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‘Autonomy-Supportive Mentoring’: mentoring from the perspective of self-determination theory

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the Autonomy-Supportive Mentoring Model, a new model that integrates mentor training with practical mentoring of beginning teachers (BTs). The model was developed within an international European Union project called Promentors. Grounded in self-determination theory, it sought to support the psychological needs of both mentors and BTs and to cultivate autonomous motivation for mentoring and teaching. The two-year phenomenological study used semi-structured interviews with 13 pairs of Bedouin mentors and BTs and five policymakers. The results indicated that mentors in the training program experienced need satisfaction, changed their mentoring paradigm, and enhanced their mentoring motivation. In a parallel process, the mentors supported the psychological needs of the BTs, who in turn reported need satisfaction and various positive outcomes. The findings underscored the organizational-ecological context as an additional source of need support and highlighted the model’s effectiveness and applicability in a collectivist cultural context.

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Mentoring; ‘Autonomy Supportive Mentoring Model’; Self Determination Theory (SDT); psychological needs; collectivist society

Introduction

Throughout the year and the mentoring process, I started treating the mentee as a professional partner, like we are one team that works together, not as if he is an inferior teacher because of his lack of experience. I’ve changed my mentoring style from an instructional approach to a supportive approach. My view on mentoring has changed. (a mentor teacher)

This statement by a mentor teacher followed a mentors’ course conducted within the framework of the Autonomy Supportive Mentoring Model (ASMM). The model was intended for mentors of beginning teachers (henceforth BTs) at the induction stage and was grounded in self-

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determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). In light of this quote, we examined the nature of the course, to better understand how it induced such profound change in the approach to and practice of mentoring.

The expansive field of mentoring has given rise to rich theoretical and empirical literature, including qualitative, quantitative, and combined studies. The literature addresses a variety of aspects within mentoring, allowing us to examine different approaches, theories, models, and intervention programs across different contexts (e.g. Alegado & Soe, 2021; Richter et al., 2013).

This wealth of knowledge reveals two main mentoring paradigms (Burger et al., 2021; Richter et al., 2013). The conventional approach is that of transmission-oriented mentoring, whereas the other approach highlights constructivist and autonomy-based mentoring. The traditional paradigm, relying on behaviorist theories of learning and motivation, perceives the mentor as the holder of authority and the mentee as a passive entity requiring guidance and direction. Their relationship is viewed as hierarchical and one-directional, fitting into the common definition of mentoring in which an experienced professional (mentor) transmits knowledge to a colleague taking his or her first career steps (Pennanen et al., 2018).

Over the years, this understanding of the essence of mentoring has undergone a profound change, leading into a constructivist and autonomous paradigm, which draws on a humanistic approach. In this paradigm, the mentor-mentee relationship is at the center, and is characterized by mutuality, equality, and lack of hierarchy. In this view, mentoring is based on collaborative reflection, exploration, and autonomous decision making (Cruz et al., 2020). This thinking has yielded new mentoring models, such as Peer Group Mentoring (Pennanen et al., 2018), which are inspired by new approaches to learning like collaborative learning, professional learning communities, and the constructivist approach.

This mentoring paradigm served as the basis for an international project of the European Union (under the Erasmus+ program) called Promentors. The project's purpose was the development of learning communities catering to interns and new teachers (in their post-internship year), both populations together termed BTs, together with their mentors. In addition, the project developed new mentoring models, aiming to position the mentor's role in the Israeli education system and structure mentors' training frameworks. ASMM was developed within that context.

This article presents ASMM and its contributions from an empirical viewpoint. We begin by introducing the Promentors project and move on to presenting ASMM's theoretical approach and its goals. In the second part of the article, we will present the findings of the qualitative study that accompanied the ASMM and demonstrate the model's benefits.

The promentors project

Promentors project encompassed multiple partners: nine education colleges in Israel, four European universities, Mofet Institute, which is an Israeli national institute for research and development in teachers' training, and the Israeli Ministry of Education. The intervention model focused on teachers' induction processes and mentoring, in the context of school-wide and town-wide partnerships. The project operated for three years, and its intervention model is still operating after its official termination.

The intervention took the form of learning communities termed Multi-Players Induction Teams, or MITs, which included both BTs and mentors. These MIT communities were accompanied by school principals and policymakers (inspectors from the Ministry of Education, local education directors, and leaders of education and community). The MITs drew on an ecological and clinical-collaborative approach, according to which BTs were supported and assisted within their professional contexts (Kaplan, 2022; Kaplan et al., 2021).

The professional literature acknowledges the intense challenges of teachers' induction (Flores, 2017) and the importance of professional communities (e.g. Thomas et al., 2019). The MIT is thus a supportive framework for BTs that promotes structuring of meaningful professional identity among teachers through reflective dialogue and exploration. The activities of the community are adapted to the specific cultural context of the school or town, giving the teachers an opportunity to learn about themselves in these contexts. In the MITs, the teachers discuss issues relevant for that stage of their career and explore goals, values, views on teaching and learning, learning methods, professional dilemmas, etc.

Within Promentors, various mentoring models were studied, and a mentors' training program was designed. This process yielded different models, ASMM among them. The project focused on developing a new mentoring paradigm, which sought to be autonomous, relational, constructivist, and humanistic (Burger et al., 2021; Kaplan et al., 2023). The model drew on cognitive aspects of learning (social constructivism), social aspects of mutual support, equality and reciprocity, and the centrality of the community and the peer group. In addition, this approach highlighted SDT-based motivational aspects that have become central to ASMM, as presented below.

