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# International mobility and cultural perceptions among senior teacher educators in Israel: 'I have learned to suspend judgment'

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to explore the motives underpinning career mobility, and the impact of such mobility on changing the perceptions of senior teacher educators from Israel who have experienced cross-cultural professional transitions during the mid-career stage (hereafter referred to as 'internationally oriented teacher educators'). A thematic analysis of five interviewees' retrospective narratives highlighted three motives driving career mobility: the opportunity for professional development; the joy of adventure and challenge; and the need to bring about a fundamental change in their careers. In addition, two categories of changes in perceptions that occurred following international mobility were mapped: (a) pluralistic perceptions in a multicultural higher education environment, and (b) culture of learning among the younger generation. The discussion raises similarities and differences between the findings and the literature on career mobility in higher education.

## KEYWORDS

Mid-career; teacher educators; international mobility

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## Introduction

International mobility across countries and cultures is received as an important and welcome step in academic careers in the field of higher education (Altbach and Yudkevich 2017; Caruana 2014; Leisyte and Rose 2017; Netz and Jaksztat 2017; Kim 2017; Rumbley and de Wit 2017; Yan, Yue, and Niu 2015). Although this phenomenon has already started to be visible among teacher educators around the world (Townsend 2011; Williams and Berry 2016), in Israel it is very uncommon. This, in spite of the steady increase in the academic demands of the Council of Higher Education, which include the requirement to upgrade the level of academic staff in teacher training colleges, and to encourage their ability to generate international research (Cohen, Yemini, and Sadeh 2014; Yemini et al. 2015, 2017). As a result, criteria for academic advancement in teacher training colleges have been elevated to include the candidate's ability to gain international academic recognition, to establish ties with researchers abroad, and to obtain research funds for the initiation of collaborative projects. This is in stark contrast to what prevailed until a decade ago when advancement was contingent solely upon evidence of a significant academic

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and professional contribution within the country's borders. Some researchers (e.g. Aubusson and Schuck 2013) argue that these changes will lead to the internationalization of teacher education programmes, and to the trend of exchanging teams of teacher educators between countries and hence international career mobility among this group. The expectation that a new professional identity ('internationally oriented teacher educator') will develop calls for the need to plan and document empirical research on teacher educators who experience this complex and changing reality. Evidence of this can be seen in the studies of Townsend (2011), arguing that the expectation that teacher educators will engage in international research and integrate such research into teacher training, which exists in different countries, has created a need to nurture the perception of internationalization among them and proves itself on the positive side. Accordingly, this study will deal with teacher educators who have experienced temporary international career mobility and who thereafter returned to the parent institution in Israel. It will focus on the motives underpinning the transition, and the changes in perceptions which accompanied the process.

### *International mobility in higher education*

In the era of globalization, professional mobility between countries is seen as an important component in promoting careers in various sectors, including higher education (Altbach and Yudkevich 2017; Leisyte and Rose 2017; Kim 2017). However, while the higher education institution receives praise for its ability to recruit academic staff from different cultures, and its process of internationalization serves as a hallmark of its pluralism and prestige, the benefits of career mobility for the staff are ambiguous. The individual's ability to successfully integrate this process depends primarily on personal and professional factors, as well as on external dynamics related to the organizational climate and the quality of work life the institution offers (Yan, Yue, and Niu 2015). These may lead the individual to acquire global academic experience once he or she has managed a career in a higher education institution within a different culture; alternatively, they may impede this process. The main purpose of engaging with different cultures is to assist institutions and their faculty members to situate and examine local academic knowledge within the context of broader agendas and cultures, thereby obtaining an innovative and up-to-date perspective on an international scale. According to some studies (Proctor 2015; Rumbley & Wit, 2017), the contribution of this group to global research is undeniable, despite the fact that their numbers remain small.

