model developed in this research is an original and innovative model that has closed a gap in knowledge in the field and thus contributes to theoretical knowledge in the field of training STs of VI students regarding their role in promoting their students' social conduct. In this sense, this study is the first of its kind and constitutes an innovation in the field of training STs to promote the social conduct of students with VI. This gap in knowledge stands out particularly in light of the professional literature that emphasized the significant implications of VI on social development and functioning (Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Hartmann, 2012; Papuda-Dolińska, 2017), and the literature emphasizing the importance of promoting the social conduct of students in general and students with special needs including students with VI by their schoolteachers (Giese et al., 2021; Hess, 2010, 2015; Manitsa & Doikou, 2022).

The STT-SF model contributes to the literature in this field and expands on knowledge about the unique professional needs, pedagogical and emotional challenges of teachers working with students with VI, who try to promote their students' social conduct. Its contribution is increased in light of complex cases of completely blind students and students with of varying degrees of VI severity, denial of disability and more, as reflected in the literature (Manitsa & Doikou, 2022; Papuda-Dolińska, 2017).

The STT-SF model also expands knowledge about teachers' PD. Based on this study's findings, the model offers a multi-staged PD framework to promote STs' ability to cope with their challenging role in social aspects, combining specialization processes and

ongoing institutional support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Havea & Mohanty, 2020; Shukshina et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017). Furthermore, the STT-SF model contributes to and expands knowledge in the field of PD for in-service SETs (Havea & Mohanty, 2020; Robinson, 2017; Rock et al., 2016) and the field of PD for in-service teachers to promote their students' social functioning and integration (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Stipp, 2019).

Contribution to Practical Knowledge

The STT-SF model is a conceptual, practical, and integrative model to advance a gradual and comprehensive PD process for STs of VI students. The model is based on findings emerging from this study addressing professional and emotional needs of STs raised following their efforts to promote the social conduct of students with VI in regular schools. In this sense the STT-SF model is tailored to provide a professional and detailed response to the needs of STs, their difficulties and professional dilemmas while coping with complex cases and situations as raised in the study. Additionally, the model could lead to a change in SETs' training policy promoting the social conduct of students with VI. On a practical level, the STT-SF model can serve as guidance for teacher education framework wishing to offer courses promoting the PD and emotional abilities of teachers for students with VI. The model can also be useful at a universal level, to be used in different countries and cultures, to promote social aspects in the work of teachers of students with VI, as well as promoting those who teach students in regular education and students with special needs and other disabilities.

Contribution to Methodological Knowledge

Four quantitative questionnaires, based on findings that emerged from a qualitative study were adapted to serve the needs of this research. Teachers' perceptions of their role (Habók & Nagy, 2016), sense of self-efficacy (Fridman & Kess, 2000) and motivation (Mano-Israeli & Gero, 2017) questionnaires served as a basis for adapting items compatible with this study's objectives. The three adapted questionnaires underwent a process of expert validation and reliability tests. In addition, Israeli STs' perceptions of the social conduct of students with VI questionnaire (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2011) was shortened, items were added and then the tool underwent a process of expert validation and reliability to meet the objectives of this research.

IV.4 Further Studies

The current research examined a specific training program, mainly from the perspective of STs. It is suggested to conduct further research focusing on the perspectives of students with VI. Such research should be longitudinal and examine the stability of changes in the first years after the program ended. Although the present research addressed this issue, the scope was limited. It is recommended to conduct research based on a larger research population, including homeroom teachers and other stakeholders to acquire a more comprehensive view of how to promote the social conduct of students with VI in a more ecological manner. In view of the importance of promoting students' social conduct, especially that of students with special needs, and in view of the contribution of the examined program to students with VI, it is recommended conducting studies to evaluate teachers' programs promoting the social conduct of students with other disabilities. In addition, since the present research focused on exploring the Israeli STs' program, it is recommended conducting studies about other training programs in the social field worldwide to expand insights and knowledge about key, universal and effective components of such training programs.

IV.5 Importance of Research and Universal Contribution

This study and the extensive literature reviewed to anchor it show that education systems around the world cope with students with VI. Moreover, it turns out that vision impairment is one of the impairments with the smallest number of cases in special education. On the other hand, social issues occupy a prominent role in VI's students' quality of life, hence the universal importance of this study. It seems that the model developed in this study, STT-SF model, can serve special education systems addressing this special group of students and improve their social aspects by constructing a range of learning courses, training programs, ongoing guidance and supervision settings throughout the careers of teaching staff supporting VI students in their learning framework. The STs' training program examined in this study, which focused on promoting the social conduct of students with VI, had not been examined this study was conducted, hence the importance of the study and its contribution. Moreover, at a universal level, the literature is lacking in research on such programs for TVIs. Furthermore, the STT-SF model's principles can be implemented and used at a global level in PD framework focusing on social aspects for teachers in regular education and special education, while adapting contents to the unique characteristics of every student disability and local cultural characteristics.

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