Autonomy Supportive Mentoring Model (ASMM)

ASMM is based on SDT (Dantzer, 2017; Fisher et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2017), a humanistic theory of motivation and personality (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to SDT, the components of optimal development are three innate and universal basic psychological needs: relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

The need for relatedness is the strive to maintain close and satisfying relationships with others in the social environment and to be part of a community. The need for competence is the desire to experience oneself as capable of fulfilling plans, goals, and ambitions, and to feel a sense of efficacy. The need for autonomy is the strive for self-determination, authentic self-expression, meaning, and freedom of choice (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It is an individual's endeavor to construct an identity and to develop an 'inner compass', a sense of knowing what is truly important to the self in terms of values, interests, and goals (Assor et al., 2023).

The theory lists different types of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomous motivation is when an individual experiences a sense of choice and self-direction, acting out of identification with a certain value or behavior (identified motivation) or deep curiosity and sense of satisfaction (intrinsic motivation). Controlled motivation is when an individual's actions stem from a sense of coercion, expectation of reward, or external obligation (external motivation); or from internal pressure, guilt, or shame, wanting to win respect (introjected motivation). Behaviors that derive from external motivation may undergo internalization (Deci & Ryan, 2000), meaning that beliefs, values, and behaviors stemming from external motivation may become an integral part of a person's self-identity (integrative/autonomous motivation).

Internalization is a central concept to ASMM, as teachers tend to take on mentoring because of external motivation (e.g. they were asked by the principal to serve in this role) and/or bring to the role a traditional perception of mentoring. According to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, 2023), creating an environment that supports participants' needs may promote internalization of new perceptions and practices and encourage autonomous mentoring motivation. This study examined this premise.

The new model developed unique ways to support participants' psychological needs, based on accumulated knowledge from SDT research and SDT-based intervention programs (e.g. Ahmadi et al., 2023; Reeve et al., 2022). The need for relatedness, for example, can be supported by constructing the group as a safe place that facilitates protected discourse. In addition, relatedness can be supported through activities that encourage participants to get to know each other, giving rise to a peer group characterized by empathy, mutual help, and equality. Reflective dialogue and sharing of emotions and experiences also strengthen the sense of relatedness. The need for competence may be supported by providing non-judgmental feedback, assisting in setting optimal goals and challenges, reducing competition and social comparisons, helping participants deal with challenges, legitimizing difficulty, and teaching skills needed for mentoring and teaching. As for autonomy, it may be supported by giving choice, making collaborative decisions, discussing authentic and professionally relevant issues, encouraging freedom of expression, giving room to controversial stances, exploring

issues related to professional identity, providing rationale and encouraging proactivity. For a more comprehensive overview of need-supportive behaviors within the mentoring domain, see Kaplan et al. (2023).

It is important to note that various need-supportive strategies should be adapted to the specific context and population. For example, within the domain of physical education teaching, Tilga et al. (2017) conceptualized autonomy support as a multidimensional construct, comprising cognitive, organizational, and procedural dimensions. The current program is designed for mentors.

In ASMM, need-support and the experience of need satisfaction are evident both in the mentors' training program and in the actual mentoring process.

The training was designed to create an environment that supported participants' needs through unique group facilitation methods and the nature of the relationships between the group facilitator and each participant as well as among participants. During the practical mentoring, which took place at the schools, the mentor-mentee relationships reflected the same ideas.

Studies have demonstrated the applicability of SDT in the mentoring of BTs (Burger et al., 2021; Kaplan, 2021a, 2021b, 2022). Kaplan (2022) reported a study conducted over two years among two populations of Israeli teachers – Jewish and Bedouin-Arab – who participated in two-year workshops for BTs. The findings showed that the support of the workshop's facilitator in the teachers' needs predicted their autonomous motivation in the workshop, which in turn predicted positive feelings and satisfaction with the workshop. Furthermore, the support of the facilitator and that of the mentor predicted autonomous teaching motivation, which in turn predicted a sense of competence in teaching, self-actualization, and reduced burnout. No significant differences were found between the two cultural groups.

These findings align with the motivational mechanisms underlying SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to the theory, support in people's psychological needs leads to a sense of need satisfaction, which in turn promotes autonomous motivation. Autonomous motivation serves as the basis for a range of emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and identity-related benefits.

Research on teachers has shown that these motivational mechanisms exhibit parallel processes, such that teachers that experience need satisfaction or autonomous motivation will be more supportive of their students' autonomy, and the students in turn will exhibit increased autonomous learning motivation (Roth et al., 2007). In the current study, we examined the parallels between satisfying the mentors' psychological needs (through need-support provided by the group facilitator and other participants) and the mentors' support in the BTs. According to ASMM, support of the mentors will promote a sense of need satisfaction, autonomous motivation, and other positive outcomes among the BTs. Previous studies that examined these mechanisms have utilized quantitative methodologies (e.g. Kaplan, 2021b, 2022). In contrast, this study employed qualitative methods, for the first time in this research domain. ASMM was specifically

developed for BTs and was unique in drawing on the community-centered approach of Promentors.

ASMM's main goals

- To create a need-supportive environment that will lead to experiences of need satisfaction – among both mentors and BTs.
- To promote autonomous motivation for mentoring and/or teaching – among both mentors and BTs.
- To teach the values, principles, and practices of SDT and ASMM – among the mentors.
- To enhance the familiarity with the BT's inner world from the perspective of satisfaction or frustration of needs – among the mentors.
- To promote experiences of optimal induction into the teaching profession – among the mentees.

