The Official Journal of the International Society for Comparative Physical Education and Sport

INTERNATIONAL SPORTS STUDIES

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Physical Education Teachers as Homeroom Teachers: Professional Identity, Perceptions, and Implementations

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Keywords:
quality education, teacher well-being, sustainable education, homeroom teacher, conflict management in educational setting

Recommended Citation:
Zach, S., Natani, A., Shalev, S., & Ophir, M. (2025). Physical Education Teachers as Homeroom Teachers: Professional Identity, Perceptions, and Implementations. *International Sports Studies*, 47(2), 30-51, htpps://doi.org/10.69665/iss.v47i2.47

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Abstract

This study examined the perceptions of Physical Education (PE) teachers who are also homeroom teachers regarding their professional identity and methods for transforming perceptions into actions. A mixed methods design was employed. 128 PE teachers working as homeroom teachers completed a questionnaire examining perceptions of their professional identity and tasks as homeroom advisers. For the qualitative phase, four focus groups of PE teachers identified as homeroom teachers (n = 28) were interviewed to gain deeper insight into the results. Quantitative findings showed that once PE teachers became homeroom teachers, they developed a strong dual-role identity as teachers, in addition to their professional teacher identity. They extended the scope of educational values and became more holistically oriented in their attitude. Conversely, the qualitative results revealed that they could more clearly see the student's worldview beyond the physical aspects of sport and movement. They were empathetic towards the students and more oriented towards creating a positive climate with social acceptance. In their view, a deeper understanding of the complexities of student life enhances student-teacher communication and increases the likelihood of achieving educational goals. They also became an integral part of the staff, affecting their centrality and sustainability in the school. The discussion elaborates on how PE teacher education programs should integrate specific preparation for becoming a homeroom teacher within their curriculum. Such preparation would equip them with tools to cope with the conflicts, dilemmas, and difficulties they will encounter.

Introduction

In countries with a homeroom teacher system in K–12, such as China, Japan, South Korea, Israel, and certain Western nations like Denmark, France, the USA, and the United Kingdom, there are two primary teaching roles (Popper-Giveon & Shayshon, 2017): the subject teacher and the homeroom teacher. The subject teacher instructs in specific academic disciplines. In contrast, the homeroom teacher oversees a broader range of responsibilities, including organisational, educational, social, and administrative tasks related to the students in their class (Gosen, 2015). This investigation is a national case study of the Israeli educational system that explicitly examines the role of high school PE teachers who also serve as homeroom teachers. By focusing on these dual responsibilities, the study underscores the importance of PE teachers in classroom management and student support. This

research will provide insights into how their roles can be refined and updated to meet learners' evolving needs better.

Role Theory offers a valuable framework for analysing the multifaceted responsibilities of PE teachers, particularly when they are tasked with dual roles such as teaching PE and serving as homeroom or advisory teachers. Role ambiguity occurs when individuals lack clear information about their job responsibilities, expectations, or role scope, leading to uncertainty and stress. For PE teachers who also serve as homeroom or advisory teachers, this ambiguity can be particularly pronounced. The dual nature of their responsibilities, balancing the physical development focus of PE with the academic and socio-emotional support expected in homeroom settings, can create conflicting expectations and unclear boundaries. Recent research highlights that such ambiguity negatively impacts teachers' subjective well-being, teaching efficacy, and their sense of connection to the school community (Macovei et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these issues, as rapid transitions to remote instruction blurred role definitions and increased uncertainty (von Haaren-Mack et al., 2020). Addressing role ambiguity through clear communication, defined responsibilities, and supportive professional development is crucial in mitigating its adverse effects.

Role strain occurs when the demands of multiple roles become overwhelming, leading to stress and decreased job performance. PE teachers often experience role strain when juggling instructional duties with additional responsibilities such as coaching or administrative tasks. A study by Pitney et al. (2008) found that dual-role PE teachers and athletic trainers reported significant role strain, primarily due to extended working hours and the complexity of managing multiple responsibilities. Furthermore, role conflict, where the expectations of different roles are incompatible, can lead to tension and difficulty in effectively fulfilling all role demands. Iannucci and MacPhail (2018) observed that PE teachers who concurrently teach another subject experience inter-role conflict, necessitating strategies such as role prioritisation to manage competing demands. These challenges underscore the importance of organisational support and clear role expectations in enabling teachers to navigate their multifaceted roles effectively.

The role of the homeroom teacher, as presented by the Israel Ministry of Education (MoE, 2024), comprises two types of duties: classroom instruction and classroom management. The homeroom teacher is a leader who employs a two-pronged approach, combining the technical-managerial and emotional aspects (Leitwood et al., 2020; Timor, 2017). As a manager, the homeroom teacher oversees technical and organisational tasks, including monitoring student lateness and absenteeism, coordinating the number of lessons delivered by the entire teaching staff, ensuring sufficient time between exam dates, and maintaining students' and the classroom's proper appearance. This role should be regularly revised to remain relevant to the changing needs of both students and society (Volansky, 2020). Teachers maintain a unique role in managing emotions within the classroom, both in teacher-student and student-student interactions. Additionally, they are also expected to encourage and sustain various forms of collaboration with parents, such as policy setting, parent instruction and volunteering, data exchange, and fundraising efforts. Parental involvement positively influences students' academic achievement, motivation for learning, and self-esteem, while contributing to reductions in school violence and absenteeism (Childs & Grooms, 2018; Lesneskie & Block, 2017).

Having teachers equipped with social and emotional competencies to manage a variety of complex interactions with students, both collectively and individually,

is imperative (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Jennings and Greenberg proposed a conceptual model that describes the prosocial classroom, a model of teacher social and emotional competence in conjunction with classroom and student outcomes. Following this model, studies have noted the relevance of emotions in the learning process. While negative emotions hinder students' ability to focus on schoolwork and attain high academic achievement (e.g., Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016; Sainio et al., 2019), positive emotions support academic achievement and generate better learning opportunities (e.g., Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016; Schweder, 2020). For example, Kashy-Rosenbaum and colleagues (2018) examined 73 classes in grades 7-12 in Israel and found that homeroom teacher support and a positive emotional climate in the classroom predicted positive academic achievements. They suggested a model similar to that of Jennings and Greenberg (2009), which both models contend is tied to teachers' social and emotional competence, which is essential for establishing and sustaining positive student–teacher interactions, managing classrooms effectively, and creating the conditions necessary for high-quality social and emotional learning.