Nonetheless, the international mobility of Israeli teacher educators remains sporadic and controversial (Yemini et al. 2017). This results from the tension between the advantages of internationalization for the institution and the colleges' pedagogic and cultural values. In other words, teacher educators who are inclined to undertake research studies abroad, or take up short-term employment in an overseas institution, are perceived as seeking a university culture of internationalization and international research, thereby acquiring a mobility ticket beyond their [home] environment, and hence neglecting the goal of educating teachers. Continuing on the subject of the expectation of loyalty to such an identity, this study seeks to examine the justification of this fear by college principals, by examining the testimonies of international teacher educators in connection with a change in pedagogical and cultural perceptions as a result of their mobility.

### Research on teacher educators

Faculty members employed in teacher training colleges, referred to in the professional literature as teacher educators (Ellis et al. 2014; Williams and Berry 2016) are characterised by a unique professional identity that constantly oscillates between ‘academic researcher’ and ‘teacher in a second-tier institution’. The persistence of this hybrid identity is a consequence of the covert requirement of the workplace to link educational research with a particular vision that is shaped by the local institutional culture. In terms of priorities and investment of resources by teacher educators, the institutional demand for academic research sometimes conflicts with the commitment to train talented human capital for the education system (Gunn et al. 2015; Shagrir 2015).

The literature on teacher education contains few insights into the field of teacher educators’ professional identity vis-à-vis their career mobility. Mobility is understood mainly as the transition between schools and teacher training colleges, and is substantiated by the experiences of ‘becoming a teacher educator’ (Murray and Male 2005). Similar to other changes in the careers of teachers and teacher educators, this development usually takes place at the mid-career period, which is assumed to cover the age range 35–45 (Sparkes, Templin, and Schempp 1990). According to others (Griffiths, Thompson, and Hryniewicz 2014; Romano et al., 2004), this stage leads to a ‘crossroads’ at which the individual examines the compatibility between his or her professional identity and the work environment. Such individuals are expected continuously to deal with significant dilemmas about their future careers and to make a final decision between opportunities to grow and open up to new challenges, sometimes in a new and unfamiliar environment, or to continue as before, seeking stability and settling in the home institution. These factors, which were mentioned in connection to the transitions within teaching, will be examined in this study as contributing to the motives for international career mobility and the construction of a new professional identity.

### Study context

There are 21 teacher training colleges in Israel which provide services to 32,000 young people who wish to be trained in a variety of teaching subjects and specializations (CHE, 2016). At the end of the four-year study period, colleges award the graduates a B.Ed. degree. The cultural reality of Israeli teacher training colleges is characterized by various factors, the main one being that the colleges are divided by sector into three groups: Jewish-secular, Jewish-religious and Arab, in accordance with the main ethnic groups in Israeli society (Moskovich and Liberman 2018). Each sector fosters a different educational ideology that appeals to its own community of future educators, and acts according to the unique culture of the respective institution. Correspondingly, each college prepares its graduates to educate different populations, and assimilates educational concepts that are identified with the social and cultural characteristics of its respective group (Shagrir 2015).

Alongside this reality, over the past decade, the trend of academisation has been evident. This is reflected in the raising of academic standards in terms of teaching and research, one of which is reflected in its goal of severing the Ministry of Education’s sponsorship and to join the auspices of the Council for Higher Education (CHE) as other

academic institutions in Israel. This transition is expected to serve as a necessary condition 125  
for the continued existence of teacher training colleges in the coming years, and as part of  
this, college administrators are required to develop internationalisation skills and to instill  
them in the faculty. This is reflected not only in encouraging staff members to produce  
international research, but also in internal management, in decisions about recruiting  
a diverse staff with an emphasis on multiculturalism, in the process of absorbing students 130  
from different sectors and regions. This trend is especially evident in secular colleges  
(which naturally espouse the values of democracy, openness, pluralism, and equality),  
but there are also sparks in the 'ultra- " (religious-Jewish and Arab) academic colleges,  
which, up until a decade ago, maintained their identity as a convenient institution for  
students from the relevant groups and provided them with the best preparation available 135  
for teaching in these religious sectors (Yemini and Giladi 2015).