The context of the project and the research

The MIT examined in this study was located in a Bedouin town in southern Israel. The Bedouin-Arab society is defined as collectivist, hierarchical, and patriarchal (Oplatka & El-Kuran, 2022). As a collectivist society, its norms and customs prioritize the interests of the affinity group over the individual's goals and needs. The social structure of the Bedouin society is based on tribalism, loyalty to affinity groups (the family and tribe), emphasizing the value of honor, maintaining a hierarchical structure, and high levels of obedience to parental-patriarchal authority. In recent decades, the Bedouin population has been undergoing substantial lifestyle changes. These have shaken the ideological, social, domestic, and economic foundations, destabilizing its collectivist nature. Despite these transitions, the Bedouin society is still considered collectivist when compared to Western cultures (Oplatka & El-Kuran, 2022).

The MIT community, led by a team from Kaye Academic College of Education, was composed of a group of mentors who were taking a mentors' course, and a group of BTs (containing both interns and new teachers) from all elementary and secondary schools in the town. About half of the sessions took place within the MIT community and were attended by BTs and mentors, and some also by policymakers. In these mixed sessions, teachers discussed issues from school life, performed collaborative tasks (such as initiating educational projects), met with policymakers, and learned from each other. In the separate groups for mentors and BTs, the content related to each group's specific needs. Each year, most mentors were paired up with BTs participants, forming mentor-mentee pairs. A town steering committee accompanied the MIT, meeting several times during the year to oversee the activity, suggest content adjusted to the town's needs, discuss the MIT's role in the town, and build a town vision for teachers' induction.

The current study

The study aimed to examine the efficacy of the ASMM, with a focus on motivational processes and outcomes reflecting the transition from training to mentoring. Specifically, we examined the motivational experiences and perceptions of mentoring among mentors who participated in the training program. We also explored the nature of actual mentoring from the perspectives of both mentors and BTs, with particular emphasis on mentoring relationships, need-supportive practices, and outcomes. In addition, we investigated how the broader organizational and community contexts of the MIT supported the experiences of need satisfaction and motivation among both mentors and BTs. Accordingly, the study was guided by three research questions:

- **RQ1:** What characterized the motivational experiences and perceptions regarding mentoring among mentors who participated in the ASMM training?
- **RQ2:** How did the mentors and BTs perceive the mentoring process in the ASMM, in terms of relationships, need-supportive practices, and outcomes?
- **RQ3:** How did the mentors and BTs experience the support of the town and the MIT community?

Methodology

The study was performed within the qualitative paradigm and the phenomenological genre, focusing on the experiences, perceptions, and meanings the participants ascribed to the program.

Participants

In each of the two years of the study, two courses took place – a mentors' course and a course for BTs (each year with different participants). Within the MIT, some of the mentors and BTs were paired together. In the first year, the mentors' course had 23 teachers and the BT's course 25 teachers. Eight pairs of mentors and BTs were interviewed (16 interviews). In the second year, 18 teachers participated in the mentors' course and 26 in the BT's course. Five pairs were interviewed (ten interviews). We also interviewed five policymakers.

Research tools

Semi-structured interviews were used, focusing on the perceptions and experiences related to the training environment and the actual mentoring. The topics included experiences of need satisfaction, mentoring motivation, and outcomes related to the effects of mentoring. Here are some sample questions: Describe a meaningful session in the workshop; How did the course contribute to you;

Describe your relationships with your colleagues or the course facilitator; Describe your relationship with your mentor. Policymakers were interviewed about their perceptions of the project and its role in promoting education in the town. For example: Describe the contribution of the project to the town's education system. In addition to interviews, we used session protocols and facilitators' year-end reports as complementary research tools. These sources provided further evidence concerning the ecological and organizational dimensions of the MIT.

Procedure and ethics

All ethics requirements were kept. Participants provided informed consent to be interviewed. Their anonymity was maintained, and principals could not access teachers' interviews. Data collection was performed by research assistants who were not part of the project faculty. Some of the interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated into Hebrew. All interviews took place at the end of the school year. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the academic institution.

Data analysis

The interviews were thematically analyzed (Kacen & Krumer-Nevo, 2010), by means of a structured multi-stage process consistent with qualitative thematic approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, each interview was read holistically to gain an overall sense of the participants' accounts. Second, an inductive analysis was conducted to identify themes emerging from the data, which were then classified into meaning units and preliminary themes. Third, a deductive analysis was applied, utilizing theoretical criteria drawn from SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This methodological pattern, which focused on theory-driven criteria, revealed themes such as experiences of need satisfaction. Criteria-focused content analysis is a familiar approach in the analysis of qualitative content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Finally, a mapping process was undertaken to build the complete category system, refining the main themes and sub-themes that structured the findings. Lastly, the findings from session protocols and facilitators' year-end reports were integrated into the thematic framework in the descriptive and interpretive sections that presented the project's organizational and ecological aspects.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the research team jointly analyzed three interviews at the beginning of the analysis process. Any disagreements concerning the identified themes or the appropriate quotations for each theme were discussed until full consensus was reached. This procedure enabled us to assess the degree of agreement between the researchers and to formulate guidelines for the data analysis. In addition, reflexivity was maintained

throughout the process, with researchers continuously reflecting on their own assumptions and their potential influence on the interpretation of the data. This approach helped to reduce bias and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

Findings

The analysis identified six themes. The findings are presented in accordance with the three research questions, each of which aligns with specific themes that emerged from the analysis, as detailed below:

RQ1, which examined the motivational experiences and perceptions of mentoring among mentors who participated in the ASMM training, is reflected in Themes 1–3. **Theme 1** refers to satisfaction of mentors' psychological needs during the training. **Theme 2** refers to changes in the mentoring paradigm. **Theme 3** focuses on the growth of autonomous mentoring motivation among mentors.