Rhodes (1994) compared the duties of homeroom teachers in the USA with the class atmosphere of their Japanese counterparts. In both cases, teachers meet with the class for at least one hour per week. They ensure that every child attends school regularly and makes progress in accordance with the program goals for all subjects in which they are enrolled. The teachers' responsibility is to ensure the students' social and emotional welfare is maintained. Additionally, they should be in touch with the student's parents and encourage them to be positively involved with their child's school life. Everyday activities are essential, but a particular emphasis should be placed on the weekly, one-hour education class with the homeroom teacher. The homeroom teacher is a familiar figure in other countries as well, including China (e.g., Wang, 1997), Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Israel, Canada, and Argentina (Shi & Leuwerke, 2010).

The Hour of Education

"The hour of education" is a mandatory one-hour lesson in the Israeli curriculum from first to twelfth grade and is among the homeroom teacher's responsibilities. This lesson is one of the core subjects taught in schools. Seven goals have been set by the Israel MoE (2024) for the hour of education lesson: (1) To nurture the class as a social group, and to have a respectful and protected discourse in response to emotional and social needs and values of students in the class; (2) To serve as a framework for dealing with various routine and/or risky life situations, and to strengthen mental well-being; (3) To enable students to experience individual and group self-management processes while maintaining a democratic basis; (4) To serve as a framework for discussing values concerning the class's day-to-day events and issues on the public agenda; (5) To develop moral judgment, and to build a personal value system that will strengthen the students' ability to sustain informed processes of choice in their lives; (6) To prepare students for social and cultural activities, including their planning and entrepreneurial skills; and (7) To conduct a reflective discourse for processing emotional and cognitive reactions to the students' social and cultural experiences after they occur. Hence, education classes enable teachers to lead educational and social processes, as well as value-driven discussions, and to influence the classroom climate. The classroom, as a social structure, is a significant factor in the development of students' personal, gender, group, cultural, civic, and national identities. At its best, the educational lesson integrates students as active partners in the educational processes in their classroom.

Nevertheless, a study that collected data from homeroom teachers in 20 regions in Russia and classified them according to their teaching styles (Polyakov, Stryukova, & Krivtsova, 2018) determined that about half of the teachers used the direct instruction model, in which they encourage students to remain passive, while the remaining half used the cooperative teaching model, in which they call on students to be actively involved. No associations were made concerning learning or social outcomes.

It follows that teachers' roles and duties are reflected in their professional identities, a multidimensional construct in which the personal and the social are interwoven (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017; Richardson & Watt, 2018). Professional identity is considered a developmental, dynamic, and fluid concept that is continually changing (Fomunyam, 2016). It is characterised by a sense of belonging and identification with the profession (Richardson & Watt, 2018). Teachers' professional identity comprises sub-identities, such as knowledge, pedagogical proficiency, and didactic expertise (Kozminski & Klavier, 2021). Congruence between the sub-identities will lead to a harmonious balance and identity, accompanied by positive feelings among teachers regarding their professional identity.

Building a professional identity in teacher education during the year of induction (i.e., the first year of teaching) is a central axis reflected in theoretical and practical courses, teaching experience, internship workshops, and advanced training (Caza & Creary, 2016). Vocational teachers have additional roles in middle and high schools, with the most common role being the homeroom teacher. Like their peers, PE teachers are also offered the role of the homeroom teacher. Teachers are usually integrated into this role with little preparation and may act intuitively. To the best of our knowledge, the literature lacks information on the uniqueness of the PE teacher as a homeroom teacher.

Although the goals of the hour of education and the role of homeroom teachers have been clearly defined, non-systematic observations and informal reports from students and teachers reveal significant variability in their implementation. This raises questions about the ecological validity of the homeroom hour of education and the extent to which its objectives are achieved. Consequently, this study aims to (1) examine the perceptions of PE teachers who are homeroom teachers concerning their professional identity and (2) examine their methods of transforming perceptions into actions. The findings may shed light on the value of tailored training, as currently incorporated into teacher education programs in Israel, and underscore the importance of developing a strong professional identity among prospective PE teachers. Additionally, the insights are designed to support educators as they progress in their careers.

Methods and Materials

This study used a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design. This design establishes a parallel execution of the quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative and qualitative data are analysed separately, providing cross-validation and confirming findings from the two parts of the study (Almeida, 2018). Both quantitative and qualitative data were integrated and interpreted.

Quantitative Phase

Participants. Participants were 128 PE teachers (males = 39; females = 89) aged 25-66 (M = 45.5; S.D. = 4.2) who completed the study questionnaire. Three-quarters of the graduates were from the same college, and the rest were from four other colleges with PE programs in teacher education. Their teaching experience was distributed as follows: 52 beginning teachers (1-5 years), 76 veterans (6+ years); 63 with 0-3 years of experience as a homeroom teacher, 32 with 4-10 years, 19

with 11-20, and 12 with more than 20 years of experience. Two-thirds taught in high school, and one-third taught in middle school.

Instrumentation

Questionnaire. A questionnaire was developed by the authors of this study, which comprised both quantitative and qualitative parts. The quantitative part includes nine questions on a Likert-type scale (1 = not at all; 5 = very much) concerning the participants' habits and educational perceptions: Q1 = A College suitable preparation; Q2 = Investment vs. reward; Q3 = HT as the primary professional duty; Q4 = The extent of your lesson goal achievement; Q5 = Generally, to what extent education lessons achieve their goals; Q6 = Self-involvement in school life; Q7 = Student engagement in preparation of the lesson; Q8 = Student involvement in the lesson; Q9 = Meaningfulness of the lessons.

The development of the questionnaire and the open-ended questions for the interviews was grounded in the official role definition document for homeroom teachers published by the Israeli Ministry of Education, as well as the authors' professional expertise as homeroom teachers, PE instructors, and experienced pedagogical mentors in teacher education programs. The initial draft was collaboratively constructed by the authors and subsequently reviewed by a panel of eight teacher educators from an academic college and five PE teachers who also serve as homeroom teachers. The feedback obtained informed revisions to improve item clarity, relevance, and alignment with the intended construct, thereby establishing both content validity and expert validity. The final versions of the questionnaire and interview questions were written in Hebrew, the native language of both the authors and the target population. To evaluate the reliability of the instruments, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 23 participants (13 females and 10 males) drawn from the target population. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients for the questionnaire sections ranging from 0.76 to 0.88, indicating acceptable to good reliability ($\alpha = 0.76$-0.88).

