Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca
Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences
Department of Educational Sciences

Long Abstract

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PHD STUDENT
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Development of Professional Competencies for Second Career Kindergarten Teachers

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Table of Contents

Glossary of Abbreviations

ECE	Early childhood education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
FO	Future Orientation
FTP	Future time perception
NTS	Non-Traditional Students
OJT	On the Job Training
SOC	Sense of Coherence
SOCITS	Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations

List of Tables

List of Figures

ABSTRACT

One of the most significant predictors of the quality of early childhood education and care is the professional training of the staff in daily contact with the children. Opportunities for quality education begin at birth. The normal development of newborns depends on their environment and the quality of their educators' training. Their first fundamental right is the right to education and to realize their potential.

Before the reform, in September 2015, an experimental training track was opened at a teacher training institution for women working in early childhood. The on-the-job training track considers work experience as a significant source of knowledge required for enrichment and theoretical and pedagogical support. As part of the four-year track, female non-traditional students (NTS) who have first experienced academic studies. They had the privilege of integrating their continuous work into the educational framework as experience. Also, they received guidance and personal guidance on their way to becoming preschool academic educators with a teaching certificate.

The study examined the NTS' personal and professional development during the training period to examine whether it contributed to their sense of self-efficacy, future orientation (FO) regarding work and changing careers, and their sense of coherence in teaching situations (SOCITS). Until this study's onset, the FO of NTS had not been examined. People's self-perceptions have a decisive effect on their behavior. This study examined these perceptions to learn as much as possible about the training program and its suitability for this population.

The study was conducted at a teacher education institution. All female students participated in the program from the first to 4th year, and the practicum year was defined as the fifth. The research was done using mixed methods. The NTS completed a quantitative questionnaire regarding their FO, concerns, and hopes regarding work and career, self-efficacy, and perception of SOCITS at three time points: the beginning of the year, during the academic year, and its end. Data analysis employed a slope to examine the participants' development trends. The steeper the slope, the more significant a development trend was observed, reflecting resilience and the ability to cope with the integration of training, home, and work. The positive slope expressed the change in self-efficacy that developed during the training program. In the qualitative part, NTS were interviewed, and their answers were content analyzed using themes and categories.

The main findings showed that the NTS's age and seniority at work and in the training program positively affected the development of the sense of self-efficacy, FO, and the perception of SOCIT. That is, the more NTS' years of experience in life and work in education and care, the more consolidated their professional identity, resilience, and ability to direct their personal resources to the period of training and professionalization, while the younger NTS, with less experience in life and work, who do not work full-time, needed guidance and other training that is more related to the consolidation of their professional identity and choice of profession.

The applied and universal contribution of the research is in developing differential training programs according to those involved in early childhood education to preserve them and prevent dropouts and even leaving the profession after the training.

Keywords: Future orientation; Early child education; Hopes and fears; Non-traditional students; On-the-job training; Professional development.

INTRODUCTION

This study examined the professional development of kindergarten teacher assistants who participate in an on-the-job teacher training program that will grant them a teaching certificate and an academic degree. Considered non-traditional students (NTS), the women participating in the study passed the threshold requirements for an academic institution (most of them participated in an annual pre-academic preparatory course to meet the threshold requirements). In addition, they had to have at least five years of experience as preschool educators and carers in daycare centers for ages birth to three or in kindergartens for ages three to six. The training program was launched in 2015 as an experiment to enable mature women, in most cases married and with families, who did not have opportunities for academic education during their lifetime, to develop and advance their professional abilities. Participating in the program was an organized initial training, even though they had accumulated many years of experience in their work.

According to the current study conducted in 2018, the program was implemented in one teacher education institution, which formed the grounds for this study. Today, in 2024, with the reform of preschool education in Israel and the transition from a split model to a uniform model, the responsibility for education from birth to the end of the educational continuum is under the Ministry of Education. All educators from birth to three must undergo basic preschool training of 200 hours, as part of which they receive a professional certificate. The state subsidizes this training and allows the participants to continue the training path toward a teaching license and a bachelor's degree. This track is currently common in most teacher training institutions in Israel.

As part of the research, the NTS' future orientation (FO), their fears and hopes regarding work and career, as well as their sense of self-efficacy and their sense of coherence in teaching situations (SOCITS) were examined at three time points, at the beginning of an academic year, during the academic year and at its end, all NTS studying in the program participated in research from year one to year four, including those who left in the fifth year at the end of training for full-time work as kindergarten teachers after the internship year.

Despite being NTS, with a negative professional image for such a significant position, their abilities and professional development stimulated the need to investigate their personal and professional development throughout their participation in the program. Learning from the research is a basis for understanding the possible need for the

development of differential training programs that will allow female participants to persevere in the profession for a long time, so that it is possible to solve the employment crisis of early childhood education women at the local and universal level.

In Israel, the children's participation in daycare centers is high compared to other countries. Therefore, for early childhood educators, who are in daily contact with toddlers and children and maintain reciprocal relationships with them in the first years of their life, a decisive influence is that, from this, it is desirable that the foundations for normal development be given by professional women who have undergone adapted and supervised training (Pianta et al., 2005; Britto et al., 2011). The quality of early childhood education and care is affected by the continuous participation of educators in training and professional development programs, as well as receiving professional guidance that provides reflective thinking and professional feedback.

In Israel and around the world, there is a significant early childhood workforce crisis. In Israel, this profession has a negative public image and low remuneration. In addition, there is a historical crisis of trust between parents and educators following severe incidents of violence by caregivers in unsupervised settings that reached the media and created a negative resonance, and reflected years of the state's neglect of the field of early childhood education and care. Considering this, most of the applicants for this job come to it because of the lack of prerequisites for training. In most cases, the educators who meet the children every day are newcomers without language, women from the Arab society, for whom this is their first entry into the world of work, or women who have not been able to integrate into the world of employment for a long time in other professions.

Until the inception of this study, the research FO of NTS had not been examined. Although there is research literature on professional conversion in a second career to early childhood education areas, the development of the NTS' perceptions of participating in academic training for the first time has not yet been examined. Conducting this study was an opportunity to learn more about this population, which constitutes the professional infrastructure for early childhood education and care, to adapt the training programs for them, and even create motivational factors for choosing a profession and continuous professional development throughout the years of work.

CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

I.1 Future Orientation

In an age when we address the fact that every person will have more than one career and it is important to develop skills and qualifications, as well as mobility between fields and occupations, the question arises whether it is relevant to prepare for our futures as our parents did (Gutiérrez-Braojos, 2015).

Today, with developments in the research field of individuals' mental well-being, there is a place for and meaning in developing thoughts about the future, and this has been found to contribute to emotional and physical health (Kahana et al., 2012).

I.1.1 Concept Areas

Research on FO has shown that motivation and a need to change, improve, and progress are necessary to reach goals and make behavioral and practical changes. This need is what drives people to act (Nuttin & Lens, 1985) and change their future. The ability to make plans and set and achieve goals and targets includes a motivational and meaningful component along the axis of people's life development. The ability to see and imagine the future fundamentally affects people's planning and actions to advance toward their goals (ibid).

I.1.2 Three Components of the Future Orientation Model

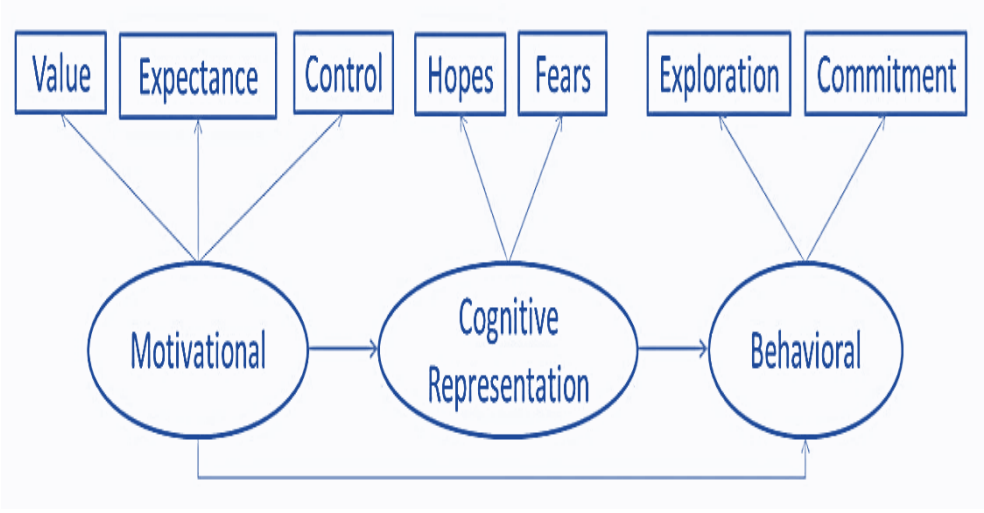

Figure 1: Future Orientation Model

Studies (Dekel, 2009; Mahajna, 2007; Seginer et al., 2008; Seginer et al., 2004; Shoyer, 2006) The study, which was carried out using structural equation modeling (SEM), showed the correlation between the three variables, assessment, expectation, and

intrinsic control, and the motivational component of FO, hence increasing the validity of the motivational part of the model.

