



HOW DO PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS FROM EAST JERUSALEM PERCEIVE THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ON THEIR PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AS FUTURE TEACHERS?

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Abstract:

For pre-service teachers, the teaching practicum represents the first meaningful opportunity to connect university learning with authentic classroom practice. During this period, school leadership extends beyond administrative responsibilities by shaping the quality of mentoring, professional support, feedback, and learning opportunities available to future teachers. This experience is particularly important in East Jerusalem, where teacher preparation occurs within a complex educational context characterized by multiple educational authorities and unique sociopolitical realities. Although previous studies have examined the relationship between school leadership and teacher outcomes, limited attention has been given to how pre-service teachers perceive the influence of school leadership during the practicum, particularly within the context of East Jerusalem. This study explores how pre-service teachers in East Jerusalem perceive the impact of school leadership on their professional performance and professional growth during the teaching practicum. Specifically, it examines how leadership practices influence participants' instructional confidence, professional learning, and identity development while considering the role of the local educational context in shaping these experiences. A qualitative research design was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 pre-service teachers undertaking the Stage Programme in schools across East Jerusalem. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected based on their direct experience with school leadership during the practicum. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify the major themes that explain participants' perceptions of school leadership and its influence on their professional development. This study contributes to the educational leadership literature by focusing on pre-service teachers, a group that has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. By examining leadership within the distinctive educational context of East Jerusalem, the study provides context-specific insights into how leadership practices shape teacher

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preparation. The findings offer practical implications for school leaders, mentor teachers, teacher education programmes, and policymakers seeking to strengthen practicum experiences and better support the professional development of future teachers.

Keywords: school leadership; pre-service teachers; professional performance; professional growth; East Jerusalem; teacher education; teaching practicum; professional identity

1. Introduction

This study explores how pre-service teachers from East Jerusalem perceive the impact of school leadership on their professional performance and professional growth during their teaching practicum. The study is grounded in the recognition that the practicum represents one of the most influential stages of teacher education, during which future teachers begin translating theoretical knowledge into classroom practice while simultaneously developing their professional identity, instructional competence, and understanding of the teaching profession. Because much of this learning occurs within schools, leadership practices experienced during the practicum can significantly influence how pre-service teachers perceive teaching, respond to professional challenges, and prepare for their future careers (Lestari *et al.*, 2024; Mason, 2009).

The central research question guiding this study asks how pre-service teachers from East Jerusalem perceive the influence of school leadership on their professional performance and professional growth as future teachers. To address this question, the study adopts a qualitative research methodology using semi-structured interviews with approximately thirty pre-service teachers undertaking their teaching practicum in schools across East Jerusalem. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows participants to describe their experiences, interpretations, and perceptions in depth while providing a richer understanding of the relationship between leadership and professional learning within authentic educational settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

School leadership has increasingly been recognised as one of the most significant factors influencing teaching quality, teacher learning, and school improvement. Contemporary educational leadership extends beyond administrative responsibilities to include instructional support, professional development, mentoring, collaboration, and the creation of school environments that encourage continuous learning. Research consistently demonstrates that supportive school leadership enhances teachers' motivation, instructional effectiveness, participation in professional learning, and long-term professional development. In particular, instructional leadership has been shown to increase teachers' engagement in mentoring, collaborative learning, and continuous professional development, while distributed leadership promotes teacher

empowerment, shared decision-making, and school improvement (Kim & Lee, 2020; Priamphimai, 2024).

Although the relationship between school leadership and teacher outcomes has received considerable scholarly attention, the existing literature has focused predominantly on in-service teachers. Comparatively little is known about how pre-service teachers perceive school leadership while they are still constructing their professional identities during the practicum. This omission is important because the practicum is often the first sustained opportunity for future teachers to interact with school leaders, mentor teachers, and professional communities, making leadership experiences particularly influential during this stage of professional development (García-Lázaro *et al.*, 2025; Beltman *et al.*, 2015).

The need for further investigation becomes even more apparent within the educational context of East Jerusalem. Schools in East Jerusalem operate within a unique educational landscape characterised by multiple educational authorities, diverse curricula, institutional fragmentation, and continuing sociopolitical challenges. These contextual realities influence school leadership practices, teacher preparation, and professional experiences in ways that differ considerably from those reported in many international studies (Alayan, 2019; Nuseibeh, 2016; Masry-Herzallah & Cohen, 2024).

