

# The Future Skills of Special Needs Teachers in Evolving Educational Landscapes in Finland

Special education teachers play a crucial role in identifying and addressing pupils' individual needs. As these needs become more diverse, future special education teachers will need a broader skill set. This study investigates special education teachers' perceptions of these future skills and their relevance in their newly received education. The research question is: what are special education teachers' perceptions of the future skills needed and its relevance in their received education? The data for this study (N=30) consists of responses from recently graduated special education teachers. The data was analyzed using a data-driven content analysis. The study indicates that special education teachers anticipate an expanded role in addressing diverse challenges. They emphasize the importance of promptly identifying and catering to individual pupil needs. Moreover, future educators must possess proficient IT skills for leveraging digital tools. Cultural sensitivity and collaboration are deemed crucial, necessitating effective communication with colleagues, parents, and specialists. Empathy remains paramount, as it enables teachers to understand and support both pupils and caregivers, fostering trust and meeting evolving demands in special needs education. Future special needs teachers need a wide range of skills, and these skills are essential in special education teacher training.

*Keywords:* special needs teacher, future skills, special education, special education teacher training, education

## Introduction

The future of education and societies has been discussed on many forums worldwide. In these forums, the role of teachers has been highlighted as crucial, for societal sustainability and well-being. For example, UNESCO's global report on teachers highlights that there is an urgent need for 44 million teachers to primary and secondary levels by 2030. UNESCO points out that teachers play a key role in shaping the future and unlocking every learner's potential (UNESCO, 2024). Further, OECD (2018) and the World Economic Forum (Schöning & Witcomb, 2017) have listed future skills and competencies that future citizens should have.

From these premises it is clear that teachers need specific skills and knowledge to support each student to reach their potential. This knowledge is acquired during initial teacher training and also in in-service training. Teachers are for instance tasked with scaffolding children's learning, social relationships, and competencies within classroom settings, as emphasized by Harju-Luukkainen and Kangas (2020) and Schöning and Witcomb (2017). Teachers are ascribed numerous roles and values in both policy debates and research, depicted as researchers, critical thinkers, active agents, knowledge processors, digital experts, multi-professional networkers, and assessors of personal development (Ranta et al., 2021). Encouraged to be visionary and contribute to the future of education,

1 teachers are urged to become "future-oriented" (Harju-Luukkainen & Kangas,  
2 2020). However, the quality of teacher education programs, which include both  
3 pre-service and in-service training, is crucial in equipping teachers for these  
4 evolving roles. Yet, as Kangas and Harju-Luukkainen (2021) observe, the  
5 methods to meet these expectations are often not clearly defined. A notable issue  
6 is the predominant focus on current teacher roles and competencies, rather than on  
7 preparing simultaneously teachers for future demands. Harju-Luukkainen and  
8 Kangas (2020) emphasize the significance of teacher agency, advocating for  
9 teachers to be proactive in their professional development. This is particularly  
10 challenging in the dynamic field of teacher education, which requires resilience,  
11 transversal competencies, and ongoing professional growth (Ranta et al., 2022;  
12 2023). In all this, special education teachers have a central educational mission,  
13 identifying pupils' specific needs and providing tailored support for learning. In  
14 the future, the work of special education teachers will require a wider range of  
15 skills to meet the increasingly diverse needs of pupils (Harju-Luukkainen et al.,  
16 2022; Bahdanovich Hanssen, Harju-Luukkainen & Sundqvist, 2024; Harju-  
17 Luukkainen, Bahdanovich Hanssen & Sundqvist, 2022).

18 In response to these demands, teacher education in Finland is continuously  
19 evolving. Notably, in 2016, the Finnish government initiated significant  
20 advancements by establishing a teacher education forum. This forum, guided by  
21 foundational documents, aims to address current and future challenges in the  
22 teaching profession and set forth objectives for teacher education (Husu & Toom,  
23 2016).