I.1.3 Previous Research on FO and Higher Education

Authors who have examined the role of FO in learning processes have noted that a high level of FO has firm control over areas of interest. Students with a high FO level will be more involved and make more tremendous efforts in their academic work, and FO directly correlates to self-efficacy, beliefs, metacognitive strategies, an effort to perform academically, and self-efficacy (Phan, 2009).

I.2 Sense of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is the ability to harness motivation and find and organize personal and behavioral resources required to produce actions that successfully progress goals. It is a positive ability that develops during people's lives and comprises their psychological capital. Self-efficacy affects individuals' ability to engage even when there are challenges; in other words, people will take actions that, in their opinion, match their abilities as they perceive them to progress toward goals (Bandura, 1997; Luthans et al., 2004; Luthans et al., 2006).

Various findings in the field of adjustment of students with learning difficulties to academic studies have shown that some adjust and integrate successfully. Other studies testified that adjustment is complex and challenging. From these ambiguous findings, it is possible to conclude that the findings are inconsistent, and it is impossible to show an unequivocal correlation between learning disabilities and academic adjustment (Harris & Robertson, 2001; Heiman & Precel, 2003; Reiff et al., 2001; Zwart & Kallemeyn, 2001).

I.2.1 Kindergarten Student-Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy

Educational research in recent years has reflected recurring concerns about improving the quality of education and training processes. This concern is explained by the high dropout rate from the profession and difficulties recruiting student-teachers and educators from kindergarten upwards. Moreover, a literature review linking Bandura's (1997; 2015) social learning theory revealed that examining kindergarten children's educators' perceptions and beliefs concerning self-efficacy in their training years influenced both their achievements in the training process and the students educated by them in their first years of work (Guo et al., 2011; Mehmet, 2017).

I.2.2 Implications of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Students' Sense of Self-Efficacy

Researchers in Israel and other countries who have explored the effect of the pandemic on students' sense of self-efficacy and their formulation of the future of teaching during the Coronavirus noted reports of decreased student sense, a lost sense of control, and self-efficacy to maintain continuity of studies and progress as expected. Students reported that the many changes to which they had to react daily led to uncertainty and loss of control and harmed their ability to plan tasks and get organized. All these increased their sense of concern and even self-efficacy.

I.3 Sense of Coherence

Over their lifetimes, people accumulate experiences and coping skills that contribute to developing a sense of coherence (SOC). This sense's strength allows people to use resources efficiently in stressful circumstances. In other words, when people cope with crises while experiencing a lack of success or failure, the strength of their SOC will reflect learning abilities consolidated throughout their lives and will characterize how they will react (Urakawa & Yokoyama, 2009).

I.3.1 Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations

Studies exploring the effect of SOC on learning and academic achievements have shown diverse influences and conclusions. Studies examining the SOC level of students with learning disabilities showed that students report low SOC levels, allowing them to cope with the challenges of academic studies (Davidson et al., 2012; Ben-Naim et al., 2017). According to Bracha and Hoffenbartal (2011), SOCITS is a concept developed in an attempt to understand student-teachers' abilities to cope, and at their foundation is a SOC as defined by Antonovsky (1998) and described as resources available to individuals in challenging situations, general life changes, and academic studies in particular. Academic training processes are perceived as continuous and challenging processes that accompany individuals with feelings of stress and tension. (Bracha & Hoffenbartel, 2011) explored SOCITS and validated its existence through a questionnaire developed in their research. SOCITS, like SOC, are intrinsic coping resources. SOCITS has three components: The cognitive component of *Comprehensibility* refers to the degree to which a person believes that teaching situations are predictable and meaningful from a cognitive standpoint. The behavior component of *Manageability* refers to the degree to which student teachers believe that the available resources are adequate for meeting the demands made in teaching

situations by intrinsic and extrinsic stimuli. The motivational-emotional components of *Meaningfulness* refer to the intensity of student teachers' perception that their work is emotionally fulfilling. This research will strengthen the concept of SOCITS among student-teachers through qualitative approaches and tools.

The following is a concept map of this research.

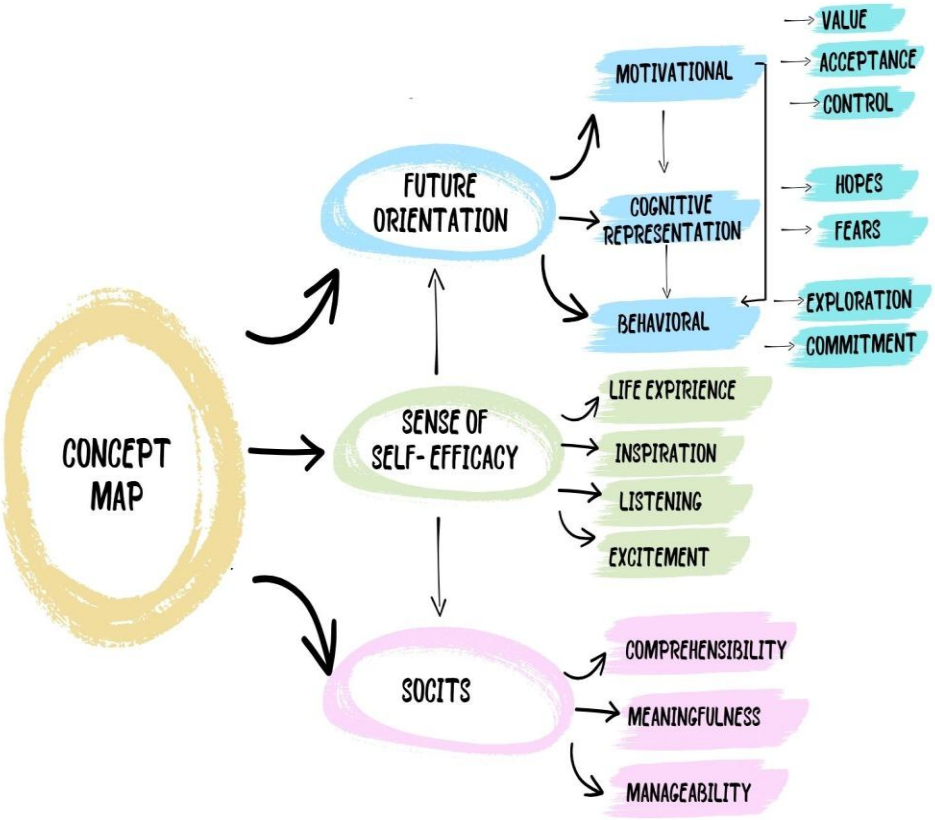

Figure 2: Concept Map

I.4 Second Career

The term 'second career' refers to a significant change of profession or occupation (Helppie-McFall & Sonnega, 2017). The term is used in the labor market to describe a changed professional who is no longer satisfied with his/her job, resigns, and chooses to go in a completely different direction, and perhaps a better-suited profession and start a new professional chapter.

A vital component of this idea is academic retraining. Academics who initially decided on a career path based on factors such as their FO, the demands of the labor market, or external influences are now in a position where they are looking for a different academic discipline that aligns with a revised future vision, market demands, or a

personal choice to pursue a different career (Chambers, 2002; Haggard et al., 2006; Novak & Knowles, 1992; Powers, 2002).

In this study, the students have no academic training or training at all. They choose a second career and social mobility.

I.6 Non-Traditional Students (NTS)

The last decades have shown an increase in the number of older students around the world, including Israel, and consequently, academic interest has developed around them (Chambers, 2002; Lazovsky et al., 2007; Novak & Knowles, 1992; Oplatka, 2008; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014). The research literature defines an 'adult student's age as 30. This definition relies on the assumption that at age 30, older students have already established families, their work-life balance is stable, and their life course is such that they can undertake the obligations of academic education (Oplatka, 2008).