We chose the odd-numbered scale for several reasons. First, **o**dd-numbered scales include a midpoint or neutral option, which can be valuable if you want to allow respondents to express neutrality or ambivalence. This is particularly useful if respondents have mixed feelings or are genuinely undecided about their choice. In addition, it reduces forced choice. Second, odd-numbered scales help avoid forcing respondents into choosing a side when they may not have a strong opinion. This can lead to more honest and accurate data, as respondents are less likely to "lean" toward an option simply because they are uncomfortable with the choices provided. Lastly, it increases data range: Odd scales allow you to capture a broader range of responses, including those who might otherwise fall into a "no opinion" or "neutral" category. This can provide a fuller picture of opinion distribution and attitudes (e.g., Chyung et al., 2017; Colman & Norris, 1997; Kulas & Stachowski, 2013; Nadler et al., 2015).

The qualitative part comprises 15 open-ended questions, each of which can be answered with a brief response. Examples include:

- "Is there any added value to the PE teacher as a homeroom teacher?"
- "What is the importance of the homeroom teacher?"
- "Briefly detail five appropriate goals to achieve in the education lesson."
- "What helps you in achieving these goals, and what hinders or prevents you?"

To test the questionnaire's external reliability, 23 PE homeroom teachers filled out the questionnaire twice, two weeks apart. Reliability was demonstrated over time using test-retest (.79-.88).

Qualitative Phase

Participants. An email was sent to PE teachers who served as homeroom teachers, requesting volunteers for the study. Four heterogeneous focus group interviews were conducted, each with seven participants (comprising males and females, inexperienced and very experienced). The participants had 5-22 years of experience as PE and homeroom teachers.

Focus group interviews. Interviews with the four focus groups, each comprising seven participants, were conducted via Zoom. Focus groups offer distinct advantages over individual interviews in qualitative research, particularly when exploring shared experiences and collective perceptions. The interactive nature of focus groups fosters dynamic discussions, enabling participants to build on one another's ideas and yielding richer, more nuanced data. This group interaction can uncover insights that might remain hidden in one-on-one settings (Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021). For instance, Guest et al. (2017) conducted a randomised study comparing focus groups and individual interviews. They found that specific sensitive topics appeared more frequently in focus groups, suggesting that the group setting can encourage participants to share experiences they might withhold in individual interviews. The study concluded that focus groups could elicit a broader range of information due to the synergistic effects of group discussions.

Additionally, a focus group was conducted via Zoom to facilitate logistical coordination among participants, allowing for remote access regardless of geographic location. This online format enabled efficient scheduling and facilitated broader participation. Microphones were intentionally left unmuted to foster an open, interactive environment, and participants were encouraged to contribute actively to the discussion. When a participant did not engage voluntarily, the moderator proactively invited them to share their perspectives to promote inclusivity and comprehensive dialogue.

They included questions regarding participants' perceptions, feelings, and thoughts about their duties as homeroom teachers; how they implemented their ideas into practice; and what they suggested to include in teacher preparation programs to better prepare student teachers for these duties. The interview was semi-structured, with questions like:

- How do you perceive the homeroom teacher's importance and contribution to the individual students and the class as a group?
- What is the content of the lessons?
- Who chooses it?
- How are the lessons conducted?
- How do you cope with large classes?
- How do you reach each and every child?

Nevertheless, the interviews were flexible enough to follow the interviewees' examples, emphases, and suggestions that arose during the conversation.

Procedure and Data Analysis

After receiving permission from the Academic College at Wingate's institutional review board (IRB) (No. 238), the study began. The questionnaire was distributed via email, with a link to Google Docs, to all PE teachers who serve as cooperating teachers at the College of PE Teacher Education. Additionally, a snowball technique was employed to recruit more participants. We collapsed the 5-point Likert scale into a 3-point scale, grouping responses 1 and 2 as "Disagree," 3 as "Neutral," and 4 and 5 as "Agree." This is done, as suggested by others (Jeong & Lee, 2016; Van Dusen & Nissen, 2020), for several reasons. First, it simplifies data interpretation by reducing readers' cognitive load, making patterns in the data more apparent and easier to communicate. Second, most respondents select extreme values; merging adjacent categories creates more balanced distributions. Finally, from a theoretical standpoint, distinctions between

adjacent Likert categories may not always be meaningful, particularly if the difference between "agree" and "strongly agree" does not reflect a substantively different attitude.

Two focus groups met via Zoom for 90 minutes each. The first author moderated the discussion. However, all four authors participated in these meetings, contributing by asking clarifying questions, prompting further elaboration, and raising questions involving dilemmas and ideas. Conversations were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Trustworthiness

We conducted thematic content analysis to interpret qualitative data from open-ended questions in the questionnaire and for the data generated from the focus group interviews, following the six phases outlined by others (Nowell et al., 2017; Stahl & King, 2020): familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This structured process enabled us to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences. By systematically coding and categorising the data, we ensured a rigorous and transparent analysis that enhanced the credibility and depth of our qualitative findings.

To establish trustworthiness, we applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. We achieved credibility through investigator triangulation, with four researchers independently coding the data before discussing and reconciling differences. Transferability was addressed by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research context, allowing readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed audit trail documenting all stages of the research process, enabling external reviewers to evaluate the consistency of our study. Confirmability was established by demonstrating that the findings were grounded in participants' responses rather than in researcher bias, and supported by the audit trail and reflexive documentation. By systematically attending to these criteria, we enhanced the rigour and trustworthiness of our thematic analysis of the focus group data.

The textual analysis was initially conducted independently by each author. Subsequently, we engaged in paired discussions about our analyses, generating themes that were partly unique to individual researchers and partly shared. In the third phase, we convened as a quartet, with each pair presenting their thematic developments. During this stage, additional themes were generated, as not every pair had identified identical thematic elements. This methodological approach preserved the distinctiveness of individual interpretations while simultaneously facilitating consensus regarding shared themes. This multi-stage analytical process aligns with the investigator triangulation described by Nowell et al. (2017), thereby enhancing the credibility of our thematic analysis through multiple analyst perspectives.