The trend of internalization exists due to several reasons. Firstly, the systemic pro-  
cesses mentioned above impose high expectations on the part of the CHE to develop an  
identity similar to that of institutions budgeted by it (for example, presenting the  
institution as a multi-cultural mosaic with diverse fields of expertise and research). 140  
Secondly, the process of academisation has created a demand for the implementing  
of new master's programs, such as the M.Teach or M.Ed., which are designed to absorb  
a diverse population of students (with differences in the regular programmes that  
appeal to the specific audiences, who usually choose the institution according to vision,  
climate and geographic proximity). This development creates a need for in-depth 145  
thinking about making an institution adapt to diverse needs in order to allow for the  
well-being, comfort, and professional development of each person.

The changes confront colleges with new challenges, the first of which is adapting the  
learning environment, curricula and teaching methods to students' (immediate and  
future) needs. The second challenge, created through the accessibility of advanced 150  
degrees, is finding a balance between the need for the college to meet the criteria for  
academic recognition whilst at the same time adhering to the ideological values it wants  
to instill in its particular population of graduates (Davidovitch and Iram 2014). These  
challenges undoubtedly cast a shadow over the professional identity of teacher educa- 155  
tors in Israel, and distinguish them from their counterparts around the world. This study  
attempts to examine the skills of internationalisation and cultural concepts, which create  
binding conditions for success in a variety of aspects described above and raises  
a question about the contribution of international mobility in this group. This is based  
on the assumption that those who have experienced the practice of teaching, research  
or management in an institution with a different culture than theirs will develop 160  
internationalisation and resilience that will enable it to meet the challenges of the  
changing reality in the parent institution.

## Methodology

The study included five internationally-oriented senior teacher educators (one female  
and four male) from five teacher training colleges throughout Israel. This constitutes 165  
a representative sample of this rare group. Their ages range between 47 to 65 years. All  
of them hold leading positions in their parent institutions and have in the past held  
various positions in academic management. Their career experience in teacher

education ranges from 16 to 30 years, including a period at an international institution ranging from one to five years (see Table 1). Identifying each of them as an internationally oriented teacher educator was based on a combination of their teaching and research experience in educational institutions in Israel and abroad. The sampling procedure was purpose-oriented (Patton 2002), using the above-mentioned criteria relating to age and experience and the referral to potential participants was conducted through informants. 170 175

A meeting with the interviewees took place in their offices in a comfortable and quiet atmosphere. In order to maintain the ethical principles of educational research (AERA 2004), full transparency was maintained regarding the purposes of the study and the manner in which the information will be used, while preserving the privacy of the interviewees and their anonymity. Subsequently, the interviewees signed a consent form to participate in the study and the interviews began. 180

This qualitative study employed a narrative approach and was based on the teacher educators' life stories and their accounts of their experiences of international career mobility at mid-career stage. During the semi-structured interviews, the interviewees were asked about the motives for international career mobility, their initial experiences during their integration into the host institution abroad, the process of integration and acclimatization, and especially changes in their perceptions when they returned to Israel. This accords with the approach whereby interviewees share their life stories with the researcher by reflecting on, and reconstructing, the changes they experienced in their perceptions. 185

During the data analysis stage, I applied an approach to thematic analysis (Percy, Kostere, and Kostere 2015) according to which, I drew from the narrative data the prominent themes with respect to the current research question about international career mobility experiences. This process follows the methodology of analysis according to the themes to which the interviewees related in the interview, while also seeking sub-categories and examples that seemed as meaningful to them by finding repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clark, 2006, 8). In this case, such an approach assisted me in mapping the main issues that led the interviewees to decide to move their careers abroad and the core areas in which their perceptions changed. The findings were validated by two qualitative researchers who read the in-depth interviews and offered their own interpretations. The cross-referencing of the themes that emerged in this process anchored the findings. 190 195 200