Recent research focusing on teacher education in East Jerusalem suggests that future teachers negotiate complex educational, cultural, and professional realities throughout their preparation. Their practicum experiences involve not only learning how to teach but also developing professional identities within schools operating under diverse institutional and societal expectations. Consequently, understanding how school leadership influences these experiences is essential for improving teacher preparation programmes and strengthening the transition from university study to professional practice (Kakounda-Muallem, 2022; Manor & Masry-Herzallah, 2025).

This study contributes to the growing body of educational leadership literature by examining school leadership from the perspectives of pre-service teachers rather than experienced teachers or school principals. Furthermore, by focusing specifically on East Jerusalem, the study addresses an important contextual gap in the literature and provides insights into teacher preparation within a politically, culturally, and institutionally distinctive educational environment. The findings are expected to contribute to both theory and practice by informing school leaders, teacher education programmes, mentor teachers, and policymakers seeking to strengthen practicum experiences and support the professional performance and professional growth of future teachers.

2. Literature Review

School leadership has received considerable attention in educational research because of its influence on teaching quality, teacher development, and school improvement. Likewise, teacher education research identifies the teaching practicum as a critical stage

in which pre-service teachers develop their professional identity, instructional competence, and readiness for teaching. Despite this growing body of literature, limited research has explored how pre-service teachers perceive the impact of school leadership on their professional performance and professional growth, particularly within the distinctive educational context of East Jerusalem (Kim & Lee, 2020; Lestari *et al.*, 2024; Kakounda-Muallem, 2022).

The educational context of East Jerusalem presents unique institutional, cultural, and sociopolitical characteristics that distinguish it from many educational systems examined in previous research. These contextual realities influence school leadership practices, teacher preparation, and the professional experiences of future teachers, highlighting the need for context-specific research that considers the interaction between leadership and teacher development (Alayan, 2019; Nuseibeh, 2016; Masry-Herzallah & Cohen, 2024).

2.1 School Leadership

School leadership is widely recognised as one of the most influential factors affecting school effectiveness, teacher development, and students' learning outcomes. Contemporary educational leadership extends beyond administrative responsibilities to include instructional improvement, teacher mentoring, collaboration, and the creation of supportive learning environments that promote continuous professional growth. Rather than relying solely on formal authority, effective school leadership is viewed as a multidimensional process through which school leaders influence organisational culture, teacher motivation, instructional quality, and school improvement (Bush, 2020; Hallinger, 2011). Within teacher education, supportive leadership practices contribute to pre-service teachers' instructional competence, professional confidence, and professional identity, particularly during the teaching practicum (Lestari *et al.*, 2024; Beltman *et al.*, 2015). These practices are especially important in East Jerusalem, where complex educational conditions make effective leadership essential for supporting future teachers' professional performance and professional growth.

The concept of school leadership has evolved from a managerial function concerned primarily with school administration to a collaborative and developmental process that promotes teaching quality, professional learning, and school improvement (Bush, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2020). Although definitions differ, researchers generally agree that school leadership involves influencing individuals and organisational processes to achieve shared educational goals through strategic direction, instructional support, collaboration, and continuous professional learning (Priamphimai, 2024; Arar & Abu Nasra, 2019). Within teacher education, these leadership practices shape the practicum environment in which pre-service teachers develop professional confidence, instructional competence, and emerging professional identities (García-Lázaro *et al.*, 2025; Kakounda-Muallem, 2022).

School leadership has been explained through several complementary theoretical perspectives. Transformational leadership emphasises inspiring teachers through a shared vision and supporting professional development, resulting in higher motivation, instructional effectiveness, and organisational commitment (Bass, 1985; Bush, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2020). Instructional leadership focuses on improving teaching and learning through mentoring, curriculum supervision, constructive feedback, and continuous professional development (Hallinger, 2011). Distributed leadership views leadership as a collaborative process that encourages shared decision-making, teacher empowerment, and professional learning (Spillane, 2006; Zhou & Alias, 2024), whereas servant leadership highlights trust, empathy, ethical behaviour, and the personal and professional development of teachers (Greenleaf, 1977; Priamphimai, 2024; Nezhad & Mehrabanfar, 2014). In contrast, transactional and authoritarian leadership emphasise organisational control, hierarchical authority, and compliance with established rules, generally offering fewer opportunities for collaboration and professional learning than transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2011; Arar & Abu Nasra, 2019). Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide complementary explanations of how leadership practices shape pre-service teachers' professional performance, professional growth, and identity development during the teaching practicum.