I.6.1 Previous Studies Choosing Academic Training and Teaching as a Second Career in Early Childhood Education

The last decades have shown an increase in the number of older students worldwide, including Israel, and consequently, academic interest has developed around them. (Chambers, 2002; Lazovsky et al., 2007; Novak & Knowles, 1992; Oplatka, 2008; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014). The research literature defines adult students as aged 30. This definition relies on the assumption that at this age, older students have already established families, their work-life balance is stable, and their life course is such that they can undertake the obligations of academic education (Oplatka, 2008).

Studies on choosing kindergarten education as a second career are scarce. One such study, conducted in Israel, examined 34 female students who chose kindergarten education as a second career. The findings regarding reasons for choosing kindergarten education were congruent with the motives enumerated above.

The students mentioned that this field was due to their interest in early childhood and their experience since they had raised children. They described an internal need for self-fulfillment and self-realization, with a sense of profession and belief in their ability to influence children and contribute to their education. They also talked about the fact that the choice to study was made after a process of self-reflection and future planning (Weizmann & Karnieli, 2016).

I.7 On-the-Job Training

On-the-Job Training (OJT) - A common concept in the current professional employment world (Jacobs, 2003; van der Klink & Streumer, 2002), predominantly in the fields of engineering, law, and healthcare. This concept applies to inexperienced graduates who arrive at their places of work and undergo a training process specific to their places of work while working at their jobs. The academic training program for kindergarten teacher-assistants or workers in the kindergarten education discipline combines the concepts of Second Career Kindergarten Teacher and OJT. It is a practical program that combines studies with working in students' current workplaces, based on acquired professional experience. In 2021, the State of Israel underwent a reform in early ECEC, and in a historic process, it was determined that daycare and education from birth to three would be transferred to the Ministry of Education, which would be responsible for the entire educational continuum from birth to 18.

As part of this historic process, it was decided to supervise daycares for seven children and up, and even to regulate training processes. Financial grants were given to female learners to promote and encourage women to undertake state-subsidized training. ECEC systems were mandated with training hours, the process of regulating supervision began, and the improvement of the quality of education care was launched (Rabinowitz, 2023).

I.8 Characteristics of Early Childhood Teachers in Israel

Mostly from vulnerable populations, early childhood teachers find their training and professional development difficult to persevere over time with work because of exhaustion, lack of professional knowledge, and ability to cope with work challenges over time (contact with parents, teamwork, hard physical work, professional identity, negative image of the profession, and more). Training programs are not adapted to objective conditions (language, academic abilities, absence of accompaniment and instruction, personal mentoring, and application in the field).

CHAPTER II:
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

II.1 Research Paradigm and Approach

The chosen research paradigm in this study was mixed methods. In this mixed-methods research, the examined research participants were women from different backgrounds ethnically, who held different roles in the ECEC framework, assistants and caregivers, women who had not been involved in kindergarten management leading frameworks and, on the whole, were on the margins of management routines, mostly coming from low socio-economic levels and at-risk populations (Bryman, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Tzabar Ben Yehoshua, 1995).

Quantitative Paradigm

The quantitative method examines various theories to reach a generalization. In other words, quantitative research enables looking at the association between research data and theory in studying social phenomena (Queirós et al., 2017; Bryman, 2012). This approach was used in the present study to examine the development of self-efficacy, SOCITS, and FO among early childhood teaching professionals.

Qualitative Paradigm

The qualitative paradigm is an inclusive term describing theoretical and interpretive research strategies that allow researchers to enrich the understanding of social phenomena or human behavior. (Queirós et al., 2017; Creswell, 2014; Richardson A. J., 2012; Tzabar Ben Yehoshua, 1995). This research focused on academia-trained kindergarten teacher assistants' hopes and fears regarding their future jobs and careers by conducting semi-structured interviews at the beginning, during, and at the end of each academic year in the program (and after the training program while integrating into the field) to inject a degree of terminology consistency (Bryman, 2012).

The appeal of using semi-structured interviews is their flexibility and the fact that they are an alternative to collecting qualitative data. Although interviews are time-consuming, they are preferred as a source of personal perspectives (Bryman, 2012).

II.2 Research Aims, Questions, and Hypotheses

Main Research Aim

The main aim of this study is to examine the contribution of the original ECE training program to the self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future orientation of the participating students (kindergarten teachers).

The research aims and questions of the study are derived from this primary aim.

Research Questions

1. What are students' levels of self-efficacy, SOCITS, future work, and career and future orientation - hopes and fears - at three points: at the beginning, during, and at the end of each academic year?
2.
   a) How do students' background variables (year of study, age, years of education, job scope during the study year, seniority as kindergarten assistants, and job description) affect self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career?
   b) How do students' background variables (year of study, age, years of education, job scope during the study year, seniority as kindergarten assistants, and job description) affect future orientation - hopes and fears?
3. What are the correlations between self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career?
4. How do FO, hopes, and fears develop over 3 points: In the beginning, during, and the end of the academic year?

Research Hypotheses

1. Self-efficacy, SOCITS, future work, and career levels will gradually increase over time.
2. NTS' years of study, age, seniority in kindergarten, and job scope variables significantly affect self-efficacy, SOCIT, and future work and career.
3. NTS' years of study, age, seniority in kindergarten, and job scope variables significantly affect future hopes and fears.
4. A positive correlation between NTS' Sense of self-efficacy and SOCITS will be found.
5. A positive correlation between future work and career will be found between the motivation component and the sense of self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career.
6. Hopes were expected to grow, while fears would decrease.

II.3 Research Participants

The research participants were kindergarten teacher assistants who participated in the original ECE training program. ECE research is based on the need for significant figures who provide suitable responses to the developmental needs of children from

infancy to the age of six. Appropriate responses require professional training, and ECEC needs to be recognized as a profession that requires appropriate academic training.

This study's participants included 40 NTS in a kindergarten certification training program. The program is open to early childhood educators working in the ECEC system for five (or more) years of continuous experience in early childhood work without a previous education and teaching certificate, especially in early childhood. Of 47 NTS currently in all stages of the program, 40 (N=40) completed research questionnaires, constituting 85% of the targeted population. Nine students in their first year and three NTS in their second year participated in this research. Those were connected, and their definition in this research is Beginners. Eight students and five students participated in the third and fourth years. Fifteen students who graduated from the program were part of this research as well. The participants from years 3, 4, and 5 were connected to what they defined as *seniority*.

38 participants worked in the Jewish secular (state) educational framework and two in the Arab (state) framework. 39 participants were women and one man. About 36 participants were Jewish women, and four were Arab women. Nine respondents had neither children nor family; the remainder were mothers and managed households (78%). Research participants authentically represented the employment situation in the ECE system in Israel. A comparative study conducted by the Teaching International Learning Survey (TALIS, 2018) presented the following findings: Most of those occupied in ECE professions and care in Israel were predominantly women. Fifty percent of women in kindergarten teacher assistant positions were between 30 and 49.

The finding was similar globally: 53% of women in kindergarten teacher assistant positions were between 39 and 50. Concerning the current study, it appears half of the women employed in ECEC are untrained but strive to professionalize and improve the quality of education.

Over 60 percent of the students were older than 30. The NTS' background education was 12 years or less [Beginners] (50 percent), whereas the other half reported up to 16 years of education [Seniorities] (42.5 percent) and more (7.5 percent). The current job status was distributed between full-time jobs (50 percent) and part-time jobs (45 percent), while only 5 percent were unemployed when filling out the questionnaires. Many students had experience in kindergarten assistance of seven or more years (80 percent), and only 20 percent had less than seven years of experience.

The prior job distribution was divided between two major categories: kindergarten assistance (37.5 percent) and kindergarten teaching in practice (47.5 percent), while other categories were minor (15 percent). Finally, these students were at various points in their studies, e.g., first (22.5 percent) to fifth (37.5 percent) year, see the distribution of student participants per year of study.

II.4 Research Tools

Two questionnaires were used in this research: a closed questionnaire mainly based on statements, measured on a Likert scale, filled out by the participants, and semi-structured questionnaires with two open questions, one for their perceptions of FO hopes and one for their FO fears and hopes.