## Findings

The semi-structured interviews that were conducted as a research tool led the teacher educators to share their dilemmas and reflections on the moves in their careers and the new perceptions that were shaped by the international mobility experience. Accordingly, the section on the findings is divided into two parts: the first refers to the motivation factors underpinning career mobility and the motives for developing one's career abroad; the second part deals with the teacher educators' changing perceptions which resulted during this stage of their careers. This second part divides into two sub-themes: (a) pluralistic perceptions in a multicultural environment of higher education; (b) culture of learning among the younger generation. During the interviews, career experiences at the parent and the host institutions were reconstructed, with the emphasis on their influence on the formulation of new concepts. 205 210

Table 1. The sample data.

Pen name	Age	Gender	Teaching & research area	Current position	Former position in the overseas institution	Geographical location of the overseas institution	Period of		
							Teacher education (before career mobility)	Working in the overseas institute	Teacher education (after career mobility)
Prof. A	61	M	Philosophy of Education	Head of Educational Center	Lecturer	USA	24	1	5
Prof. O	65	M	Music Education	Dean of Faculty	Lecturer, Academic administrator	Europe	18	13	4
Prof. S	57	M	Educational Science, Multicultural Education	Head of School of Education	Lecturer, Academic administrator	South America	23	3	2
Prof. Z	50	M	Psychology and Educational Management	Head of Research Authority	Research Fellow, Lecturer	USA	0	5	5
Dr. H	47	F	Educational Science	-	Research Fellow, Lecturer	USA	8	2	8



## Motives for developing a career abroad

In the interviewees' testimonies, references were made to the factors that make careers overseas attractive, such as opportunities for professional development, experiencing new managerial and academic challenges, breaking old boundaries and adopting a multicultural working style. Thus, for example, Prof. O. (65) pointed to a yearning for career development: 215

*When I reached a certain age I wanted to open up my life a bit, to get a different perspective. This progress is very important academically and in terms of a career. I think this is another opportunity and another place for renewal and development and growth, to bring the experience we have from Israel, the better things, such as the creativity, the entrepreneurship, the swift responses, and try not to bring the worst things.* 220

Then he shared the motivating factors that led to the decision, i.e. the need to bring about a fundamental change in his career. The main dilemma facing him was the choice between a change of direction and opening up a new horizon in a society where his field of expertise is more recognised, versus the opportunity to establish himself in his existing workplace while dealing with the academic-administrative role he had been offered as the next stage in his career. According to him, the latter option was less attractive since it did not give him the appropriate space for the creativity and professional development he desired. 225 230

*After 18 years of academic work, you have exhausted your capabilities. And I faced the question of whether to be appointed president of the [institution] because it was on the agenda, and I said to myself – it's so much administration. On the other hand, I could go to Europe where the recognition of [...] flourishes more than anywhere in the world. And give myself a new horizon of another 18 years until the pension. It did not work out for 18 years because of a personal problem, but my plans were far-reaching.* 235

Prof. S. (57) also emphasised that the significant attraction factor for him was embodied in the joy of adventure and challenge, which created the urge to put management skills to the test and gain a higher level of achievement: 240

*I was offered the position and I took it tentatively for three years. It is a university of the Jewish community that wants to expand to include a non-Jewish population. There is a community there that desperately needs a leader to take the university through its aggressive growth program. They noticed what I had done in the previous place. We grew from 500 (students) to 3,000 within two years. I was very proud that this institute chose me out of many candidates as someone who could set the university on a path of aggressive growth. It was a great honor.* 245

Looking at the life stories that preceded the decision to move a career to an overseas institution, one can identify a pattern of coping with professional stagnation and opening up new avenues of momentum. The interviewees took on new challenges after considering their alternatives, and decided to take advantage of the opportunities abroad. In the course of the interviews, issues related to the challenges of management were raised, mainly in the development of leadership skills in professional and managerial contexts, while integrating into different cultures. 250

## Career mobility and changing perceptions

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Retrospective narratives presented experiences of changing perceptions that occurred a few years later, when the teacher educators had returned to Israel. Two themes were introduced in which perceptions were changed and new positions were formulated about the role of the educator: (1) pluralistic perceptions in a multicultural higher education environment, and (2) the culture of learning among the younger generation. While the first theme emphasised the relationship between the interviewees and their professional environment in both workplaces in relation to their respective pluralistic outlooks, the second theme related to the interaction between the interviewees and the students at both institutions, and the tensions created around the difference in culture of learning as an important component of academic success.