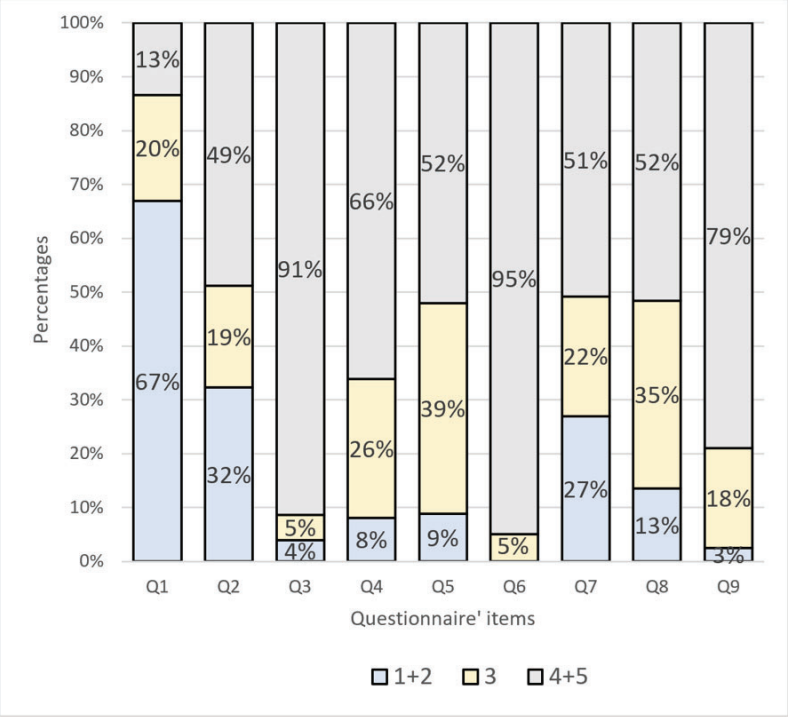
Results

The results are presented according to the research procedure: first, the quantitative part; then the results of open-ended questions; and finally, a description of the themes generated in the qualitative part. The interviewees' perceptions and beliefs were presented first, followed by their descriptions of the implementation methods.

Quantitative Results

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of participants' answers to the quantitative section of the questionnaire._Teachers felt that college preparation for the duties of homeroom teachers was not satisfactory. Additionally, they reported that their effort in their work was not congruent with the reward they received.

Figure 1. Distribution of teachers' perceptions concerning their roles/professional identities



*Q1 = A College suitable preparation; Q2 = Investment Vs reward; Q3 = HT as the main professional duty; Q4 = The extent of your lesson goal achievement; Q5 = Generally, to what extent education lessons achieve their goals; Q6 = Self-involvement in school life; Q7 = Student engagement in preparation of the lesson; Q8 = Student involvement in the lesson; Q9 = Meaningfulness of the lessons

Another interesting result, as demonstrated in Figure 1, was the low student engagement rate in the education lesson, whether in preparation or during the lesson itself. In addition, participants attached great importance to their role.

In open-ended responses about their perceived roles, the metaphors "mother," "father," “I am everything for them," and even "God" were prevalent in about one-quarter of responses. PE teachers believe their role significantly contributes to students' well-being by fostering their abilities and encouraging aspirations for improvement. They also act as intermediaries between students and school authorities, enhancing the classroom's positive social and emotional climate. The top five goals of the 128 participants were cultivating class cohesiveness, empowering students' self-identity and self-efficacy, clarifying values, teaching respect for others, conducting a respectful dialogue, and fostering life skills. About 85% of participants thought the educational lesson was important, but about half did not believe they had achieved the lesson's goals.

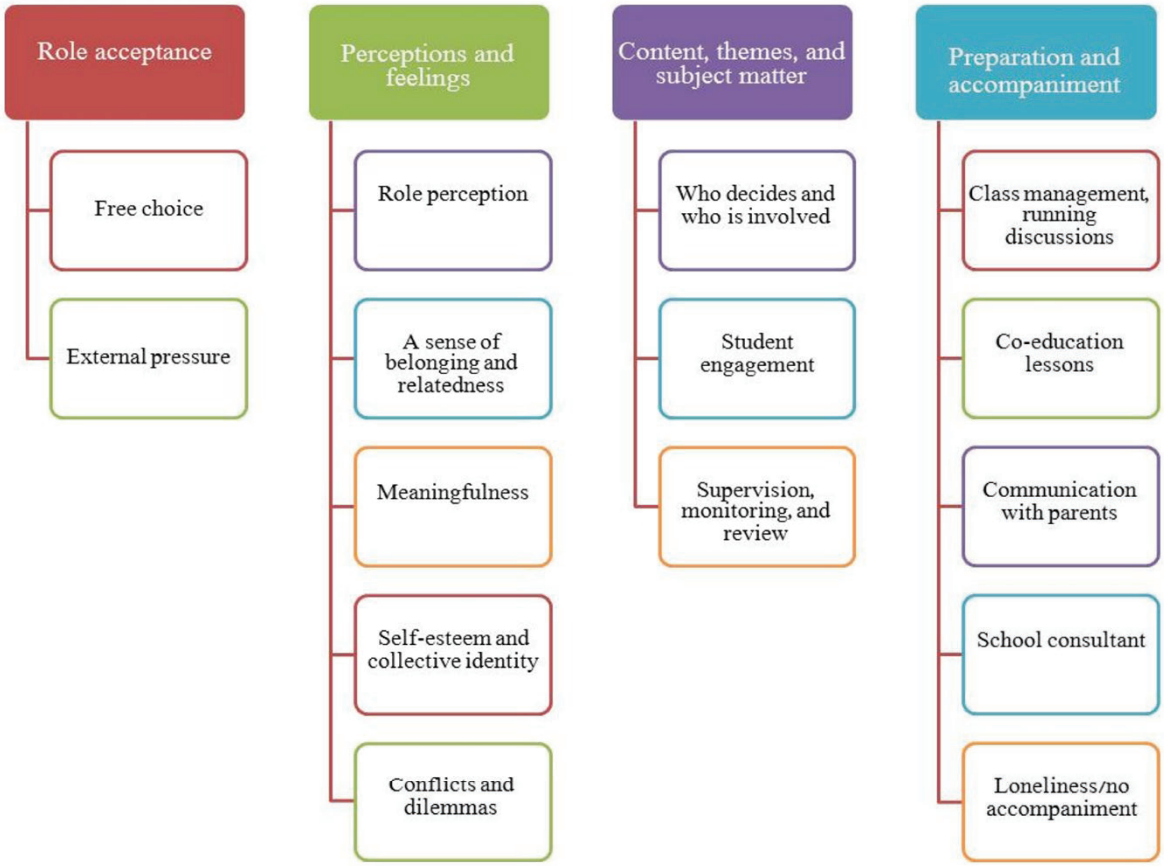
Qualitative Results

Thematic Analysis of the Interviews

The analysis of interviews by the four authors revealed four main themes that represent the issues that preoccupied the homeroom teachers, with sub-themes that were generated from a deeper analysis (see Figure 2): (1) role acceptance, (2) perceptions and feelings, (3) content, themes, and subject matter, and (4) preparation and accompaniment.