Sense of Self-Efficacy Questionnaire

This study employed a sense of self-efficacy questionnaire (Chen & Gully, 1997), developed to examine individuals' subjective perceptions about their abilities to achieve goals and cope with challenges. The questionnaire consisted of 14 statements - some referred to coping with difficulties and individuals' subjective perceptions of their ability to do so successfully. The questions' reliability score was tested using three measurements and scored above 0.90 (Chen et al., 2001). Reliability as internal consistency in various studies was found to be $\alpha = 0.95$, and in this study, reliability was $\alpha = 0.88$.

SOCITS Questionnaire

The modified questionnaire developed and piloted by Bracha and Hoffenbartal (2011) was validated and has proven to be reliable. The entire questionnaire's reliability was measured at $\alpha = 0.77$ and reported as satisfactory (Bracha & Hoffenbartel, 2011). In this study, the reliability of the entire questionnaire is $\alpha = 0.75$. The questionnaire aimed to measure SOCITS using its components: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. This questionnaire comprises 25 items on a 6-point Likert scale, from 1 (not at all) to 6 (to a large extent).

Future Work and Career Questionnaire

This questionnaire is a part of the prospective life course questionnaire (Seginer & Lilach, 2004; Seginer, 2009). It consists of three parts addressing three life areas: future work and career, marriage, and family (not included in the research questionnaire), as

well as FO - hopes and fears. This questionnaire assesses two variables of the FO concept - motivational and behavioral. The questionnaire contained two parts - quantitative and qualitative. The structured section comprised two questions, one about hopes with 10 statements and one about fears with 10 statements on a 5-point Likert scale. Each statement referred to diverse representations that people have concerning hopes and fears, as well as the frequency of their appearance. Reference was between 1 (never) and 5 (every day).

Future Hopes and Fears Semi-Structured Questionnaire

Future Hopes and Fears was tested using a Semi-Structured Questionnaire based on (Seginer, 1988a). A second qualitative tool employed was based on a hopes and fears questionnaire. (Seginer, 1988a) This semi-structured questionnaire addresses two questions about people's thoughts about their future, hopes, and fears. The questionnaire examines representations of the future and their depiction of individuals' future lives. It is a methodology to handle open questions, that is, questions leaving an open space for respondents to fill in qualitative responses. The study's questionnaire included two open questions based on Seginer's hopes and fears scales (1988a).

II.5 Research Design

This research was divided into a bidimensional matrix. The first dimension was methodical, divided into qualitative and quantitative research methods. The second dimension was the schedule, which consisted of three phases during the training program.

Table 1: Research Stages and Tools

Stage	Aim	Research Method and Tools	Participants	Data Analysis
1	Developing and validating research questionnaires	Questionnaires	A group of four to six experts	Rank the quality of questions according to three different sliding scales: relevance, clarity, and fit to potential respondents. Test instrument variables, answer linkage to topic on a high-to-low scale.
2	To quantitatively assess self-efficacy, SOCITS, future work, career, future orientation, hopes, and fears.	Method - Survey Tools: Self-efficacy questionnaire SOCIT questionnaire Future work and career questionnaire My Future Hopes and Fears questionnaire	40 students in different years of study	Distribute the questionnaire three times during the academic year, resulting in a longitudinal data set. This data set was used in the final analysis with two dimensions: between aspect associations and within aspect developments over time.
3	Content analysis of the qualitative answers of future hopes and fears	Semi-structured future orientation hopes and fear questionnaire	All participants	Quantitative assessment of the qualitative answers of future hopes and fears. Perform categorical analysis and code to rank future hopes and fears into a quantitative table of marks.
4	Modelling and analysis of future hopes and fears	Multidimensional scaling (MDS); generalized estimating equations (GEE); individual growth curve model (IGCM)	All participants	A semi-parametric method is used to map future hopes and fears' binary values into a multi-dimensional framework. Parametric assessment of future hopes and fears time affected; Calculated random slope: a sensitive analysis of the individual's development.

Table 2: Research variables, tools, data analysis according to research questions and aims.

Research aim	Research Questions	Research Variables	Research Tools	Data Analysis
To examine formulation and consolidation of students' (kindergarten teacher assistants) self-efficacy, SOCITS, future work, and career and FO hopes and fears, in three points of time: At the start of the academic year of study During the academic year of study At the end of the academic year of study	1. What are students' development of self-efficacy, SOCITS, future work and career and FO hopes and fears, in three points of time along study years? 2a. How do students' background variables (year of study, age, years of education, job scope during the study year, seniority as kindergarten assistants, and job description) affect self-efficacy, SOCITS, future work, and career? 2b. How do students' backgrounds (see 2a) variables affect FO hopes and fears? 3. What are the correlations between self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career?	Dependent variables: Self-efficacy, SOCITS, future work and career and FO hopes and fears. Independent Variables: Year of Study, Age, Years of Education, Job scope during the study year, Seniority as kindergarten assistant, Job description, three points of time (at the start, during, and at the end of the academic year of study)	Background Questionnaire (year of study, age, years of education, job scope during the study year, seniority as kindergarten assistant, job description) Self-efficacy Questionnaire (Chen & Gully, 1997). SOCITS questionnaire (Bracha & Hoffenbartel, How Students Feel – Developing a Sense of Coherence in Teaching Questionnaire, 2011). Future work and career questionnaire (Seginer, 1988a)	T-Test (p), represents a two-independent sample by determining differences if the means of two sets of data are significantly different from each otherχ^2, is used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between expected and observed frequencies in one or more categories (Greenwood & Nikulin, 1996). Spearman's categorical correlation (*ρ)* assesses how well the relationship between two variables can be described. (Myers & Sirois, 2004)
	4. How do FO hopes and fears develop over 3 points of time: In the beginning, during and in the end of the academic year?	Dependent variables: FO hopes and fears. Independent Variables: Year of study, age, years of education, job scope during the study year, seniority as kindergarten assistants, job description	1. FO Hopes and Fears Questionnaire (Seginer, 1988a)	IGCM, Individual Growth Curve Model (Hoffman, 2015) χ^2, used to determine a statistically significant differences between expected and observed frequencies in one or more categories (Greenwood & Nikulin, 1996). MDS, Multidimensional Scaling (Giguere, 2006; Guttman, 1968) is used when there are limited samples and a need to sort samples into features' categories.

Table3 describes the research methods used to analyze data

Table 3: Data analysis methods

T-Test	T-Test represents an independent sample by determining differences between levels of years of studies (categories 1,2 versus categories 3,4,5), age group (25-30 versus 31-51), education (training program non-graduated versus training program graduated), job scope (full-time versus part-time position), seniority (4-8 years versus 9-20 years) and pre-study position (kindergarten teachers versus kindergarten teachers' assistants)
χ^2	$\chi 2$ measures varied from one another. Further ranking was based on pairwise comparison, e.g., Time 1 versus Time 2, Time 1 versus Time 3, and Time 2 versus Time 3. Thus, this method provides an answer to change over time at the level of research indicators
GEE	By using the GEE procedure, measurements by time points are ranked from the lowest mean to the highest, which tells whether a response to the intervention was determined according to predicted rankings (Hardin & Hilbe, 2013). Using both $\chi 2$ and GEE methods, the response time based on the GEE procedure results
IGCM	Individuals' random intercepts and slopes, namely, individuals' growth curve model, or more specifically, for each questionnaire respondent, this tool produces the starting point parameter, intercept, and development rate, the slope of the development curve (IGCM (Hoffman, 2015)
MDS	Multidimensional Scaling (Giguere, 2006; Guttman, 1968) It is used when there are limited samples and a need to sort samples into feature categories. A proximity matrix is used. This tool detects meaningful underlying dimensions to explain observed similarities or dissimilarities (distances) between investigated objects (Multidimensional Scaling), yet within limited information about objects or subjects in question (Mead, 1992). Specifically, in this case, respondents' binary responses are the only information handled. The interpretation of dimensions usually represents the final analysis step, where the actual orientations of axes from MDS analysis are arbitrary and can be rotated in any direction. The advantage of MDS procedures is that a researcher may analyze any distance or similarity matrix. In general, MDS methods allow a researcher to ask relatively unobtrusive questions for which answers are relational rather than absolute. To identify the development model in this study, it was necessary to rank the features of hopes and fears (which respondents answered in the qualitative section). The tools cross-checked fears and hopes and showed how it is possible to rank them on two axes by coding and quantifying qualitative data into a quantitative table of marks. The tools allow for mapping scores, in this case, in a two-axis sample: the hopes axis and the fears axis. The tool's graphic display allows various mathematical analyses, from which it is possible to learn about and identify students' diverse perceptions of fears and hopes. This information is precious in this study.