### *Pluralistic perceptions in a multicultural higher education environment*

The participants shared the changes in consciousness they underwent as a result of exposure to the multicultural environment at the host institution abroad, while trying to adapt to the culture there. According to their accounts, three factors shaped their pluralistic approach when returning to Israel: (a) openness on the part of the faculty members of the host institution abroad towards their cultural identity; (b) developing sensitivity to intercultural needs with the understanding that commonality prevails over difference and the factors that separate people from different cultures; and (c) the need for fresh preparation for the changes that had occurred in the socio-cultural fabric of the Israeli colleges in which they work today. Thus, Prof. Z. (50) talked honestly about his positive experience of integration into a university in the United States, and the openness of colleagues there towards his cultural identity.

*I had serious concerns about my integration into the university, where most people were close and conservative Catholics, and I feared prejudice. But to my surprise and joy I discovered very quickly that I was accepted because of my professional and personal skills, and no one was interested in whether I was an Israeli and a Jew. Also, I had difficulties deciphering local cultural codes, and I asked to be told if I was doing something that was unacceptable. I learned very quickly that their culture is very different from ours, but at the same time their needs and feelings are very similar even though they express them differently. This led me to contemplate and to reflect on my initial assumptions. In this way I have also learned to suspend judgment toward others in my environment.*

Prof. O. (65) also elaborated on the changes he was experiencing in his perceptions, as follows:

*Before leaving my country, I was rather rigid and single-minded. Seeing parts of the world and encountering people and opinions so different to my own have taught me flexibility and tolerance. I learned that it is also possible to do things differently and to understand, accept and identify with cultural codes that were previously unknown to me.*

The interviewees also shared insights into the changes in perception that developed as a result of their experiences at the host institutions. For example, Prof. Z (50) brought a personal story that demonstrated the moment when he understood the need to develop sensitivity to multicultural diversity and different cultural codes in order to

become integrated into the teamwork of the host institution, as well as the vitality required in order to learn about the local cultural codes as a way of life.

*I had difficulties adapting to teamwork from the first day, because this place is based on a crossroads of cultures that have to pass successfully. You arrive knowing that you are still a small child who has to learn a great deal about their cultural codes. This is expressed very strongly in the culture of discourse in work meetings. For example if one of your colleagues said something that sounded inappropriate, it is not acceptable to comment on it. The first time that happened, I said: "I disagree with that", and they took me aside and told me, "Listen, this is what we say in a gentler way". Then I replied: "This is a whole world, I am learning, do not hesitate to wake me up if I say something nonsensical, and if I make a mistake, please feel free to correct me." They were very patient with me and very much understood the gap. This is how I learned, and it is expressed in all kinds of places, such as how to behave in new places, how to deal with a student who feels distressed. There were challenges all the time, made easier over time.*

According to other professors, they have adopted a more tolerant and pluralistic approach than they had before, with an emphasis on sensitivity to the needs of different cultural groups. This can be seen in the examples below:

*Prof. A. (61): Once I was more single-minded, and today I am much more open to multiculturalism. Today I give priority to the person before the opinion. And this is partly due to the experiences I underwent both there and in other contexts where I taught abroad. The new idea in my perception is that courtesy precedes the sanctity of religion.*

*Prof. S. (57): I came with openness to the subject but my interactions with faculty members and students from various backgrounds greatly enhanced my cultural understanding and I am very grateful to the [institute] for this opportunity.*

The teacher educators referred to the fact that the entry of people from different cultures into the Israeli institutions where they work signifies a trend of integration that creates new opportunities for them to participate in the process of cross-cultural understanding. According to them, their past experiences abroad taught them to adopt greater sensitivity to multicultural needs and appropriate work patterns. The period spent overseas served as a preparation for the expected **change in the social-cultural fabric** that had been created in Israeli colleges upon their return.