2.2 Pre-Service Teachers

Pre-service teachers represent the future teaching workforce and play a fundamental role in improving educational quality. Teacher education programmes prepare them through pedagogical knowledge, practical experience, reflective practice, and professional values that facilitate their transition from university students to beginning teachers. Consequently, the quality of teacher preparation and school-based experiences significantly influences their instructional competence, professional readiness, and long-term professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2006; García-Lázaro *et al.*, 2025; Lestari *et al.*, 2024).

Teacher preparation combines academic coursework with supervised practicum experiences to develop pedagogical knowledge, classroom management skills, professional ethics, and reflective practice (Mason, 2009; García-Lázaro *et al.*, 2025). Effective teacher education integrates theoretical learning with classroom practice, mentoring, and continuous feedback, enabling pre-service teachers to strengthen their professional competence while gradually developing their professional identity through increased confidence, professional values, and a stronger sense of belonging to the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Beijgaard *et al.*, 2004; Beltman *et al.*, 2015; Gross & Hochberg, 2016; Hidarto & Christine, 2021; Ünal & Saklan, 2025).

The teaching practicum represents the central component of teacher education because it provides pre-service teachers with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic classroom settings while developing instructional competence, classroom management, and professional confidence. Through mentoring, classroom

observation, constructive feedback, and reflective practice, pre-service teachers strengthen their self-efficacy and readiness for professional practice. Research consistently demonstrates that supportive practicum environments characterised by effective mentoring and instructional leadership enhance professional learning, confidence, and long-term professional growth (Kim & Lee, 2020; García-Lázaro *et al.*, 2025; Hidarto & Christine, 2021; Lestari *et al.*, 2024).

2.3 Professional Performance and Professional Growth

Professional performance and professional growth are closely interconnected concepts in teacher education, particularly during the teaching practicum, where pre-service teachers begin applying theoretical knowledge in authentic classroom settings while developing their professional competence and identity. Professional performance refers to teachers' ability to apply their knowledge, skills, and professional competencies effectively in educational practice. It encompasses lesson planning, classroom management, assessment, communication, collaboration, and reflective teaching (Danielson, 2007; Stronge, 2018). Professional growth, by contrast, is a continuous process through which teachers expand their knowledge, instructional practices, and professional competence through reflective practice, collaboration, continuous learning, and supportive school environments (Day, 1999; Avalos, 2011).

For pre-service teachers, both professional performance and professional growth develop simultaneously during the teaching practicum. Through mentoring, classroom observation, constructive feedback, and reflective practice, they strengthen their instructional competence, professional confidence, and emerging professional identity. Research indicates that supportive school leadership plays a central role in facilitating both dimensions by providing guidance, learning opportunities, and professional support that enhance teaching performance while fostering continuous professional development (Hallinger, 2011; Kim & Lee, 2020; García-Lázaro *et al.*, 2025; Hidarto & Christine, 2021; Lestari *et al.*, 2024; Mason, 2009).

2.4 Educational Context of East Jerusalem

Education in East Jerusalem operates within a distinctive political, administrative, and sociocultural environment characterised by multiple educational authorities, diverse curricula, and varying governance structures (Alayan, 2019; Nuseibeh, 2016). These conditions shape school leadership, teacher preparation, and the practicum experiences of pre-service teachers. Previous studies indicate that educational fragmentation, policy differences, and resource disparities influence both leadership practices and teacher development in East Jerusalem (Masry-Herzallah & Cohen, 2024; Alayan, 2019). Despite increasing research on education in the city, limited attention has been given to how school leadership influences pre-service teachers' professional performance and professional growth, highlighting the need for context-specific research.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how pre-service teachers in East Jerusalem perceive the impact of school leadership on their professional performance and professional growth during the teaching practicum. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations within their natural educational context. Unlike quantitative approaches that focus on measuring variables or testing hypotheses, qualitative research seeks to understand how individuals interpret and make meaning of their experiences, making it particularly suitable for educational research addressing complex social and professional phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary method of data collection. This method provided sufficient flexibility for participants to describe their experiences while allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions that clarified and expanded emerging ideas. The interview protocol was developed based on the literature concerning school leadership, pre-service teacher education, professional performance, and professional growth. To enhance the content validity of the interview guide, the questions were reviewed in light of the relevant literature and aligned with the study objectives before data collection. Owing to the security situation and the ongoing war in the region, all interviews were conducted online via Zoom.