RQ2, which explored the actual mentoring from the perspectives of both mentors and BTs, is reflected in Themes 4–5. **Theme 4** refers to parallel processes occurring in both the training and the mentoring activity. **Theme 5** explores the mentoring itself from the perspective of the mentor-mentee pairs. This theme highlights the link between mentors' perceptions and behaviors and BTs' experiences of need satisfaction.

Finally, **RQ3**, which examined how the mentors and BTs experienced the support of the town and the MIT community, is reflected in **Theme 6**. This theme uncovers an additional source of support for participants' psychological needs – both the organizational and ecological context surrounding the MIT ('support from above') and the community context of the MIT itself ('support from within').

Theme 1: satisfaction of mentors' psychological needs in the training (RQ1)

The findings indicated a need-supportive environment and a sense of need satisfaction among participants in the mentors' training course. This included the following: a close connection with the facilitators, personal attention, caring, bonding, and collaboration with teachers from the same school or town (support and satisfaction of the need for relatedness); an expansion of knowledge and acquisition of tools for mentoring, an experience of success, and an enhanced sense of capability (support and satisfaction of the need for competence); and an opportunity to get to know one's own uniqueness and inner strengths, egalitarian discourse, encouragement of free expression, multiple opinions, freedom of thought, and recognition of one's culture (support and satisfaction of the need for autonomy).

The mentors reported an empathic atmosphere in the course that promoted a sense of relatedness: 'I felt a welcoming environment. The facilitators accepted us as teachers, provided love and acceptance' (mentor, first year).

A mentor reported that the course made her feel special and with a strong personality (a sense of autonomy), that she experienced caring and acceptance (a sense of relatedness), and that her sense of competence increased.

After the course I feel proud and special. I feel that I have my own personality and I can support the new teacher and give room for his needs. The MIT is a place for support and assistance and the course really promoted me. I experienced care and acceptance, and these things I passed along to the new teacher I mentored. (mentor, second year)

The course helped mentors understand the inner world of new teachers while also providing practical tools, which enhanced their sense of competence, as reported by a participant.

I learned what a new teacher feels – to be in an unfamiliar place, with many demands – and this understanding affected my mentoring. For example, we learned about evaluations of new teachers that is part of our role. Now I know how to evaluate and how to give room to someone else. A good evaluation is an evaluation built on dialogue and attention. (mentor, second year)

The mentors described the mutual learning in the course, which offered multiple perspectives and allowed them to get closer to other participants. They also described their relationships with the facilitator, who demonstrated 'optimal mentoring' by supporting their autonomy through egalitarian discourse, opportunities to speak one's mind, mutuality, and involving participants in choosing topics.

I also learned a lot from the other teachers in the course. I had the privilege to meet veteran teachers from other schools. Each one has his point of view and professional wealth, and we contributed to each other. We learned content that can help teachers in general and mentors in particular, like how to evaluate teachers through dialogue. I also learned a lot from the facilitator's style of facilitation. It included giving space, collaborating on choosing the course content, and the importance of speaking at eye level. I didn't feel like there was a facilitator that knows everything and we only implement, but rather that we do everything in cooperation. We had our own voices. The connection between the course facilitator and the teachers demonstrated optimal mentoring. (mentor, second year)

The findings indicated that the course participants experienced support in their autonomy. They reported that the course gave room for free discussion, multiple opinions, and freedom of thought and expression: 'In the group we always had many different ideas. We discussed them, argued, and I always heard creative ideas from everyone. This is why I preferred this model' (mentor, first year).

Theme 2: changes in the mentoring paradigm (RQ1)

The findings indicated a shift in the perception of mentoring from the traditional paradigm, in which the relationship is hierarchical and the mentoring revolves around transmission of knowledge, to a relational and autonomous paradigm, in which the mentor and mentee act together as partners. In the paternalistic and collectivistic Bedouin-Arab society, relationships are based on authority. Shifting into a relationship of equality and autonomy was shocking to participants at first, but eventually the change was internalized. This was evident when interviewees directly reported a changed perception and addressed the tension between the new ideas and the Bedouin norms and values. They also reported that the new approach filtered into their educational work.

Furthermore, interviewees testified that the new model raised questions and shook the traditional view of the mentor as a know-all authoritative figure. These insights also extended to the teachers' relationships with their students.

What characterizes Promentors is that it questions existing things. We always learned the classic model of mentoring, where the mentor is the one that leads, advises, and directs, and no one doubts his authority. And suddenly there is another model, which first caused a shock, like, 'this can't be true'. But as we started going deeper, with the discussion and the implementation, things started to look different. (mentor, second year)

Since the course content went against the local norms and values, the new thinking amounted to a paradigm shift.

The course was really challenging. I see its uniqueness in its non-classical contents. Contents that go against many social norms and values, reflected in putting the command in the hands of experienced older people. Therefore, the mentors were shocked at the beginning of the course. But during the course, there was a change in consciousness and perception and we learned to involve the younger teachers. I think the course ushered into our system a new model, that gives room to both young teachers and mentor teachers, and it really empowered both. (mentor, first year)

The teachers were initially apprehensive about the concept of autonomy, which was perceived as contradicting their culture. They asked: 'Why should I voice my opinion?' This development coincided with other transitions in the Bedouin society.

I liked the model of autonomy support. First the new teachers didn't understand the concept of autonomy and asked: why should I voice my opinion? Why should I be the one to decide? They found it strange. We learned in the course that each teacher, each person, wants to be autonomous, but suddenly the teachers felt stress because of the autonomy, like they wanted some grownup to tell them what to do. I think it depends on your culture and society. (mentor, second year)

In the end, the mentors internalized the new model and understood the significance of autonomy and reciprocity between mentor and mentee.