*Prof. A. (61): Following the mixing of cultures and populations, I faced new challenges. Later, when the graduate programmes began here at the college, religious Jews, settlers, Christian and Muslim Arabs also began to arrive, and the population became much more diverse. For example, there were no mezuzahs [prayer scrolls attached to doorposts] here previously, because ours is a secular college. However, we decided that in light of the demand from certain students, in order to honour them, we would place mezuzahs on the doorpost of each classroom. It means that now one has to be culturally sensitive and respectful. The change in the population and the change in the global approach, the culture of discourse in the world which led to multiculturalism, all led to me adopting more moderate perceptions as well.*

*Prof. S. (57): As head of school in a multicultural institution, I advocate an attitude of tolerance and patience for social and cultural diversity, and I lead my colleagues in this way. Here we strongly believe that people can continue to live according to their beliefs. If an ultra-Orthodox person said that he had moved away from his sector because he studied at our campus, for us it would represent a failure. We really respect difference, and that's one of the significant things I learned there [abroad]. And I think that it is desirable and worthwhile for anyone who engages in education, in teacher education, to promote a multicultural approach, and to show openness and tolerance towards people from different backgrounds and sectors.*

On this issue, the trend is towards the positive influence of an overseas institution on the sense of belonging to a multicultural society. Professional experience in this regard exposed the interviewees to the kind of expression necessary for a tolerant society that also resonated when they returned to the parent institution. 345

### *Culture of learning among the younger generation*

The culture of learning, the effort exerted by the students to integrate into higher education and the perception of achievement, were issues that concerned the interviewees, and these were raised in the testimonies as some of the central components that changed their perceptions. In some of the testimonies these were perceived as distinctions between cultures; whereas among others, the generational differences in the culture of learning and the concept of achievement were perceived as a cross-cultural phenomenon among the younger generation. In both cases, according to the interviewees, these led to rethinking and sometimes changing their pedagogical perceptions after coping with the challenges of interaction with their students, both in the parent and in the host institutions. 350

The interviews raised three topics: the differences in the culture of learning between higher education institutions, the common denominators, and the related challenges in the development of appropriate pedagogy. For example, the differences in the culture of communication between students and teachers were mentioned by Prof. Z.: 360

*The gaps between the learning cultures of students [here and there] are enormous. There, their culture requires them to arrive ready for class, fully mobilized for the task. It is likely that this is their education from home and it may also be due to the excessive tuition fees paid there. They take higher education very seriously, it must be accomplished to justify the investment. There is also a gap in the way they communicate with lecturers. They would not allow themselves to joke with the teacher or argue with me. Here [in Israel] the borders are breached much more often. But in the end, in both countries there are students with low motivation who do what they do only "because they have to", and there are those who want to be smart and enrich themselves intellectually. So ultimately, I would say that both the motivations and the weaknesses are similar between here and there, however different cultural groups express it in different ways.* 365

Prof. O. also referred to the gap between the populations and the change they had brought about in his perceptions: 375

*In that [institution], the teaching was more purposeful, and success oriented. However, I would not say that the students there are more serious in terms of career and success, although they are undoubtedly far more purposeful. I would see students there who were ready to suffer because they must succeed and they almost 'killed' themselves in the process. At some point I realized that it was a certain problem there. While purposefulness is a good thing, it must come in harmony with the person, not against him. And this is an important thing which I learned there, and I now apply here in my work. I say at every opportunity to my students: In the long-term perspective, the pursuit of success can kill you.* 380