II.6 Validity, Reliability, Triangulation, Generalization

An internal consistency index for scale reliability, Cronbach's alpha, is presented in Table 4 for each indicator and shown in the next column. Internal consistency is a correlation-based index that represents the level of common variance across items in the indicator and supports the construction of an index (Bliese, 2000). Higher reliability index values ($\alpha > .70$) indicate a more robust common context across items.

Table 4: Research indicators statistics- Cronbach's α indices

Index	Item	α	Means	SD	% Agree or Highly Agree
Sca1	Future Work & Career Self-Efficacy	.88	4.15	0.50	85.4
Sca2	Future Work & Career SOCITS	.75	3.93	0.56	80.8
Sca3_1	Future Work & Career Commitment	.85	3.86	0.80	67.5
Sca3_2	Future Work & Career Search (Exploration)	.85	2.55	0.90	16.3
Sca3_3	Future Work & Career Cognitive		3.92	0.80	80.0
Sca3_4	Future Work & Career Expectations		2.45	1.24	22.5
Sca3_5	Future Work & Career Motivation		4.43	0.59	95.0
Sca5	FO - Hopes	.81	3.79	0.58	65.38
Sca6	FO - Fears	.87	3.17	0.75	43.13

Table 4 presents research indicators as constructed according to the questionnaire instruments. This table contains the label of each indicator and the label of the items that comprise each indicator. An indicator is the mean across the items (Bliese, 2000).

A higher value ($\alpha>.70$) of the reliability index indicates a stronger common context across the items. Table 5 shows that all reliability index values exceeded the common threshold for acceptance. Except for the SOCITS indicator (alpha=.75), other indicators were above .80, e.g., the self-efficacy indicator (alpha=.88) or the FO–fears indicator (alpha=.87). Although, as mentioned above, preliminary exploratory or confirmatory analyses were not performed due to the small sample size, the reliability results provided support for the chosen composition of the research indicators.

II.7 Researcher's Role

This study sought to explore changes in participants' views during the training program to provide a clearer understanding of the necessity for the program and its establishment as a leading program for working women seeking opportunities to change their reality and that of Israeli children. The researcher's role is to highlight this population and present the findings and conclusions, which lead to better training program developments and improvements.

II.8 Ethical Considerations

Code of Ethics in Academic Training and Research

In this research, ethical considerations addressed the moral and ethical aspects. The research population consisted of kindergarten teacher assistants without academic training who had come to study on a professional course. Before participating in the research, they were informed of the research and its aims and were assured that their data would be used for research purposes only. It was made clear to students that questionnaires were anonymous and their details confidential and would be collected by a research assistant who had no previous acquaintance with them. To meet ethical rules and avoid biasing participants, the researcher did not serve as a pedagogical instructor in the program during the year the research was conducted and the following year. Before conducting this study, an application was made to the Research Authority at Oranim College, and the research plan was presented for approval to the college ethics committee. The committee invited the researcher to discuss the question of ethics because she was the pedagogical instructor of students participating in the research. The discussion clarified to the head of the ECE department and representative of the ethics committee that the researcher would not serve as an instructor while the research was conducted, so as not to affect research results or student desirability. The committee requested a clarification document about research questions. Once submitted, the ethics committee approved it, and the study commenced. Questionnaires were distributed by a research assistant who did not know the program's students.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND RESULTS

III.1 Findings Relating to Research Question 1: What are the NTS' levels of self-efficacy, SOCITS, future work, and career, in three points of time at the start, during, and end of the academic year of study?

The study assessed self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work commitments during the academic year. Self-efficacy increased slightly from Time 1 to Time 2 but decreased at Time 3 due to the pandemic. SOCITS peaked at Time 2 and was lowest at Time 1. Future work indicators declined from Time 1 to Time 3. Overall commitments rose significantly from the beginning to the middle of the year, with no significant changes from the middle to the end.

The study found that the sense of self-efficacy among non-traditional students (NTS) increased initially but decreased by the end of the academic year due to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. Factors contributing to this decrease included uncertainty and loss of control, lack of continuity in training and feedback, and the challenge of balancing family, personal, and work demands. The pandemic's impact on academic capabilities and mental resilience also played a significant role. In addition, the absence of group and individual pedagogical training sessions negatively affected the sense of self-efficacy.

Research showed that NTS' sense of coherence (SOCITS) and self-efficacy fluctuated during the academic year, contrary to previous findings. The pandemic impacted on their ability to develop stable SOCITS, which is crucial for their well-being and professional capabilities.

The findings indicated that NTS' perceptions of their professional futures declined during their training program, particularly during the academic year, due to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. This caused uncertainties about their work and careers, affecting their resilience and well-being. The importance of early childhood educators' well-being is emphasized, as it impacts their ability to provide quality education and care and maintain their dedication and professional development.

III.2a Findings Relating to Research Question. 2a: How do the effect of students' background variables (year of study, age, years of education, job scope during the study year, seniority as kindergarten assistants, job description) on self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career

The study found that the background variables of NTS, such as years of study, age, and job scope, significantly impacted their self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career outlooks. Longer study years were linked to higher commitment but lower expectations. Older students had fewer fears, and full-time students had higher SOCITS and future career perceptions than part-time students. The original hypothesis was partially confirmed.

III.2b Findings Relating to Research Question No. 2b: How do students' background variables (year of study, age, years of education, job scope during the study year, seniority as kindergarten assistants, and job description) affect self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career?

The hypothesis was that NTS' years of study, age, seniority in kindergarten, and job scope variables significantly affect future hopes and fears. The test of different distribution of background categories and the binary assessed hopes and fears did not result in any significant row-column dependency, as shown in Table 8, for $\chi 2$ test results, except when age groups were correlated by hope for professional success ($\chi(1)2=4.42$, $p<.05$) and hope for academic education ($\chi(1)2=4.22$, $p<.05$). This answers research question No. 2(b) regarding the significant effects between Future Hopes and Fears and background factors. The hypothesis was partially confirmed. Only age groups were cross-correlated by hope for professional success and academic education.

III.3 Findings Relating to Research Question 3: What are the correlations between self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career?

The first hypothesis predicted a positive correlation between NTS's sense of self-efficacy and SOCITS.

The second hypothesis predicted a positive correlation between motivation, Sense of self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career.To complement this comparison, correlations between research indicators are presented in Table 9.

Table 5: Correlations between research indicators

		Self-Efficacy	SOCIT	Future Work & Career: Commitment	Future work & Career: Search	Future Work & Career: Cognitive	Future Work & Career:
Sca1	Self-Efficacy	-					
Sca2	SOCIT	.62***	-				
Sca3_1	Future Work & Career: commitment	.16	.14	-			
Sca3_2	Future Work & Career: search	.06	.11	-.27~	-		
Sca3_3	Future Work & Career: Cognitive	.14	.28~	-.01	.27~	-	
SCa3_4	Future Work & Career: Expectation	-.07	-.18	-.55***	.32*	.19	-
Sca3_5	Future Work & Career: Motivation	.49**	.43**	.45**	.01	.29~	-.44**

*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ~p<.10

Table 5 shows that motivation (as a component of future work and career) was highly positive correlated with self-efficacy, SOCITS, and commitment (r=0.49, p<.001; r=.43, p<.01; r=.45, p<.02; respectively), but in contrast, motivation was negatively correlated with expectation (r=-.44, p<.01).

Expectation (as a component of future work and career) was negatively correlated with search (r=-.55, p<.01) and positively with the cognitive component of future work and career (r=.32, p<-.05). It also shows that the correlation between self-efficacy and SOCITS was highly positive (r=0.62, p<.001); that is, higher SOCITS values were correlated with higher self-efficacy and vice versa. This answers research question No. 3 regarding the correlations between self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and

career. **The first hypothesis was confirmed.** Higher SOCITS values were correlated with higher self-efficacy and the vice versa. **The second hypothesis was mainly confirmed.** The future work and career Motivation component was significantly positively correlated with self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career commitments. The future work and career motivation component was negatively correlated with the future work and career expectance component.

III.4 Findings Relating to Research Question 4: How do future orientation hopes and fears develop over 3 points of time: in the beginning, during and in the end of academic year?

The hypothesis was that Hopes were expected to grow over time while Fears would decrease. Two stages were performed to analyze FO Hopes and Fears:

1. Qualitative content analysis of the students' answers to the open questions regarding their Future Hopes and Fears, to define themes and categories.
2. Quantify the category distribution and answer the research question

III.4.1 Content Analysis Findings Relating to Future Hopes

Professional Success - Most interviewees referred to the expectations of their professional development following the training program; recognizing their abilities and the successes they accumulated in the process allowed them to imagine an improved professional future.