I came to the course with the classical model, in which the veteran teacher knows everything and has the task of training the young teacher. After the course, I'm putting a very big question mark on that model, because I learned from my mentoring a lot, and therefore I cannot say that I know everything and she doesn't. I love the model of autonomy-supportive mentoring because it's a kind of mentoring that gives room, space, and respect to the mentee. It's a model that takes into account the teacher's inclinations, abilities, opinions, and emotional world, and this is what I try to implement in my mentoring. (mentor, second year)

Theme 3: the growth of autonomous mentoring motivation (RQ1)

The mentors reported that the course increased their mentoring motivation, which seemed to be autonomous. They further described how mentoring brought about a sense of growth, satisfaction, and enjoyment. A mentor described how the course induced feelings of relevancy and joy in his role as mentor.

After years of feeling that mentoring was a burden, I am enjoying my mentoring role for the first time. Today I feel much more relevant to my mentees and much closer to them than ever before. (mentor, first year)

Another mentor described her path and reported an enhanced sense of mission and meaningfulness in her current mentor's role.

In this workshop there are several stations and in each station you learn something new about yourself and others. At first we got to know each other, and you also need to get to know yourself [...] Then we learned about the school, its needs, what new teachers need. What interests me is how to rise to my task. It's not easy to be a mentor. You have to support (the mentee's) motivation, encourage (them). I see it as a sacred task – it's a mission, and I'm happy to be part of its leadership. (mentor, first year)

A mentor reported her positive feelings and autonomous/identified motivation for mentoring new teachers after participating in the course.

I'm very happy to be a mentor. To be responsible for a new teacher, give of myself to her. I really enjoy supporting the new teachers. Seeing the joy in a teacher's eyes and his pride in the things he does – that gives me great satisfaction. (mentor, second year)

Theme 4: evidence of parallel processes – from the training to the actual mentoring ('passing on the magic') (RQ2)

One of the premises of the model is that a mentor who feels a sense of satisfaction in the training will be more inclined to support the needs of the BT. This premise was supported by the findings. According to the interviewees,

they implemented the teachings from the course in their practical mentoring duties. The transition from the theoretical training to the mentoring practice was described as magical: 'From the group we passed the magic on to our mentees'.

The group and the facilitator gave us a lot. The facilitator had a lot of knowledge and experience, and he exposed us to new knowledge through meaningful activities and working in small groups. From the group we passed on the magic to our mentees. We received a lot of responsibility and love. The facilitator gave me a lot [...] not just for this course, but for life (mentor, second year)

The facilitator's conduct and the need-supportive climate of the course served as a model for the teachers' mentoring and even teaching activities.

We had joint sessions and we worked in groups of mentors and new teachers. When you sit down and listen to a situation they present and then you work out the problems together and present the solutions, you experience success. You pass on what you got from your facilitators to your mentee. It all works out like magic, it's wonderful without the interns and new teachers feeling like they are new, small, and inexperienced. We passed on to them everything we learned. We gave all our knowledge with love and patience. (mentor, second year)

Theme 5: actual mentoring – the perspective of the mentor-mentee pairs (RQ2)

This theme concerns the association between a mentor's need-support conduct and a BT's sense of need satisfaction, as well as other outcomes relating to the teachers' functioning at school (including motivational, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral effects). These outcomes were examined through three mentor-mentee pairs of teachers from the MIT's second year. [Table 1](#) presents these associations.

The table shows the mentors' perspective on their mentoring style and how they believed they supported the BTs' needs. In these three cases, autonomy support took the form of providing choice, 'zooming out' of the situation, being attentive, avoiding dictating solutions, giving rationale, and finding out what the mentee needed. Competence support included avoiding criticism, legitimizing mistakes, and assisting in problem solving. Finally, relatedness support was evident in creating trust, building a parental relationship, and showing empathy.

Additional evidence came from the BT of each pair. According to these interviews, their mentors supported their autonomy by showing interest, listening, giving room to their ideas and opinions, involving them in decision making, emphasizing relevant content, and stressing equality. Support in their competence included providing tools to handle issues such as classroom management, communication with parents, time management, and lesson planning. Support

Table 1. The association between autonomy-supportive mentoring and a sense of need satisfaction among BTs.