Interviews were conducted in Arabic to allow participants to express their experiences naturally and comfortably. With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 40–60 minutes, providing sufficient time for participants to discuss their practicum experiences in depth (Kallio *et al.*, 2016).

The study population consisted of pre-service teachers undertaking their teaching practicum (Stage Programme) in schools across East Jerusalem. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants who had direct experience with school leadership during their practicum and were therefore able to provide rich and meaningful insights relevant to the research objectives (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). The final sample comprised 30 pre-service teachers representing different practicum schools across East Jerusalem and a variety of teaching specialisations, thereby providing diverse perspectives on leadership practices experienced during the practicum.

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). The analytical process involved familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of the interview transcripts, generation of initial codes, identification of potential themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final report. Coding was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge from participants' accounts rather than being predetermined by existing theoretical frameworks. This analytical approach

facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and provided a comprehensive understanding of participants' perceptions regarding the influence of school leadership on their professional performance and professional growth.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher adopted the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through repeated engagement with the interview transcripts, careful interpretation of participants' accounts, and continuous comparison of emerging themes throughout the analytical process. Dependability and confirmability were enhanced through systematic documentation of each stage of the research process, including data collection, coding decisions, and theme development, thereby ensuring transparency and consistency. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and procedures, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar educational contexts. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, informed consent was secured from all participants, participation was entirely voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

4. Results

Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews identified seven major themes that explain how pre-service teachers in East Jerusalem perceive the influence of school leadership on their professional performance and professional growth during the teaching practicum. These themes reflect participants' experiences of leadership support, professional learning, emotional well-being, contextual challenges, professional identity development, and commitment to the teaching profession.

Theme 1: Supportive School Leadership

Participants consistently described school leaders as approachable, supportive, and committed to facilitating their professional learning throughout the practicum. They emphasised that principals encouraged open communication, collaboration, and continuous guidance, creating learning environments in which they felt respected, trusted, and motivated to develop professionally. Many participants viewed school leaders as mentors rather than administrators, highlighting the importance of supportive leadership in building confidence and encouraging professional learning.

One participant explained:

"The principal always encouraged me to ask questions and discuss any difficulties. I never felt that I was only a trainee; instead, I felt like an important member of the school community."

Overall, participants perceived supportive school leadership as a key factor in creating positive practicum experiences that encouraged reflection, confidence, and professional development.

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that supportive school leadership promotes teachers' confidence, collaboration, and professional learning (Hallinger, 2011; Kim & Lee, 2020).

Theme 2: School Leadership and Professional Performance

Participants reported that school leadership had a direct influence on their professional performance during the practicum. Constructive feedback, classroom observations, mentoring, and opportunities to apply different teaching strategies helped improve lesson planning, classroom management, instructional delivery, and the effective use of educational technology. Many participants described the practicum as an active learning experience that strengthened their instructional competence and professional skills.

One participant stated:

"After each lesson, the principal discussed my strengths and weaknesses with me. The feedback helped me improve my lesson planning and classroom management in every class."

These findings are consistent with instructional leadership literature, which highlights the importance of mentoring, classroom observation, and constructive feedback in improving instructional practice (Hallinger, 2011; Lestari *et al.*, 2024).

Theme 3: Professional and Emotional Support

Participants emphasised that emotional support was as important as professional guidance throughout the practicum. Encouragement, appreciation, empathy, and continuous mentoring helped reduce anxiety, strengthen self-confidence, and increase motivation to engage actively in teaching. Feeling respected and valued encouraged participants to communicate openly, participate confidently in school activities, and reflect positively on their experiences.

One participant commented:

"Whenever I felt nervous before teaching a lesson, the principal encouraged me and reminded me that making mistakes is part of learning. This support made me feel more confident."

These findings support previous research showing that emotional support enhances teachers' confidence, well-being, and professional engagement (Kim & Lee, 2020; Priamphimai, 2024).