Some dared to dream and anticipate careers in parallel fields that require continued training and learning for advanced degrees, as stated by NTS No. 8: "*I hope to open a clinic in the next few years*."

Personal Success (Family, Home) - Most interviewees addressed the balance between home and work, understanding that their role as kindergarten managers would be more demanding and require more outstanding efforts. As described by NTS No. 44, "*To continue in the field of education, to influence and instill my educational approach. To maintain my family unit and my daughters and partner."*

Academic Education - In the academic field, most interviewees referred to their expectations to complete their training and continue studying for a master's degree. Some addressed the age factor and applied their expectations by a certain age. NTS No. 12 described it as follows: "...*hope by the age 35 to study for a master's degree*."

Income - income expectations – addressing the aspect of making a living is interesting. Interviewees referred to economic improvement as a population accustomed to unrewarding salaries, with the education sector defined as underpaid. They expressed an expectation for financial stability that would allow them to support their families and be available to their children. This was stated by NTS No. 6: "*...hope in the future to have the financial ability to invest my time in raising my children, and then to become a kindergarten manager."*

III.4.2 Findings Relating to Future Fears

Categories emerging from the content analysis regarding NTS' future fears are presented below. Content analysis regarding fears for the future yielded the following four categories:

Financial Fears: it is important to remember that most NTS come from a fairly low economic background, and some are occupied with financial survival. Therefore, these fears significantly affect their progress in training and the transition from one social ladder to another.

During training, NTS's fears were also related to maintaining income from work. Many feared that money spent on studies would endanger their families' financial situation and prevent them from completing the training, as described by NTS No.4: "*Financial debts because of the studies*." NTS No.50 described it as follows: "*My only concern is that due to difficulty in paying for my studies, my plans will be delayed."*

Job Fulfillment: In this category, interviewees addressed professional success and failure, having influence. NTS expressed concerns about the implications of completing their training and applying new knowledge to their new role definition.

After many years of working as non-leading carers, they expressed concern that their plan to become leaders and hold a role would not contribute to their sense of job satisfaction. NTS No. 16 wondered, *"Will I succeed in doing what I have to do as a kindergarten teacher?"*

Personal Fears: NTS referred to their health situation as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, and also to achieving a work-life balance. Some of them identified the demanding nature of being educational leaders and the likelihood that they would have to pay personal prices, such as decisions to delay starting a family or expanding it owing to a realization of their expectations in the professional development process. As

described by NTS No. 6: *"I'm afraid that I don't have an option to balance between having a family and my internship, so I'll have to wait.*" NTS No.21 said, *"My biggest fear is my and my family's health."*

Not Getting a Higher Degree: Entering the academic world, accumulating successes throughout training, and improving the sense of academic self-efficacy and SOC allows one to dare to dream and aim high. However, there are also concerns since some did not do so at a young age. NTS talked about finally reaching a point where they are advancing themselves, investing so many personal and family resources in their professional development process, and therefore fear that the continuation of the process, pursuing a higher degree, will not be possible for them, either because of age or ability.

One can be impressed by their words: NTS No.10 described it as follows: "... *the age 40 bothers* me ; I'm afraid for my job, where will I be in 10 years and will I be able to study for the second degree."

III.4.3 Findings Regarding the Quantitative Analysis of Future Hopes and Fears

A quantitative analysis enriched the qualitative content of interviews about NTS' hopes and fears. Figure 3 shows fears and hopes ranked by survey responses over three waves. The Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) and Individual Growth Curve Model (IGCM) tools assessed hopes to grow and fears to decrease over time. Figures illustrate data collection and individual development across three waves.

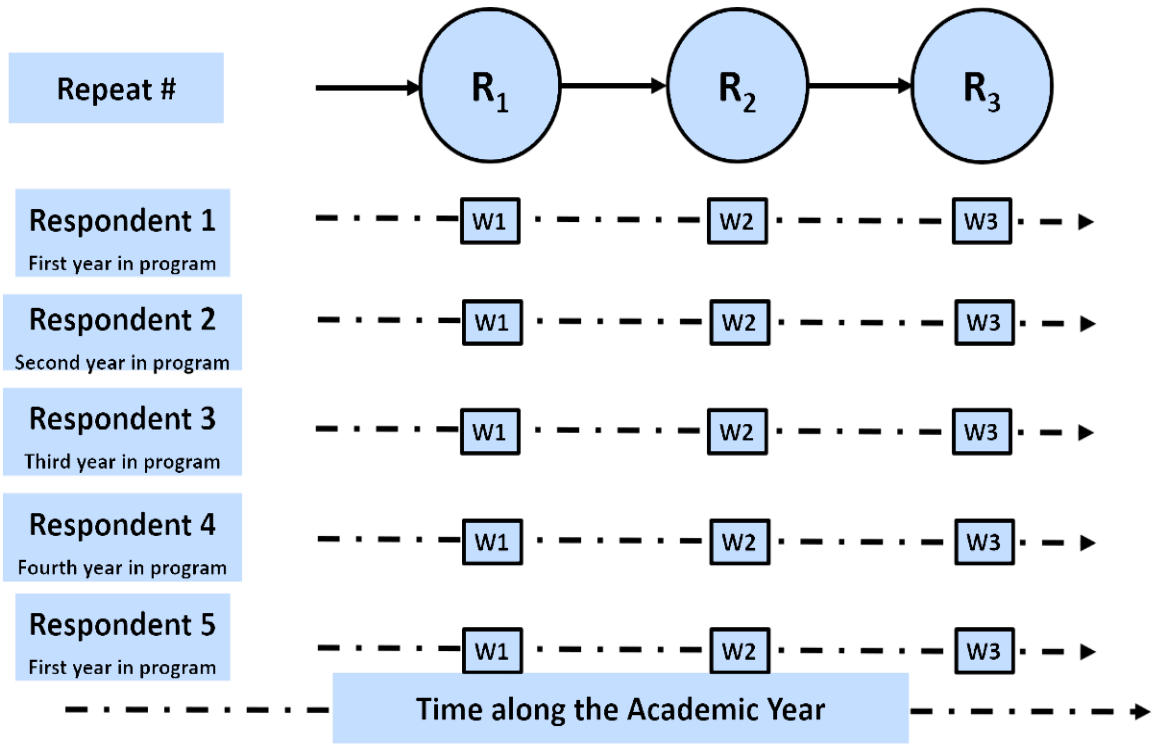

Figure 3: Illustration of data collection during the academic year in three waves

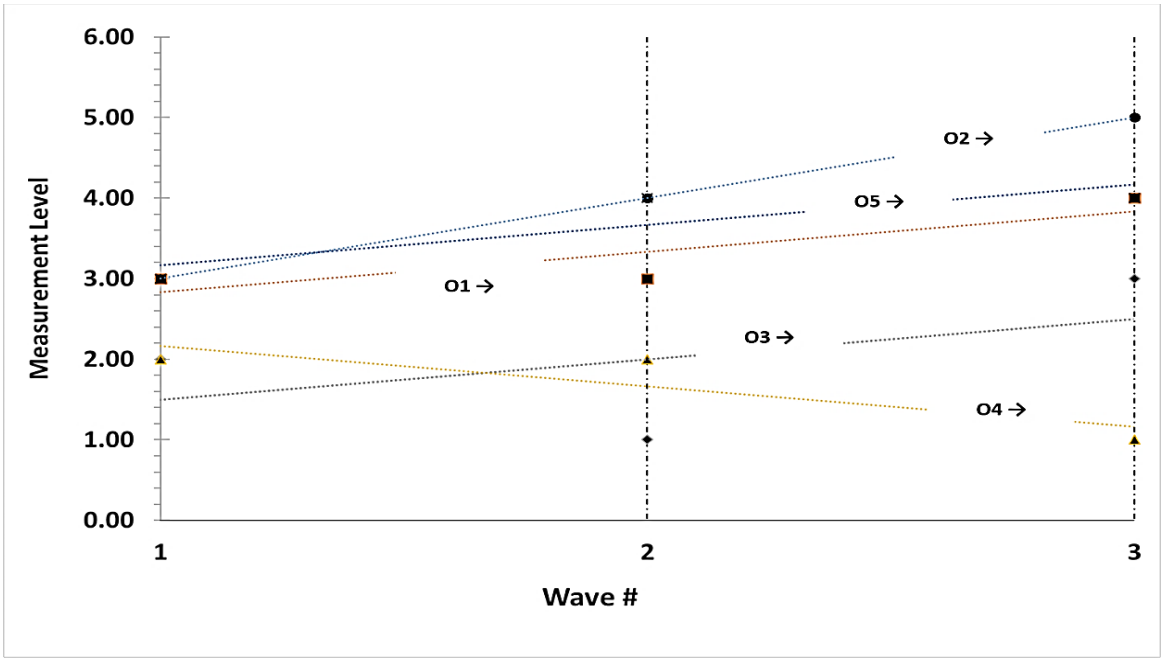

Figure 4: Illustration of the individual growth curve model

Table 6 shows the results from the GEE analyses, evaluating hopes and fears over three survey waves. The Wald test was used to assess significant time differences. Significant results led to pairwise comparisons to determine changes over time in hopes and fears.