Mentor	Beginning teacher
A mentor to me is a counselor, a mother, and a tour guide helping her follower. They do everything together, through dialogue and serious explanation. I don't go to the mentee thinking that I know everything. That is problematic, it creates a barrier for the mentee. He will avoid learning from someone patronizing that shows him that he doesn't know.	I feel empowered after every session with my mentor. I feel that she is close to me and I am comfortable speaking with her and sharing with her any emotional, social, or pedagogical issue.
The mentor is a friend who understands, listens, gives sensitive criticism, accepts criticism and sees it as part of his development. A mentor treats the mentee as a person who needs help. The mentor must make sure that the mentee's environment allows him to feel comfortable and examine together his needs, challenges, and problems.	The mentor's communication with me has been encouraging and empowering, and the topics we discussed were relevant to my work and helped me a lot. As a result, I felt a new spirit of renewal in my teaching. She made me think outside the box. I felt special.
I like to use the metaphor of compass – someone who can guide and direct the new teacher without thinking on his behalf or telling him dos and don'ts. The ideal mentor is a mentor who listens and empathizes. You don't have to spoon-feed the new teacher, you have to be near him in times of need, to give a sense of confidence, that he can turn to me with anything without fear.	The session helped me to plan a science lesson that the principal was supposed to observe. I felt confidence and a sense of success as a teacher after teaching that lesson. I felt happy and satisfied to be such a successful teacher.
We sit together and we try to find a solution. We learn lessons from each issue. I ask her to explore and not just settle for a solution. I let her choose most of the topics she raised [...] I really loved the autonomy-supportive model of the new teachers, which treats them not as an object but as a teacher who has studied and acquired many tools and is only lacking experience [...] mentoring is not about transmitting knowledge in one direction – it has reciprocity. We both learn from each other.	My connection with my mentor-teacher was very good. We met weekly and she helped me acclimate at the school. In each session we were both active. I spoke freely about my difficulties, and I also shared my successes. She brought her knowledge and experience, especially with parents, and I brought new ideas for classroom teaching, and she liked that. She always complemented my ideas and gave me feedback on any situation, whether it was good or not. Her goal was for me to learn and develop as a teacher.
It's important for me that she feels safe, that she can make mistakes, and she has permission to ask anyone for help. It's important for me that she doesn't stay alone.	I feel that I have an attentive ear at the school, a place to turn to – I can come to her whenever I want. This has made me feel committed and connected to the school. I waited for these meetings impatiently because she respected me and let me feel that I have abilities even though I'm a new teacher.
I realized that I have the capacity to give, both to new teachers and to students. In addition, you have to listen to others and understand them. When a teacher is under stress, you also have to get into his shoes and understand him. I learned that I have the ability and willingness to collaborate with others, hear their opinions, and lead them to find solutions by themselves.	My mentor teacher was considerate of me and constantly helped me from his experience and knowledge. I would come with questions and the mentor would share suggestions on how to answer my questions, and he would also let me think and share my own ideas. In each session we were partners in raising issues and making decisions. I felt that there was room for my opinion and knowledge. He enhanced my confidence. I felt that he was committed and caring to me as an intern. I felt that he was a colleague, not someone ranking above me. He helped me integrate into the school and pass the final evaluation with distinction.

in their relatedness was provided through being considerate and available, providing assistance, caring, and initiating supporting discourse.

BTs described their experiences of need satisfaction (a sense of being relevant; 'I felt special'; an experience of success, closeness with the mentor) and the effects of these experiences: autonomous motivation for the mentoring process ('I waited impatiently for these meetings') and for teaching ('I felt a new spirit of renewal and energy in my teaching'), as well as creativity, a sense of well-being, better adjustment to school, and a sense of commitment to it.

Theme 6: the organizational-ecological context and its effects (RQ3)

Unlike most trainings, which usually took place as isolated courses, the mentors' course was conducted within the Promentors community. This community provided both the mentors-in-training and the BTs with two support contexts, as documented in the session protocols and facilitators' reports. The first was the community surrounding the teachers, as policymakers and other officials from the town and the Ministry of Education participated in some of the sessions (context from above). The second support context was created through the mixed sessions, in which mentors and BTs jointly participated in half of the sessions (context from within). Together, these contexts contributed to the mentors' and BTs' sense of need satisfaction.

Sub-Theme 6.1: support from above – partnership with policymakers and other officials

The findings indicated organizational work done across the whole MIT community as well as partnerships with policymakers and officials (based on session protocols and facilitators' reports). These partnerships were perceived as positive by both mentors and BTs and contributed to their motivation and sense of need satisfaction.

The following interview with a high-ranking policymaker in the town described the partnership with the MIT leaders and indicated the importance of the organizational setting and the support given to mentors and BTs.

The town's education department is a full partner to the MIT in different aspects: the approach, writing the vision, the syllabus, choosing the content, processes within the MIT, training the mentors and supporting the new teachers [...] the MIT reflects the town's policy and we are full partners [...] The MIT is a community that contributes to strengthening the sense of relatedness of the teachers to the school and the town. This is a parameter that can improve the quality of teaching, enhance the new teachers' sense of competence, and dissipate their fears, so that their induction into the education system and the school becomes optimal. It's important for them to build their identity on the basis of understanding the school's culture and the town's cultural characteristics. (Director of Education Department, second year)

Mentors described the sessions attended by policymakers and their contributions. These sessions expanded their role identity as mentors, enhanced their sense of autonomy and meaning in their role, and strengthened their motivation and sense of competence.

In the MIT, we had shared sessions with the school principals, representatives from the local authority, and inspectors from the Ministry of Education. The director of the education department gave a lecture on expressing emotions among Bedouin teachers, which is not normally acceptable in our society. We spoke about the expectations of the mentor and how we as mentors can contribute to the teachers' quality of teaching. The session deepened our understanding of the characteristics of the population we are working with and contributed to our sense of competence as teachers.

I understood how much our work as mentors in the town is important. I left [the session] with a feeling of motivation and forward thinking. (mentor, second year)

The BTs also indicated the significance of the community for them. They believed that the commitment of the officials to their success as teachers contributed to their sense of competence and relatedness in the various circles, enhancing their own commitment to give to the school and the town. In addition, the MIT affected the support provided by the schools. For example, a BT described how under the influence of the MIT, the school principal became supportive of her and involved in her relationship with her mentor.