Theme 4: Challenges in the Practicum Environment

Although participants generally described positive leadership experiences, they also identified several challenges that affected their practicum. These included limited educational resources, inconsistent communication, administrative procedures, workload pressures, and varying levels of support across schools. Participants acknowledged that these organisational constraints occasionally limited opportunities for guidance and professional learning.

One participant explained:

"The principal wanted to support us, but the school had limited resources and many responsibilities, so sometimes we had to solve problems on our own."

These organisational challenges are consistent with previous studies showing that limited resources and administrative pressures may restrict opportunities for professional learning (Bush, 2020).

Theme 5: The East Jerusalem Educational Context

Participants consistently described the educational context of East Jerusalem as an important factor influencing both school leadership and their practicum experiences. They explained that schools operate within complex political, social, and institutional conditions that affect daily school life, leadership priorities, and opportunities for professional learning. Despite these challenges, many participants appreciated the efforts of school leaders to maintain supportive learning environments.

One participant explained:

"Sometimes the principal had to deal with issues outside the educational process before focusing on teaching. This affected many daily decisions in the school."

Participants also referred to transportation difficulties, political instability, limited resources, and institutional regulations as factors that occasionally influenced attendance, lesson implementation, and school activities. Overall, they viewed the educational context of East Jerusalem as a significant factor shaping both school leadership practices and professional learning during the teaching practicum, supporting previous findings reported by Alayan (2019) and Masry-Herzallah and Cohen (2024).

Theme 6: Professional Identity Development

Participants reported that school leadership played an important role in developing their professional identity throughout the teaching practicum. Positive interactions with school leaders and mentor teachers strengthened their confidence, increased their sense of responsibility, and helped them begin viewing themselves as future teachers rather

than university students. Encouragement, constructive feedback, and participation in school activities promoted greater independence and professional decision-making.

One participant reflected:

"The practicum changed the way I see myself. I no longer felt like a student; I began to feel that I was becoming a real teacher."

These findings support previous research indicating that supportive school environments contribute to the development of pre-service teachers' professional identity (Beltman *et al.*, 2015; García-Lázaro *et al.*, 2025).

Theme 7: Commitment to the Teaching Profession

The final theme concerned participants' commitment to pursuing teaching as a future profession. Most participants explained that supportive leadership during the practicum strengthened their motivation to remain in teaching and increased their confidence in their future careers. They also viewed school leaders as professional role models who encouraged continuous learning and professional development.

One participant stated:

"The support I received during my practicum made me certain that I chose the right profession. I am excited to continue my career as a teacher."

Taken together, these findings are consistent with studies suggesting that positive practicum experiences strengthen commitment to the teaching profession and continuous professional learning (Lestari *et al.*, 2024; Kim & Lee, 2020).

5. Discussion

The present study explored how pre-service teachers in East Jerusalem perceive the influence of school leadership on their professional performance and professional growth during the teaching practicum. Overall, the findings demonstrate that school leadership plays a central role in shaping pre-service teachers' learning experiences by providing instructional guidance, professional support, emotional encouragement, and opportunities for reflective practice. Beyond enhancing instructional performance, leadership contributed to participants' professional identity, confidence, and long-term commitment to the teaching profession, highlighting its developmental role within the unique educational context of East Jerusalem.

One of the most significant findings is that supportive school leadership formed the foundation of successful practicum experiences. Participants consistently described school leaders as approachable, encouraging, and committed to providing mentoring, constructive feedback, and professional guidance. Rather than perceiving principals

solely as administrators, participants viewed them as educational leaders who created supportive learning environments that promoted confidence, collaboration, and professional learning. These findings are consistent with Hallinger (2011), who argued that effective school leadership improves teaching and learning through instructional support and collaboration. Likewise, Kim and Lee (2020) demonstrated that supportive leadership enhances teachers' motivation, instructional effectiveness, and professional commitment, while Kakounda-Muallem (2022) found that positive practicum experiences strengthen pre-service teachers' confidence and readiness for professional practice.