The gaps in the learning culture alongside the similarity in aspirations, as expressed above, were repeated in other testimonies. An example of this can be seen in the dilemma presented by Dr. H. (47) regarding the adaptation of teaching methods to the learning culture: 385

*The major dilemmas and struggles I coped with there were about my teaching; there [abroad] it was much more directed than here. How to maintain a teaching method that would not only be correct, but also help me develop sensitivity, empowerment and listening. That's the essence of my job, and that's where I have to strive. Because up until now my efforts were also directed at the methodology of teaching, but at some point I understood that this could be ideological. In other words, my greatest dilemma was whether to teach success and achievement or personal growth. It is a constant struggle that began there and continues here until now.*

In these testimonies we can see a uniform line indicating that some of the significant insights that were reached during the teaching and education of students in an overseas institution were based on a perception of achievement versus the nature and joy of doing the work, and the ability to generate empowerment in the process.

## Discussion

The current study attempts to explore the motives underpinning international career mobility and the changes in cultural perceptions as a continuation of this process. In the initial phase of the study, the issues taken from the qualitative analysis of the interviews raised motives for career mobility in line with those of the mid-career stage in general (Brott, 2013), and with respect to the teacher educators' population in particular (Griffiths, Thompson, and Hryniewicz 2014). These were characterised by the need to renew and search for self-identity in the professional context, and attempt to expand the horizons of one's activity. The findings also coincide with the literature, which describes the major motivations for overall international mobility in higher education (Altbach and Yudkevich 2017). Such motives are aimed at specialization with an emphasis on internationalization, expansion of employment opportunities, and a sense of widening the radius of their influence on the agenda, vision and values of their respective institutions. Thus, in addition to these characteristics that relate to the cycle of career life, such as past life events and future goals as reflected in the literature (Netz and Jaksztat 2017), the interviewees expressed a tendency to discuss motifs of career mobility in terms of fundamental change, and an emphasis on yearning for an environment that would challenge their skill. The testimonies described processes of exporting unique skills that proved themselves in challenging conditions in a small country, and leveraged them in the international arena.

In the continuation of the study, the interviews highlighted two areas in which teacher educators' perceptions had changed: (a) gaining more pluralistic perceptions in a multicultural higher education environment, and (b) understanding the culture of learning among the younger generation. With regard to both these themes, the interviewees referred to the gap between their perceptions prior to the international mobility experience, and the atmosphere at the host institution which led them to reexamine their ideas and reconstruct new insights in order to stabilize and leverage their future professional paths.

In general, the first element of the findings is appropriate to the claims raised by the literature on career mobility in higher education, which points to the pluralistic view of the faculty member as a determining factor in the successful integration into an overseas institution (Caruana 2014). Another aspect raised here is that the multicultural outlook that developed overseas and the experience of education in a multicultural

environment have been shown to have a positive effect on the character and vitality of senior officials in the parent institution, in contrast to the fear of potential negative effects raised by others (Cohen, Yemini, and Sadeh 2014; Yemini et al. 2015, 2017). It seems that the differences in the culture of higher education and the sectorial division of teacher training among different populations, as practiced in Israel, create a point of view that loyally serves the new world view. It can be hoped that cultivating tolerance for different cultural groups may best serve all those involved in education and teacher training.

The findings revealed evidence of a 'crossroads of cultures' reality in which interviewees were required to develop sensitivity to intercultural needs, with emphasis placed on the absorption and implementation of cultural codes. Thus, for example, adaptation to reality in the host institution involved a great deal of learning, with emphasis on emotional intelligence, ego renunciation, and cross-cultural interpersonal skills. An emphasis on these skills leveraged their multicultural ability, which was also applied when they returned to Israel. These points were made by Pettavel et al (2009) who described the importance of multiple intelligences around the world, with emphasis on emotional components that predict success in adapting to new contexts in different cultures. The ability to develop sensitivity to cultural language, which was required in the host institution in order to adapt to a new work environment, made a significant impact upon interviewees' return to Israel and was expressed on a managerial, emotional and interpersonal level.