Many officials have visited our MIT. I felt that I became one of them, an ordinary teacher and not merely a new teacher, that I'm important to everyone and they want me to succeed. Today I have ties with the whole education system, the Ministry of Education, the local municipality, the school. That makes me realize that I'm committed to the place and have part in its success [...] The principal and my mentor teacher also participated in these sessions, which enhanced my integration into the school. Thanks to the MIT, my principal has been involved in my activity in the internship course and my connection with the mentor teacher. This really strengthens my desire to contribute to the school and the town. (intern, second year)

Sub-Theme 6.2: support from within – mixed sessions of mentors and BTs

In addition to the ecological context of the MIT, mixed sessions of the entire community were held and documented in the session protocols and facilitators' reports. The interviews further revealed that the psychological needs of both mentors and BTs were supported in these mixed sessions. According to the mentors, these sessions provided an opportunity to learn about their own abilities, enhanced their learning with the help of BTs, and increased their sense of competence. The relationship in Autonomy-Supportive Mentoring was based on reciprocity and acknowledgement of the mentee's abilities, an approach which was adopted by the mentors. In addition, these sessions strengthened their overall teaching motivation and their motivation to participate in the MIT. They also increased the sense of relatedness and motivation across all participants.

The mixed sessions deepened the bond between the mentors and BTs. I loved these sessions because they strengthened my motivation for mentoring and for teaching. I felt that I was giving to my mentee and also to the other teachers. In addition, I had an opportunity to get to know the new teachers' world. I met young, highly motivated teachers with lots of dreams. I was unpleasantly surprised to hear about their fears and doubts. (mentors, second year)

For the mentors, meeting peers at the mentors' course and BTs in the mixed sessions contributed to a sense of competence, which was further enhanced by the mutual learning. The sense of autonomy also enhanced ('I felt that I was someone in my own right'), especially in aspects concerning the role identity as mentors.

Learning here is very experiential. I learn from my facilitator, from my colleagues, and sometimes from younger teachers [in the mixed sessions]. The advantage is that I can get help from BTs, who come with new tools and have something to give. I keep reconstructing things that I did and only now do I realize how meaningful they were, and this empowers me and makes me feel competent. I felt that I was someone in my own right and that I had something to give to the new teachers as a mentor. (mentor, first year)

A mentor described the significance of the MIT sessions. He was given an opportunity to speak his mind, and his sense of competence increased. The sessions strengthened his motivation for mentoring and for participating in the MIT.

The community-wide sessions were amazing because each session had its own character. For instance, in the roundtable meeting we discussed issues from the life of a new teacher. We sat together in mixed groups of mentors and BTs and we discussed various subjects. This really enriched me because I heard new things and also had an opportunity to speak up. The teachers listened to every word and it really made me feel proud and competent. I was never absent in the course and I arrived at every session with full-blown motivation. After this year, I feel very proud and have a sense of mission, because I feel that I helped the new teacher and also other teachers I met during the course. (mentor, second year)

BTs too spoke about how the mixed sessions were meaningful for them. These sessions enhanced the bond with the mentor, shaped equal relationships, and enabled mutual learning.

The mixed sessions had advantages. First of all, they enhanced the bond between the BTs and the veteran teachers. In addition, the sessions enhanced my connection with my mentee, we became more like friends. Like, a friend in front of a friend, not something formal like usually, like 'You can only speak to me about work and that's it, I don't know you outside of that'. Besides that, in the sessions we sometimes had to build something together, write about something, consider problematic issues, learn together. The learning process was richer and more effective and the learning was mutual, we learned from each other. (BT, second year)

A beginning teacher said in her interview that the joint work with the mentor enhanced her sense of need satisfaction and her professional identity.

In one of the sessions, there were interns, new teachers, and mentor teachers. I remember because the facilitators asked us to draw how we perceive ourselves as teachers. This task taught us about cooperation between us and the mentor, that we share some views, and what capacities we can enhance in each other to succeed further. This empowered me as a teacher, to know that I'm in a group with shared fields of interests. (BT, first year)

Discussion

The findings indicated that parallel motivational processes took place and had various outcomes. The mentors' sense of need satisfaction in the course was found to be associated with a changed mentoring paradigm and autonomous motivation among the mentors. The mentors clearly reported implementing what they had learned in the course in their practical mentoring activities: 'From our group we passed on the magic to our mentees'. The mentors, having experienced need satisfaction in their training, supported the needs of BTs, who in turn experienced a sense of need satisfaction and reported behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and identity-related outcomes.

These findings are in line with quantitative research showing that teachers' need satisfaction is associated with their tendency to adopt an autonomy-supportive teaching style (Roth et al., 2007). The current study indicated that these processes, seen in the relationship between teachers and students, also took place in the relationship between mentors and BTs. The illustration that appears in Appendix 1 demonstrates these parallel motivational processes.

The findings of this study further reinforce those of previous research in which support in psychological needs was found to promote senses of need satisfaction and autonomous motivation, which in turn promoted a range of outcomes among various populations, including school pupils (Kaplan et al., 2014), veteran teachers (Aelterman et al., 2016), and pre-service teachers (Kaplan & Madjar, 2017). The importance of supporting needs was also demonstrated among BTs (Kaplan, 2021a, 2021b, 2022). It was found, for example, that support by facilitators of BT workshops and by mentors affected the BTs' autonomous motivation and satisfaction with the course, leading also to a sense of teaching competence and reduced burnout (e.g. Kaplan, 2021b, 2022). Since the current study was qualitative, we do not discuss effects; yet the qualitative analysis pointed to the association between need support and a range of outcomes among both BTs and mentors.

Several explanations may account for these motivational mechanisms. It seems that the positive emotional-motivational experience in the course may demonstrate to the mentors the importance of supporting needs. In addition, the experience of need satisfaction may convince mentors of the effectiveness of a need-supportive environment and cause a desire to change their style of mentoring (Aelterman et al., 2016).