The findings further revealed that school leadership had a direct influence on participants' professional performance during the teaching practicum. Classroom observations, mentoring, constructive feedback, and opportunities to discuss instructional challenges improved lesson planning, classroom management, instructional strategies, reflective practice, and confidence in teaching. These findings reinforce the principles of instructional leadership, which emphasise continuous supervision and professional dialogue as mechanisms for improving teaching quality (Hallinger, 2011). Similarly, Lestari *et al.* (2024) demonstrated that instructional support enhances pre-service teachers' instructional competence and confidence, while Arar and Abu Nasra (2019) reported that collaborative leadership positively influences teachers' professional performance. These findings also align with Leader Prototypicality Theory, suggesting that when pre-service teachers perceive school leaders as supportive and credible professionals, they become more willing to accept guidance and improve their instructional practice.

Beyond improving classroom performance, the findings highlight the important role of school leadership in fostering professional growth. Participants described professional growth as a continuous process supported by mentoring, reflection, encouragement, and opportunities for continuous learning throughout the practicum. These findings are consistent with Kim and Lee (2020), who argued that supportive instructional leadership promotes teachers' participation in professional learning, while García-Lázaro *et al.* (2025) and Kakounda-Muallem (2022) highlighted the importance of supportive practicum environments in developing confidence and integrating theoretical knowledge with classroom practice. The findings also support Social Exchange Theory by highlighting the importance of trust and reciprocal support in promoting professional growth during teacher preparation.

Another important finding concerns the role of emotional support in shaping participants' practicum experiences. Encouragement, empathy, appreciation, and reassurance reduced anxiety, strengthened self-confidence, and increased participants' willingness to engage actively in teaching. These findings reinforce previous research highlighting the importance of supportive school climates in promoting teachers' well-being and professional engagement (Kim & Lee, 2020; Priamphimai, 2024). Overall, the

findings suggest that supportive leadership contributes to both the emotional and professional dimensions of teacher preparation.

Although participants generally reported positive leadership experiences, they also identified organisational and contextual challenges that influenced their practicum. Limited educational resources, administrative workload, inconsistent communication, and varying levels of support occasionally restricted opportunities for mentoring and professional learning. Similar observations have been reported by Bush (2020) and Hallinger (2011), who argued that contextual factors may constrain leaders' ability to provide continuous instructional support. These findings indicate that effective teacher preparation depends on both supportive leadership and favourable organisational conditions.

Finally, the educational context of East Jerusalem emerged as an important factor shaping participants' experiences. Schools operate within complex political, institutional, and social realities that influence leadership priorities, professional learning opportunities, and everyday school life. Participants identified transportation difficulties, limited resources, institutional regulations, and political instability as factors affecting their practicum experiences. These findings are consistent with Alayan (2019), who described the fragmented educational system of East Jerusalem, and with Masry-Herzallah and Cohen (2024), who highlighted the influence of institutional complexity on Palestinian pre-service teachers. The findings demonstrate that effective school leadership not only supports professional learning but also helps pre-service teachers navigate the distinctive challenges of the East Jerusalem educational context.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that school leadership plays a fundamental role in shaping pre-service teachers' professional performance and professional growth during the teaching practicum in East Jerusalem. Participants consistently perceived supportive school leadership as an essential factor that enhanced their instructional competence, professional confidence, reflective practice, and commitment to the teaching profession. Constructive feedback, mentoring, open communication, and emotional support emerged as key leadership practices that positively influenced participants' practicum experiences. At the same time, the findings highlighted that school leadership is practiced within the unique educational context of East Jerusalem, where political, institutional, and social challenges continue to influence schools and the experiences of future teachers.

The study also highlights the importance of viewing school leadership as a developmental process rather than an administrative function. Effective school leaders contribute not only to improving teaching practices but also to fostering professional identity, resilience, and long-term professional commitment among pre-service teachers. These findings provide practical implications for teacher education programmes, school

leaders, mentor teachers, and educational policymakers by emphasizing the importance of strengthening collaboration between universities and schools, improving mentoring practices, and creating supportive practicum environments that facilitate both professional performance and professional growth.

Although this study focused on pre-service teachers undertaking the teaching practicum in East Jerusalem, its findings provide valuable insights into the broader relationship between school leadership and teacher development. Future research may examine similar experiences in other Palestinian or international educational contexts, compare different teacher preparation programmes, or employ mixed-methods and longitudinal research designs to explore how leadership influences teachers' professional development over time. Overall, the present study contributes to the growing body of literature by demonstrating that supportive school leadership is a key factor in preparing confident, competent, and professionally committed future teachers, particularly within complex educational settings such as East Jerusalem.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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