Role acceptance. Refers to the extent to which teachers acknowledge, internalise, and identify with the roles and responsibilities assigned to them within the school setting. In the context of PE, teachers who also serve as homeroom teachers must recognise and accept the dual professional identities associated with both positions. This includes understanding the expectations, duties, and values inherent in each role and integrating these aspects into one's professional self-concept. High role acceptance is associated with greater job satisfaction, commitment, and effectiveness in both teaching domains, as teachers feel confident and motivated to fulfil the diverse requirements of their positions.

Figure 2. Thematic map: Main themes and sub-themes



Free choice. In the context of PE, teachers' autonomy refers to the degree of autonomy teachers have in making decisions about instructional methods, activities, and classroom management. When teachers experience free choice, they can select or adapt content, structure lessons, and respond to students' needs based on their professional judgment rather than strict external directives. This autonomy is linked to greater job satisfaction, motivation, and a stronger sense of professional identity, as teachers feel empowered to shape their work environment and teaching practices in line with their values and expertise (Bennie et al., 2017; Leisterer & Paschold, 2022; Zach et al., 2015).

External pressure. On the other hand, involves demands or constraints imposed by school policies, administrative requirements, standardised curricula, or societal expectations. When teachers face high external pressure, their ability to exercise professional autonomy is limited, and they may feel compelled to follow prescribed routines or meet external standards, even when these conflict with their pedagogical beliefs or students' needs. This can undermine role acceptance, as teachers

may feel less connected to their work or less able to fully embrace their professional identity (Bartholomew et al., 2014).

Participants explained how they became homeroom teachers, including who was involved in this decision and to what extent they were free to accept or reject it. Most participants reported that the school principal approached them very early in their teaching experience and asserted that they took on the role of homeroom teacher, which made them feel obligated to do so. Only two interviewees claimed they decided to take on this role willingly, of their own free choice.

There are not many choices. First, in terms of a job, if you want to work full-time, sometimes with no choice, you also "take education." There is a lot of pressure on novice teachers who enter the system to educate, not just on PE teachers, of course. When I first arrived at the school 11 years ago, the principal put pressure on me to become an educator. I refused to do so until the second year. I felt that I was not ready at that time for such a mission.

Perceptions and feelings. This theme refers to how PE teachers interpret, understand, and emotionally respond to their professional roles, classroom environments, and interactions with students. Perceptions encompass teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and expectations, which are shaped by their experiences, professional background, and the broader educational context. These perceptions influence how teachers approach instruction, manage classroom dynamics, and set goals for student development (Isyabella et al., 2024; Opstoel et al., 2022). Feelings refer to the emotional states, such as joy, frustration, satisfaction, or anxiety, that teachers experience in relation to their work and the challenges they face (Barker et al., 2020; Petsos et al., 2019; Simonton et al., 2021).

Role perception refers to how PE teachers interpret their professional obligations and their potential to influence students' academic, emotional, and social development. As previous literature has shown, teachers' metaphoric self-perceptions – such as "parent," "mentor," or "protector" – reveal deeply internalised educational commitments that transcend disciplinary boundaries (Isyabella et al., 2024; Opstoel et al., 2022). Teachers perceive their role as educators as more important, with a greater likelihood of influencing the educational processes they deem necessary. They use metaphors such as "I am like a mother, a father, and a friend to my students," "I am God for them," and "They know I will be there for them through fire and water." They take responsibility for monitoring students' achievements and perceive themselves as mediators among students and between students and parents. They encourage students to strive for excellence and take responsibility for creating an atmosphere that promotes cooperation and inclusion in the classroom.

My perception of the role of the educator evolves from year to year. As time goes on, the answers I have to give also change. There is the logistical part that I am a connecting thread between myself and the students' parents, the other teachers in school and among themselves. And there is the emotional aspect, which is more central – to be there, to listen, to support, to advise, and to reflect the truth even when it is unpleasant.

A sense of belonging and relatedness. This sub-theme highlights the socio-professional integration experienced by PE teachers when they assume the role of homeroom teacher. Transitioning from marginal departmental spaces (e.g., gymnasiums) to central teaching roles fosters a stronger connection with colleagues and institutional processes (du Plessis & Sunde, 2017). The shift aligns with findings that collegial networks strengthen professional identity and organisational commitment (Popper-Giveon & Shayshon, 2017). PE teachers typically have their own room for staff

meetings, usually located in the gym. Therefore, they can develop a sense of collegiality.

Nevertheless, that situation has mixed outcomes because they are less involved with the other staff members and the life in the teachers' general room. PE teachers who are homeroom teachers, however, have regular meetings with all the staff members. They feel that, alongside their role as educators, they are more connected to the daily life of the school and feel a greater sense of belonging to the school, as described below:

From the moment I started educating, I saw the role of classroom education as something that connected me much more to the school. Of course, there is more work with this role, but the sense of belonging is amazing; it makes it something completely different.

Meaningfulness. Teachers articulated a heightened sense of meaning in their work as homeroom educators, particularly when they could influence students' lives beyond physical achievement. This aligns with Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim's (2020) argument that teacher empathy and emotional engagement enhance professional fulfilment and student outcomes. When the teachers talked about meaningfulness, they distinguished between what is personally meaningful to them and what is meaningful to their students. For teachers, the ability to be empathetic and supportive, to instil a positive learning atmosphere that leads to student self-improvement, and to earn their students' appreciation was considered meaningful. However, achieving this level of meaningfulness is very demanding, as can be seen in the following example:

Classroom education is very meaningful to me, but as it becomes more meaningful, it also becomes more intense. I think the more you give of yourself, the more involved you are. Sometimes you can be very happy, and sometimes you can be very disappointed and take things hard. I can say I'm coming to school for my education students right now. They give the meaning to my duty. It is very significant for me; I really like them.

In addition, according to the interviewees' perceptions, students consider teachers meaningful when they feel comfortable and open in their presence, feel they can trust them, and perceive that teachers acknowledge their value.