The current study highlights the importance of supporting not only students and young teachers, but also mentor teachers. As Katz et al. (2011) indicated, it is also important to provide support to those who are in a supporting role. Thus, in order to support their students, teachers must feel that their own needs are supported (Roth et al., 2007); in our case, in order to support BTs, the mentors must feel that their own needs are supported.

The findings showed a paradigm shift among the teachers trained for mentoring: from a traditional paradigm of hierarchical relationships and knowledge transmission to an autonomous and relational paradigm (Pennanen et al., 2018). By paradigm we refer to basic assumptions, beliefs, and world view that direct an individual's acts. Exposure to the new paradigm stirred participants' thinking and changed their ideas on mentoring. They understood the meaning of supporting the teachers' psychological needs, replacing the accepted hierarchy in a mentor-mentee connection with a more egalitarian approach, in which the BT's voices also count. Let us remember that the participants of this study belong to a hierarchical collectivist society that is undergoing substantial changes (Oplatka & El-Kuran, 2022), making the shifted paradigm even more meaningful, as it contradicts the accepted norms of their society.

In addition to a paradigm shift, teachers reported the growth of autonomous motivation, which, according to the literature, thrives in an environment that supports psychological needs (Ryan, 2023). The teachers' initial motivation was not measured in this study, but the teachers themselves clearly reported increased motivation. Together, these developments point to a process of internalization (Deci & Ryan, 2000), reflecting meaningful learning and integrating the new ideas about mentoring into the role identity of the teachers as mentors.

Our recommendation is to base mentor training on SDT and promote participants' autonomy. One might argue that culturally, autonomy is a Western need that is not deemed important in collectivist cultures, in which the need to belong is emphasized (Liu & Flick, 2019). This study, however, demonstrated the applicability of the theory in Bedouin-Arab society, which is defined as collectivist, patriarchal, and hierarchical (Oplatka & El-Kuran, 2022). The findings indicated that teachers in such a collectivist-hierarchical society could be trained for autonomy-supportive mentoring and promote methods and perceptions based on this notion. This insight joins findings of previous studies that demonstrated the applicability of the theory in collectivist cultures such as China, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and others (e.g. Nalipay et al., 2020) as well as in the Arab society in Israel (Kaplan et al., 2014).

One might argue that a teaching or mentoring style depends on one's personality and cannot be taught. Yet research and programs designed by Reeve and colleagues have shown that teachers can be trained to support students' autonomy (Reeve et al., 2022). Other studies have demonstrated that mentors can be trained to support the autonomy and needs of their mentees (Weber-Main et al., 2019). This body of research is joined by the current study.

It seems then that even though the teachers' everyday life is not characterized by autonomy support, it is indeed a basic and universal need. While the population of the current study was exclusively Arab, we maintain that the ideas presented here are applicable to other populations as well. In our

experience, mentor teachers from various cultures start their mentoring role holding traditional ideas regarding teaching, learning, and mentoring. The model of autonomy-supportive mentoring may promote a change for these teachers as well.

Both the mentors and the BTs mentioned the importance of the support provided by the various partners of the MIT: the town's education department, the Ministry of Education, school principals, and other community representatives. The participation of all these partners contributed to the teachers' need satisfaction and motivation. This finding joins ideas about the role of eco-systems in mentoring processes (Heikkinen, 2020), which view mentoring as a social practice taking place in a certain ecological context. The MIT does not operate in an empty space but is part of the eco-system of its town and linked to a variety of stakeholders, and systems that have various links with each other. These systems have mutual influences (Heikkinen, 2020). Thus, processes and contents from the MIT are affected by this context, and in turn affect the mentors and BTs. The uniqueness of the MIT lies in the connections formed between the various figures and organizations related to teachers' induction (Kaplan et al., 2022).

An additional context affecting the motivational processes among mentors and BTs is the MIT itself. The MIT hosted community meetings attended by mentors, interns, and new teachers, as well as officials and policymakers. The study demonstrated the important role of these sessions for the participants, as they strengthened their sense of need satisfaction and their autonomous motivation. These findings are consistent with previous studies that examined the contributions of the MIT to mentors and BTs (Kaplan et al., 2021, 2022).

The significance of organizational support systems has been presented in previous research (e.g. Thomas et al., 2019). In its essence, the MIT is a learning community of professionals (Vangrieken et al., 2017), 'whose members share a language, vision, goals, experiences, and values, and which promotes structuring of professional identity through reflective dialogue' (Kaplan et al., 2022, p. 153). The findings of this study provided support to this approach.

Several limitations of the study should be noted. First, it relied only on the perceptions of its participants – mentors, BTs, officials, and policymakers. Second, it examined only MIT activity and did not investigate directly its impact on teachers' schoolwork. Future research could explore the MIT's contributions to participants' teaching and integration into the school through observations and interviews with principals, colleagues, discipline coordinators, and others. Additionally, although the qualitative findings complement results from quantitative studies, it would be beneficial to test the motivational mechanisms identified here in a quantitative study with larger sample size. Such research would provide another perspective on the specific contributions of different figures (MIT facilitators, principals, mentors, directors of education, veteran teachers, etc.) to satisfying the needs of BTs and mentors.

Summary

Drawing on the findings of this study, the SDT-based mentoring approach is recommended as a foundational perspective for mentoring processes. It emphasizes relationships that foster need satisfaction among all partners in the mentoring process. Such experiences may promote the internalization of an autonomy-oriented approach embedded in the mentoring relationships, which characterizes the ASMM. They may also foster autonomous mentoring motivation and the acquisition of autonomy-supportive mentoring practices aligned with this approach. We hope that the study will inform policymakers responsible for delineating the nature of mentoring systems in Israel and worldwide.

Disclosure statement

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