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The second element of the findings is the fact that the students' culture of learning, part of which is expressed in the perception of achievement and the excessive pursuit of success, was quite distinctive in the eyes of the interviewees. Although the literature does not adequately address this aspect from the point of view of teacher educators, particularly in terms of an international scope, a number of studies are controversial, in line with the findings of this study. While Yin, Wang, and Han (2016) found that a positive attitude towards achievement and profound commitment to studying are influenced by the quality of teaching, interpersonal relations and other local factors, other studies (Ayalon et al., 2008; Hadar and Brody 2016) indicate that the aspiration to succeed depends on the cultural and social context. In the present study, the interviewees reiterated that despite the differences in the form of expression of the learning culture, feelings and aspirations are found to be similar among different groups of students. This insight supports a traditional statement that recurs in different contexts, i.e. 'being different yet feeling similar' (Chatman et al. 1998). In contrast to other studies that relate to the cultural competence of faculty members as a predictor of their professional skills, such as self-efficacy in teaching, satisfaction with work (Chen 2016) and a tendency to take new initiatives in implementing innovation in teaching (Gunn et al. 2015), this study does not show evidence of the empowerment of pedagogic abilities, yet it indicates a congruence between them and the ability to critically examine the students' learning culture. This finding is new against the background of existing insights in the field.

It can be argued that these two issues were exposed as a result of the unique characteristics of Israel's higher education system and the ways in which it differed from the host country. Understandably, this difference, as interpreted by the interviewees, led them to think about adapting the higher education environment in the parent

institution to meet the needs of the multicultural population, while encouraging students to preserve their identity and cultural differences, and promoting mutual acceptance and respect for heterogeneity. 480

## Summary and conclusions

The present pilot study attempted to contribute to the formulation of a new definition of the internationally oriented teacher educator by emphasising changes in perceptions resulting from international mobility. Although the testimonies were taken from a limited group of distinct academics, a pattern of changes documented in this study can be included in other groups of international academics who have become integrated into an institution where culture has been different and often contradicts the one in which they developed at home (Caruana 2014). Thus, for example, this study examines the subject of cultural dissonance as having a decisive influence on changing perceptions among this group, with an emphasis on personal and cultural aspects, a concept that has a wide scope in various contexts. The conclusions reached in the wake of the study create a scoop for other areas, with the understanding that in the age of globalisation, educators and even people from other sectors are subject to cultural realities, including international mobility (Davidovitch and Iram 2014), which can sometimes lead to cultural dissonance and interpersonal tension (Hamilton 2016; Hart and Sriprakash 2018). Although this phenomenon emerges in a judgmental manner in these recent studies, the current conclusions make it possible to see it as a critical point in the development of cultural perceptions. 485  
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It should be concluded that most of the testimonies were consistent with the claims raised by the literature on career mobility in higher education, which points to the pluralistic view of the faculty member as a decisive factor in successful integration into a foreign institution (Caruana 2014). Additionally, the experience of education in a multicultural environment has been shown to have a positive effect on the character and vitality of senior officials in the parent institution, in contrast to the fear of potential negative effects raised by the studies. It seems that the differences in the culture of higher education and the sectoral distribution of teacher training among different populations, as practiced in Israel, create a perspective that faithfully serves the new worldview. Hopefully, cultivating tolerance for different cultural groups can serve all those involved in education and teacher training. 500  
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Although the conclusions are based on subjective evidence based on reconstructing the past experiences of a small group in a pilot study, recommendations can be formulated for further studies. The first is to continue to study the identities of educators in a multicultural context, or in a different cultural environment than theirs. Second, it is worthwhile to rely on the understanding that an internationally oriented teacher educator may make a significant contribution to the pluralistic nature of the next generation of teachers and thus guide future research among teachers from different institutions and cultures. 515

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