They know that they can trust me, and that means a lot to them. They feel open to sharing ideas, feelings, and experiences, and to ask for advice and to listen very carefully. They know that I am there for them and not against them. It gives them confidence.

Self-esteem and collective identity. This sub-theme addresses the perceived professional marginalisation of PE teachers and how homeroom responsibilities help mitigate it. As noted in prior research (Mäkelä et al., 2014), the dual-role context enhances teachers' visibility and credibility within the broader school community, thereby contributing to a more cohesive professional identity. PE teachers believe they have an advantage over other teachers in school. They asserted that sport and movement lessons convey endless social-emotional situations in which students' strengths and weaknesses, personality traits, and social status can be reflected. Moreover, since academic achievements are not the focus in PE lessons and the usual evaluation scale is not utilised to assess their performance, students do not feel threatened, as presented in the following quote:

PE teachers are charismatic, with a dominant presence in school; they invest a lot of effort in school. But what makes them unique is their close relationship with the students. They have the best potential in school to understand and support the students.

Conflicts and dilemmas. This multifaceted sub-theme encompasses ethical, interpersonal, and professional tensions

arising from the dual roles. Teachers described internal conflicts such as balancing loyalty between students and colleagues, negotiating family responsibilities, and responding to ethical dilemmas involving confidentiality. Such challenges highlight the moral weight of the homeroom teacher role (Zarra, 2016) and its psychological toll (Simonton et al., 2021). Two colliding roles: PE teacher versus homeroom teacher. They contended that being a homeroom teacher requires significant time and effort, particularly given the role of physical education. For example, the conflict between loyalty to colleagues and students is described as follows:

As an educator, I encounter many difficulties between students and other teachers. On the one hand, I have to be loyal to teachers because they are my colleagues. On the other hand, there are teachers who make mistakes – not intentionally but because they come with different perceptions and sometimes their approach is different.

Another example is the dilemma of balancing emotional load and work between family and work. Some of the teachers expressed their frustration regarding this issue, as in the following example:

I have discovered that many of my emotional difficulties that I experience at home towards my children and husband stem from working as an educator. On this background there are many fights at home. I feel that I don't know how to regulate the time between work and home.

Another example concerns morals and ethics. Teachers' students engage in both close and open communication, fostering confidence (Zarra, 2016). Therefore, when teachers are privy to student secrets, they can encounter unethical, immoral, or even risky behaviour. This loyalty dilemma is described in the following example:

There are things we must not leave with us. For example, as soon as I hear from a student about a sexual assault or something like that, it is my duty to tell the child that I am going to the school consultant, so we can both help. I inform every child that if something serious has occurred I will have to share it with other professionals.

To what degree should parents be involved? On many occasions, dilemmas arose concerning what to keep between the teacher and the child, and to what extent to include the parents, to what extent to recruit parents with their children's discipline problems and academic problems, as stated in the following quote:

There are cases where the parents also give up and get to a point where they are already having a hard time dealing with their children, and then we find ourselves coping alone.

Content, themes, and subject matter. The theme of "Content, Themes, and Subject Matter" reflects a central axis in understanding the pedagogical constraints and affordances experienced by PE teachers serving as homeroom teachers. In the present study, this theme captures the tension between top-down curricular mandates and the educator's capacity for contextual adaptation and responsiveness. Although Israeli policy defines the weekly educational lesson as a structured space for addressing students' social, emotional, and civic development, the findings reveal that PE teachers, who often function as homeroom teachers, often experience limited autonomy in selecting lesson content. Instead, predetermined topics – such as substance abuse, exam anxiety, or time management – are handed down by school counsellors or coordinators, leaving little room for tailoring the curriculum to the evolving needs of a particular class. This lack of professional agency stands in contrast to contemporary pedagogical models that advocate for teacher autonomy and the co-construction of meaning with students (Wang, 2016).

Furthermore, while the educational discourse increasingly promotes student voice as essential to fostering engagement,

well-being, and democratic values, the study found that students were rarely involved in the selection or design of lesson content—an omission that may undercut both motivation and relevance (Leisterer & Paschold, 2022). These findings suggest a structural misalignment between the normative goals of homeroom education and the institutional mechanisms that govern its implementation. As such, this theme not only illustrates the complexity of translating educational policy into meaningful classroom practice but also calls for a re-examination of how teacher professionalism and student participation are conceptualised in homeroom contexts. Who decides and who is involved – This sub-theme highlights the tension between top-down curricular planning and teacher autonomy in education lessons. While national guidelines (MoE, 2024) outline key topics, the rigid framework restricts teachers' capacity for responsive, individualised instruction (Wang, 2016). This disconnect undermines pedagogical innovation and limits alignment with classroom needs. The content, themes, and subject matter are usually dictated in a top-down manner; however, the teacher finds ways to adapt the themes to the class, whether they do it with peers or independently, and the variety regarding these interpretations is clear:

Education lessons are not something that a teacher can determine what their content will be; there are perhaps only 10% of education lessons a year that the teacher is independent to decide upon. In August we build the program together with the counselor, social coordinator, and myself as a coordinator, and we publish a booklet for all the educators. There is an advisory program of the Ministry of Education and we cannot miss it. There are topics like drugs and alcohol, friendships, adolescence, test anxiety, academic motivation, time management, preparations before an annual trip, farewell at the end of the year, and others. The subject is not for them to select; the teachers can only choose the methods of teaching.

I have a team of educators with me and we meet together once a week for two hours to plan the next education lesson. It helps me a lot. Then, I gain more confidence, and there are more successful and relevant things to do with the class.

Student engagement. Despite policy rhetoric promoting student-centred learning, teachers reported limited student involvement in planning and delivering education lessons. Leisterer and Paschold (2022) emphasise that autonomy-supportive teaching environments, where students co-create content, are associated with greater emotional engagement and academic motivation. We were surprised to realise that most lesson planning and preparation do not include students. Some teachers who insist on students' engagement require it partially or occasionally, meaning that learning engagement in independent study is not a common phenomenon:

I have several committees comprised of students who volunteer to be a member. Every three months, the committee members initiate an event in honour of the birthday boys and girls. We also have student council representatives who occasionally give lessons on themes that they choose. There is a group at the school that teaches alcohol and drug prevention classes. That means the students are active. It's amazing to see them thrive and collaborate, but I cannot say that all students are involved.