Table 6: Predicted marginal means for research measurements of hopes and fears by response time based on the GEE procedure results.

	Indicator	Wald	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
T1	Hopes – Professional success	2.22	.71 (.07) N=39	.78 (.07) N=33	.59 (.10) N=25
T2	Hopes – Personal Success	1.96	.45 (.08) N=39	.59 (.09) N=33	.41 (.10) N=25
T3	Hopes – Academic Education	1.66	.23 (.07) N=39	.37 (.08) N=33	.24 (.09) N=25
T4	Hopes – Income	6.27*	.08[a] (.08) N=39	.28[b] (.08) N=33	.27[b] (.09) N=25
Fear1	Fear – Financial fear	0.29	.26 (.07) N=39	.22 (.07) N=36	.21 (.07) N=36
Fear2	Fear – job fulfillment/ professional success	6.51*	.53[b] (.08) N=39	.38[ab] (.08) N=36	.28[a] (.07) N=36
Fear3	Fear – personal fears /health / balancing family and work	2.57	.34 (.08) N=39	.28 (.07) N=36	.17 (.06) N=36
Fear4	Fear – Not getting a high education	0.60	.07 (.04) N=39	.10 (.05) N=36	.06 (.04) N=36

Latin letters for marginal mean ranking, "a" for the lowest; Standard errors in parentheses. Table 6 shows that the hope for financial improvement (Hopes – Income) was considered less important in the first time point, while it became an issue in time 2 and time 3 – probability increased from eight percent at time 1 to 28 and 27 percent in time 2 and time 3, respectively, where the last two waves did not differ from one another.

The probability of being unable to achieve professional success (Fear - job fulfillment/professional success) was highest in the beginning, time 1, but then decreased. In other words, over half the interviewees had fears of not meeting the professional requirements, but these rates reduced dramatically in time 2 (predicted 38 percent) and especially in time 3 (predicted 28 percent). No time difference was assessed in all other indicators of hopes and fears.

However, it is important to note that professional success was the greatest expected hope for study outcome, with a range of predicted probabilities between 59 percent and 78 percent, and the complementary fear of not achieving this success was the highest across the four different fears, between 53 percent and 28 percent.

Random Slope

Table 7 analyzes time differences and individual development, including random slopes. It also adds individual characteristics to test their association with the slope. This slope indicates the program's development pace, resilience levels, and the ability to integrate as kindergarten teachers. A positive slope reflects improvement in self-efficacy.

Table 7: Individual's growth curve model results, random slopes

	Research Indicator	Means Slope	Variance Slope	Age	Seniority	Education	Position	Status
	Hopes and Fears							
T1	Hopes – Professional success	-.23 (.29)	0.00 (0.00)	.01 (.02)	-.02 (.03)	-.03 (.05)	.19 (.21)	-.03 (.05)
T2	Hopes – Professional success	.004 (.25)	0.00 (0.00)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.03)	-.06 (.04)	.07 (.17)	-.04 (.05)
T3	Hopes – Academic Education	.06 (.25)	0.00 (0.00)	.03 (.02)	-.04 (.03)	-.01 (.05)	-.34 (.21)	-.01 (.04)
T4	Hopes – Income	.68* (.32)	0.08 (0.34)	.01 (.02)	.02 (.03)	-.05 (.07)	.20 (.25)	-.003 (.05)
Fear1	Fear – Financial fear	-.29 (.38)	0.20 (0.29)	.01 (.02)	.003 (.04)	-.06 (.07)	.45 (.33)	-.03 (.04)
Fear2	Fear – job fulfillment/professional success	-.63* (.27)	0.08 (0.20)	-.02 (.01)	.03 (.03)	.03 (.05)	-.24 (.22)	.003 (.04)
Fear3	Fear – personal fears/health/ balancing family and work	-.44 (.27)	0.00 (0.00)	.02* (.01)	-.004 (.03)	-.04 (.05)	-.05 (.21)	-.03 (.04)
Fear4	Fear – Not getting high education	-.17 (.42)	0.01 (0.04)	.04* (.02)	-.01 (.05)	.01 (.07)	.03 (.32)	.02 (.02)

*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, ~ p<.10; Standard errors in parentheses.

Results in Table 8 show that negative slopes were estimated for future hopes and fears (slope=-0.24, p<.01; slope=-0.13, p<.05; slope=-0.20; respectively). Except for the first slope, which was followed by a significant variance, the variances of the individuals'

slopes were non-significant. In other words, the mean slope did not vary across individual students.

The table shows in addition that the probability of hope for better income was increasing, and the fear of not fulfilling the professional requirements was decreasing (slope=0.68, p<.05; slope=-0.63, p<.05; respectively). This result is consistent across all participants. To illustrate these results, Figure5 and Figure 10 show the predicted levels and probabilities, respectively, at each time point of those indicators which resulted in a significant slope. In other words, these figures present the expected value at each time point based on the intercept and slope, which were estimated for a specific indicator.

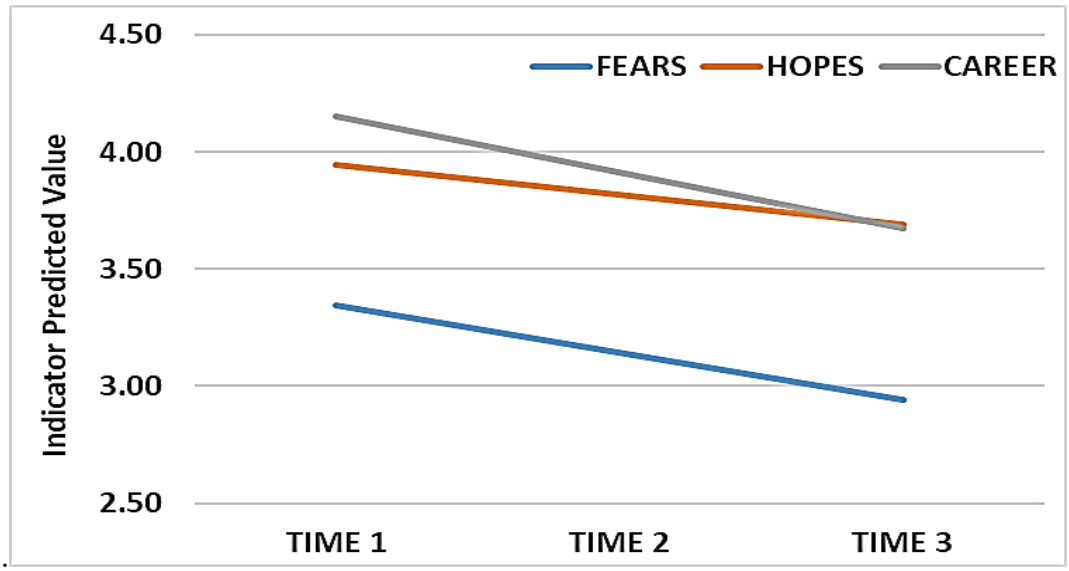

Figure 5: Predicted values and probabilities for research hopes and fears

Figure 5 shows the decrease in levels of fears, hopes, and future career (future career as reference). Hopes and Fears dropped from 4.25 at time 1 to 3.75 at time 3, a decrease of over ten percent points. Fear decreased by six percent points, from 3.35 to 2.95.