Supervision, monitoring, and review. The absence of systematic oversight or reflective evaluation mechanisms for the education lesson surfaced as a key concern. While peer reflection was informally practised, it lacked structured feedback or formal assessment. This finding raises questions about the sustainability of teacher growth in the absence of institutional support (Nowell et al., 2017).

Concerning the question of who supervises, monitors, or reviews the content, processes, and products of the education lessons, the teachers testified that none of these exist:

Once a month, the homeroom teachers have a staff meeting where they discuss all issues that arise regarding their duties and the "lesson of education". We reflect upon our experiences, share, and learn from each other. There is no documentation or supervision. We believe that we improve gradually through the process of peer learning in a reflective manner.

Preparation and accompaniment. This theme highlights the crucial interplay between teacher education and the practical challenges faced by PE teachers who assume homeroom responsibilities. Recent studies highlight a persistent gap between theoretical training and classroom application, particularly in the context of PE. For instance, a study conducted in Germany revealed that pre-service PE teachers exhibited no significant improvement in teaching performance over a five-month internship, suggesting that current training programs may not adequately equip teachers for the dynamic demands of the classroom (Greve et al., 2020). In Israel, novice PE teachers have reported a disconnect between their academic preparation and the challenges they encounter in actual teaching environments. These educators often feel unprepared to manage large class sizes, limited resources, and the need for improvisation, indicating that teacher education programs may not sufficiently address the complexities of real-world teaching (Zach et al., 2020). Moreover, the transition from subject-specific didactics to practical teaching poses additional challenges. Research indicates that pre-service PE teachers often struggle to integrate theoretical knowledge with hands-on practice, resulting in a fragmented understanding of their professional roles (Westerlund, 2023). This fragmentation can impede the development of a cohesive teaching identity and diminish the sense of accomplishment.

Class management. The PE world differs from that of non-PE teachers in many ways, as they are confined to teaching in classrooms. PE teachers usually teach in larger spaces (e.g., gyms, arenas, swimming pools, tennis courts, and track and field stadiums); they are constantly in motion rather than continually sitting, and it is the only lesson where students invest physical effort. Transitioning from a large space to a limited classroom space requires PE teachers to be adept at a range of classroom management strategies. Moreover, running a discussion requires knowledge and skills. They must plan these lessons carefully to achieve educational goals:

As a matter of fact, when I enter the classroom, I know I have all my students together for a weekly one hour. Therefore, I have to carefully plan this hour. I don't remember learning how to run a discussion, how to empower students, how to deal with social problems that arises every now and then, and how to help them solve emotional problems that interfere with their well-being. I study all these in a trial-and-error manner, and it demands a lot from me.

Co-education lessons. PE lessons in Israel are segregated by gender, posing a unique challenge for homeroom teachers expected to support mixed-gender classes. This scenario presents a challenge – namely, considering not only the characteristics of the other gender but also how to manage a mixed-gender class. This is especially challenging when working with adolescents. Teachers reported that this structural separation affects relational depth and equity in communication, a nuance that is often neglected in teacher training programs (Greve et al., 2020).

PE is the only lesson where boys and girls are separated. So, as a female, I meet the girls, in addition to the education lesson –

two times a week for PE class. Altogether, I meet them three times a week, whereas with the boys we meet only once. I have to be aware of this potential imbalance, which might lead to less effective communication with the boys.

Communication with parents. Many novice teachers expressed discomfort and a lack of preparedness in engaging parents, a gap that is often overlooked in existing curricula. Since parental involvement is linked to improved student outcomes (Childs & Grooms, 2018), the lack of systematic preparation for parent-teacher interaction reveals a critical training deficiency. According to all the interviewees, one aspect missing from PE teacher preparation programs was the establishment of teacher-parent relationships. A young novice teacher stated:

I was afraid of the first meeting with the parents. They were all older than me, and their children are now under my responsibility. Who am I to tell them something about their children?

I think that parents should be more involved. I know they have their life and career, and you cannot invite them often to school, but when I do invite them, I want it to be meaningful for everybody. I am still not sure how exactly to do this.

I am educator of the 7th grade. The whole year is dedicated toward the Bar-Mitzva event of the children with their families. The parents are involved from day one. Such cooperation creates a wonderful atmosphere of enthusiasm and willingness for action. It is a year in which parents are truly involved in the school.

School consultant. Cooperation with school consultants appears as a cornerstone of support for educators dealing with complex student issues. These partnerships serve as informal learning communities and emotional buffers, aligning with recommendations for distributed responsibility in student care (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Timor, 2017). Educators work in cooperation with the school consultant in various venues, including preparing social events, creating syllabi for educational lessons, and conducting ongoing meetings throughout the year. These meetings effectively form learning communities where educators plan, discuss, reflect, consult, and collaborate to assist one another. In addition, emotional and behavioural problems are dealt with between the educator and the school consultant, as described in the following example:

There are students who face emotional difficulties, deprivation at home, and domestic violence, and many times, I take it very hard, and really, the counsellor is very helpful. I have an hour-long meeting with the counsellor once a week, where we raise issues with students and learn how to solve the problems, when to call the student for a conversation or a personal conversation only with the student or decide to invite the parents to school. There is a collaboration of the educator, counsellor, and school coordinator.

Loneliness /no accompaniment. Despite collaborative practices, novice teachers described feelings of isolation once initial institutional support diminished. The abrupt expectation of self-sufficiency post-induction has been documented as a persistent problem across educational systems (du Plessis & Sunde, 2017). It reflects a systemic underestimation of the emotional labour involved in the homeroom role.

Induction into school is a complex process that demands mental toughness from novice teachers. They must apply all their theoretical knowledge in practice and adapt to the school environment as a new organisation. Although they should have support from within the school system, they are expected to become independent quickly. For example:

Many times, I feel lonely in certain situations. Even with all the assistance that

I sometimes get, actually, I am coping alone by myself. After the first year, it is even worse because everybody thinks that you are not a novice anymore and expects you to solve problems independently.

Discussion

We examined PE teachers who were also homeroom educators regarding their perceptions of their role as educators and how they translate these perceptions into actions. In other words, we wanted to examine their professional identities and how they implement their ideas into behaviour. We will first discuss the results of the quantitative analysis and then present the findings.

One of the prominent findings from the questionnaire's closed-ended questions was that teachers felt unprepared for the duties of homeroom teachers. Such a claim aligns with previous research, in which novice teachers reported a lack of confidence due to the perception of inadequate preparation for the school working environment (e.g., Zach et al., 2012). In addition, teachers reported that the effort they invest in their work is incongruent with the rewards they receive. Such a claim may highlight a gap in the job description, the experience that follows, and the appropriate compensation for a job with dual responsibilities. Such a perceived gap may reflect underlying frustration that has influenced teachers' professional identity. Another notable gap was observed between the elevated importance that teachers attribute to the goals and to the educational lesson, and the moderate levels of reported goal achievement. These observations could stem from a lack of knowledge and skills in transforming ideas into behaviour and powerfully express the need for improvement.

Two central questions in the questionnaire explored the teachers' perceptions of the importance of their role as educators and their definitions of educational goals. Participants attached great importance to their role. The metaphors "mother," "father," I am everything for them," and even "God" were prevalent (about one-quarter of the responses). Like other teacher educators (Graham et al., 2016; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020), PE teachers believe that their role contributes to the well-being of the students—they help them to increase their abilities and aspire for improvement, mediate between them and school authorities, and enhance the class's positive social and emotional climate. The top five goals of the 128 participants were (1) cultivating class cohesiveness, (2) empowering students' self-identity and self-efficacy, (3) clarifying values, (4) respecting others and respective dialogue, and (5) fostering life skills. With that in mind, we expect teachers to report high rates of student involvement and engagement in the education class.

Nevertheless, teachers reported low engagement rates in lesson planning, preparation, or involvement. These results contradict the messages presented in the following section, which are based on our interviews. That is, we would expect teachers who clearly define the educational lessons' goals to aim to promote students' sense of autonomy and to see this autonomy reflected in students' behaviour. We claim that such a discrepancy between what is declared and what is seen might stem from a lack of teaching skills that promote perceptions, usually abstract ideas. A similar explanation was found by Barnes et al. (2014) and Srivastava et al. (2015), who asserted that teachers are equipped with beliefs and theoretical knowledge but are not necessarily equipped with the skills to put them into practice. It might also explain why about 85% of participants think the education hour is essential, but about half of them do not think they meet the lesson's goals.

Results from the focus groups revealed that role acceptance, whether willingly or in response to the principal's offer to become a homeroom teacher, strengthened the educational sub-identity of PE teachers.

Along the lines of other research (e.g., du Plessis & Sunde, 2017; Popper-Giveon & Shayshon, 2017) claiming that professional teachers who become educators increase their sub-professional educational identity, the current study also showed that becoming a homeroom teacher requires a higher involvement in school life, strengthens the educational identity of the teachers, and increases their sense of belonging to the school. This means that homeroom teachers have many duties in school that require their presence. They must communicate with the class teachers, the school coordinator, the principal, educator peers, students, and parents. Hence, many activities require deep involvement in school life, at least regarding three levels: student life in school, interactions between homeroom teachers and their peers, and collaborations between homeroom teachers and managerial staff (du Plessis & Sunde, 2017; Popper-Giveon & Shayshon, 2017).

Meaningfulness is a value that "helps" teachers see students holistically. PE teachers often strain themselves, so becoming homeroom educators enables them to innovate, introduce novelty, and foster renewal, which can instil meaning in their work. In the focus groups, teachers asserted that once they became homeroom teachers, they developed a strong sub-identity as educators in addition to their sub-identity as professional discipline teachers. They also stated that this positively affects the teacher's personality within the school and may improve the professional status of PE. The study affirms the position of Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim (2020), suggesting that caring for students and showing empathy are key elements that offer reciprocal benefits to both teachers and students. It enhances the teachers' professional identity development while promoting students' well-being, academic achievements, and emotional and social functioning. PE teachers who became educators strengthened their caring and empathy towards their students. They gained a deeper understanding of the students' worldviews that extended beyond the physical aspects of sport and movement. They were more oriented towards creating a pleasant climate with social acceptance.

PE's low status was reflected in the data, as reported elsewhere (e.g., Mäkelä et al., 2014), in the self-esteem and collective identity of the teachers' interviews. Findings reveal that one of the most effective ways to increase PE's status in schools is to enhance the integration of PE staff into the school's general staff, including serving as homeroom educators and assuming managerial duties.

It is noteworthy that our sample is comprised of experienced PE teachers who serve as homeroom advisers; they are not the beginner teachers whose struggles they described in the interviews. As such, their accounts were written retrospectively, recalling their experiences when they began as novice PE teachers and were subsequently asked to serve as homeroom teachers as well. In this context, retrospective feedback has helped experienced teachers reflect on their earliest challenges and lack of preparation, which were hardly noticeable or readily available when they first entered the school. Teachers can reflect on their early years, providing insight into the shortcomings in preparation that helped them gain confidence and effectiveness as both PE and homeroom teachers. On this account, the retrospective view enriches the data, as it reveals how their past experiences of not being adequately prepared for these roles have shaped their professional development, lending depth to the current findings regarding the teachers' preparation. It also strengthens the argument for tailored training programs that better equip both newly qualified and experienced teachers to manage their roles.

Practical Implications

Our findings highlight the importance of professional identity in shaping the experiences of PE teachers who also serve

as homeroom teachers. The thematic analysis revealed that these educators negotiate multiple professional roles, balancing the distinct expectations of PE instruction with those of classroom teaching and student guidance. The emergence of both shared and individual themes underscores the complexity of this dual professional identity, shaped by institutional norms and personal values.

In practical terms, our results suggest that professional development programs for PE teachers should explicitly address the challenges and opportunities inherent in holding multiple roles. Specifically, we recommend integrating opportunities for reflective practice and peer dialogue within teacher training and ongoing professional learning. Such activities can help teachers articulate their evolving sense of professional self, reconcile the demands of different roles, and develop strategies for managing role conflicts. Providing forums for sharing experiences and best practices can also foster a sense of community and support among teachers facing similar challenges.

By acknowledging and supporting the multifaceted professional identity of PE teachers who are also homeroom teachers, schools and teacher educators can better prepare these educators to thrive in their complex and dynamic roles. Our study thus offers concrete recommendations for enhancing the professional well-being and effectiveness of this specific group of teachers.

Acknowledgement
The authors acknowledge the use of ChatGPT by OpenAI to assist in language refinement. All content was critically reviewed, revised, and approved by the authors to ensure accuracy, originality, and adherence to academic integrity standards. The final manuscript reflects the authors' independent analysis, interpretation, and scholarly contributions.

Funding
This study was not supported by any external funding.

Disclosure statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest. Any personal circumstances or interests that could influence the interpretation of the research have been disclosed.

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