These results provide the answer to research question No. 4, which concerns the development of FO hopes and fears over three points in time. **The hypothesis was confirmed.** Hopes are expected to grow over time, while fears will decrease.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IV.1 Discussion of Findings Related to the Impact of the NTS' Background on Their Self-Efficacy, SOCITS, and Future Work and Career

The research hypothesis was that NTS' years of study, age, seniority in kindergarten, and job scope variables would significantly affect the Sense of self-efficacy, SOCIT, and future work and career. **The hypothesis was partially confirmed.** Senior NTS had higher commitment and lower expectancies than beginner NTS. The findings showed that as the NTS in the program gained experience, their commitment increased, and their expectations decreased. Commitment, which is a behavioral aspect, was high compared to expectations (motivational aspect). The explanation is related to the continuous and challenging processes of academic teacher training, which include studies and field experience and create feelings of pressure and tension. A high level of Future orientation contributes to solid academic commitment and success. As the NTS matures, she understands that training processes increase employment opportunities and career prospects, which leads to high commitment to studies, development of independent learning skills, and better performance.

IV.2 Discussion of Findings Related to the Influence of Personal Characteristics and Seniority on Educators' Future Hopes and Fears

Discussion of the findings related to the correlations between self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career led to **two hypotheses that were confirmed**. The first hypothesis predicted positive correlations between NTS self-efficacy and SOCITS, and the result is consistent with the research literature (Cruz et al., 2013; Kohler Giancola et al., 2009; Hicks & Heastie, 2008; Jones et al., 2017). The second hypothesis predicted a positive correlation between the motivational component of work and career and future self-efficacy, SOCITS, and future work and career, and a significant positive correlation was found (Brunette et al., 2018; Chung et al., 2009; Davidson et al., 2012; Passig, 2012).

The conclusion regarding the cognitive component of FO is based on future hopes and fears (Seginer & Lilach, 2004). Age, seniority in the program, and scope of employment influence the hopes and fears of new educators. Over time, hopes increase and fears decrease, due to experience and direct contact with children. Professional training and

support allow educators to experience success and strive for a better future. OJT contributes to professional development and professional identity as educators. Seniority and age are advantages in workforce stability and professional development. NTS values academic training to realize their hopes for the future.

IV.3 Research Limitations

A significant limitation of the study was the size of the group. The constraint was that the small group size reflected their representation in the early childhood educators and caregivers population. They were a minority but represented a population of interest to investigate. Each NTS program participated in the study annually for one academic year. Statistical tests were added to explore subgroups related to background variables, such as the difference between seniors and beginning NTS. One conclusion was that the needs of each subgroup are different, and addressing them can affect the quality of training, retention, and continuity in educational roles.

Since I coordinated and taught the program, the ethics committee has indicated a conflict of interest and concern about the satisfaction of N.T.S. responses. It was decided that participants would respond to the qualitative portion in writing. The qualitative sections focused on the participants' developmental processes. I did not teach these students during the study year to avoid bias. After the changes were made, the ethics committee approved the study. The limitation of having written responses is the reduced responses due to the researcher's inability to gain additional insights from face-to-face dialogue.

IV.4 Research Contribution to Theoretical and Practical Knowledge

There is a broad consensus in the professional literature regarding the contribution of early childhood teacher education for optimal development adapted to children's needs in the first years of their life In Israel, there are still significant gaps between the training and professional knowledge of female educators working in education systems for ages birth to three and further along the educational continuum. The reform in early childhood education, launched in September 2023 and included the transfer of responsibility for children from birth to three to the Ministry of Education, did contribute to improving the training of professional women. However, it may have been too little, too late. Despite developing a five-year plan to improve the quality of early

childhood education and care, in Israel, as of 2024, there is an acute and extreme lack of skilled and educated personnel in early childhood education and care.

This study dealt broadly with the possibilities of reducing social gaps and sheds light on and presents an innovative point of view regarding the needs of women who wish to be significant and relevant and have a profession that makes a personal and social contribution. Updating the training programs and opening up the possibility of completing training while working, personal accompaniment, continuous mentorship, mentoring positions, and involvement in training can foster in women the motivation to engage in education and positions for which the demand is now acute and necessary.

This study presented the development of necessary perceptions for women in early childhood education and showed how they develop over time in the professional training processes of female NTS, who represent most women involved in early childhood education, at least in Israel.

Future orientation has been studied in various societies' education for young children and adolescents. Few studies have been done on higher education students. However, FO has not been studied on a research population like the one presented in this study: women involved in early childhood education who are NTS and do not have professional academic backgrounds in early childhood.

The contribution of the research at the local level pertains to the driving elements and the professional development needs of women involved in supporting the development of babies and children in the most significant stages of life. The field of teacher training is broadly researched, but the challenge of persevering in the education system after training remains the same. The recruitment problem, as is the dropout rate from teaching and education positions, is universal. It is possible that addressing the developmental needs of the teaching staff and developing differential programs, as presented in this study, can be a refreshing and innovative direction for the training programs, thereby contributing to reducing dropouts and persevering in the profession.

IV.5 Practical Implications and Recommendations

In Israel and worldwide, there is an acute shortage of quality early childhood educators ready to educate infants and young children, as mentioned throughout this thesis. In 2021, two years after this research began, a historical reform in ECEC took place in Israel. From the establishment of the state in 1948 until 2021, responsibility for early

childhood in Israel was divided between two government ministries. Birth to age three fell under the Ministry of Labor/Economy, reflecting the prevailing perception in the state's early years that daycare centers were necessary to support women's joining the workforce. Responsibility for ages 3-6 was in the hands of the Ministry of Education as a pedagogical authority responsible for education and schooling from age 3 until the end of the educational continuum. For many years, all those involved in education worked relentlessly towards the promotion of reform, shifting responsibility, and applying the education law from the ages of birth to the end of the educational continuum.

In Israel, most children between birth and age three are educated in unsupervised care frameworks. Many cases of violence and harm to helpless children at these ages justified the advancement of the reform, and one of the regulations is that every framework in which seven or more children are enrolled must be approved and supervised by the Ministry of Education. Although the law does not apply to frameworks with fewer children, this is a significant advancement towards improving the quality of care provided in Israel, thus nearing standardization in OECD countries. As part of the supervision, all staff in education frameworks for ages birth to three must undertake 200 hours of annual training and four hours of monthly instruction.

Teacher education colleges have engaged in training processes now occurring nationwide. An educational framework that ensures its staff's training will receive neither government approval nor benefits; thus, the interest is mutual. Policy change has influenced training processes. Educators who undergo basic training often continue to do advanced training.

The training process will be acknowledged and considered for those seeking to pursue a bachelor's degree and teaching certificate. The academic institution where the research was conducted was the only one dealing with such a training program in the first year of the research. In contrast, today the program is offered at several colleges nationwide. The research findings differentiate between various populations, beginners and veterans, identifying their different needs. Incorporating the research results into curriculum development and the support provided to students will enable precision and support that fosters educators' professional identity development and their perseverance in the profession.

The conclusions constitute grounds for strengthening the training of early childhood educators and raising the status of early childhood education by allowing women to develop as owners of a significant profession and mothers who seek to allow their children better development opportunities than they had.

IV.6 Recommendations for Policy Makers

Early childhood education policy in Israel has experienced numerous upheavals and shocks. One of the most significant struggles that lasted more than two decades is the issue of shifting responsibility for early childhood from the Ministry of the Economy to the Ministry of Education so that all Israeli children would be under the responsibility of one ministry and would receive the educational and therapeutic response adapted to their developmental needs.

Frameworks requesting state subsidies and supervision were required to send teachers to state-subsidized basic and advanced training. This process directly supports children's development and realizing their fundamental rights as befitting optimal education. However, by the time this thesis was written, a lack of stability in governance in Israel and the October 7th War had led to the state cutting these training budgets and discontinuing subsidies as of March 2024. Thus, although the Ministry of Education is meant to ensure quality education for young children, the only ones affected will be those disadvantaged and their caregivers, who are undereducated and professionally unqualified women responsible for the young children's mental health and proper development.

The proposed solutions involve policy development as a roadmap to improve the status of early childhood educators and carers in Israel by regulating training processes, defining the work as a profession, and even branding and promoting the profession as valuable and meaningful, with a moral mission that contributes to and advances society.

Learning from the status transformation of nurses in Israel and worldwide, we can adapt the regulatory processes to early childhood professions. Training should include advanced programs to enable early childhood educators and carers to pursue personal and professional development. Training processes should be integrated into workplaces and developed to include entrepreneurship pathways and community promotion activities as an initiative that instills a culture of responsibility and practical change in the field, promoting an identity of social involvement and change.