24 From these premises, we wanted to explore closer newly graduated special  
25 education teachers' perceptions of the future skills needed in working life and the  
26 topics relevance in the education they received. Our research question is *What are*  
27 *special education teachers' perceptions of the future skills needed and its*  
28 *relevance in their received education?* In order to answer this question, we  
29 collected data through a questionnaire that was responded to by 30 newly  
30 graduated special education teachers. In order to answer the research question, we  
31 use a data-driven content analysis (see Patton, 2002; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) as  
32 our analysis method. This study suggests that special education teachers are  
33 preparing for a broader role in tackling varied challenges than before.  
34 Consequently, while educating themselves for today, they must educate  
35 themselves for tomorrow, without knowing what tomorrow brings. As a  
36 concluding part of this paper, we discuss critically our findings and parallel them  
37 with some implications for practice.

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### **Finnish Teacher Education Context**

42 In Finland, the teaching profession is highly regarded and popular, attracting  
43 individuals who often remain in this career (Malinen et al., 2012). This positive  
44 perception contributes to the low turnover rates among Finnish teachers, compared  
45 to many other countries such as the USA (Harju-Luukkainen, Wang & La Torre,  
46 2019) as schools typically face no significant challenges in retaining their staff.

1 Consequently, while there is a high annual influx of applicants eager to enter the  
2 teaching field, the teacher training programs offered by universities remain highly  
3 selective, admitting only a small fraction of applicants each year.

4 Teacher education in Finland has its roots stretching back to the country's  
5 independence in 1917 and it has evolved significantly over the decades. The  
6 Finnish education system began to take its modern shape in the early twentieth  
7 century, influenced notably by two pivotal documents. The Act on Compulsory  
8 Education, enacted in 1921, mandated that all municipalities provide education to  
9 children between the ages of seven and twelve, as outlined by Kuikka (1988). This  
10 legislation, along with subsequent plans for the development of teacher training,  
11 initiated a widespread effort to educate all children, which inadvertently led to a  
12 critical shortage of qualified teachers (Määttä, Uusiautti & Paksuniemi, 2013).

13 To address this shortage, Finland established teacher-training colleges across the  
14 nation. These institutions played a crucial role in boosting the number of  
15 educators. The landscape of teacher education underwent a significant  
16 transformation in 1971 when the responsibility for training teachers was  
17 transferred to universities. This move aimed to align teacher education more  
18 closely with academic research and to ensure the provision of high-quality,  
19 master's level education for future teachers. From these premises, today all special  
20 education teachers working in primary and secondary education need to have a  
21 master's degree and a specialization in special education.

### 22 23 24 **The Finnish Perspective on the Future of Teacher Education** 25

26 The Finnish perspective on future teacher education is characterized by a  
27 strong emphasis on continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving  
28 educational demands. Known for its academic standards (Sahlberg, 2007; Harju-  
29 Luukkainen, 2023), Finnish teacher education integrates educational research into  
30 teacher training programs (Tryggvason, 2009; Tirri, 2014), that also students value  
31 (Säntti et al., 2023). This approach ensures that teaching methodologies and  
32 content are based on the latest research, equipping new teachers to implement  
33 evidence-based practices (Tirri, 2014).

34 Contemporary challenges in the educational sector globally, as discussed in  
35 the introduction, encompass a broadening diversity among students and their  
36 families, changing work environments driven by the integration and accessibility  
37 of digital technologies (Tirri, 2014), and an intensified emphasis on learner-  
38 centered pedagogies also in Finland. To effectively manage these complexities,  
39 teachers are required to possess a wide array of pedagogical competencies and  
40 substantial content knowledge, particularly in areas related to learning and  
41 instruction, interaction, well-being, and school development (Harju-Luukkainen &  
42 Kangas, 2020). The competence of teachers is critical because the teachers are  
43 shaping educational outcomes and student learning and further, this is developing  
44 the societies further (UNESCO, 2024; Kangas & Harju-Luukkainen, 2021; Harju-  
45 Luukkainen & Kangas, 2020). A fundamental aim of teacher education in Finland  
46 is also to promote lifelong learning and skill development throughout a teacher's

1 career (Harju-Luukkainen & Kangas, 2020). Although Finnish academic teacher  
2 education lays a strong foundation in these competencies, there is an  
3 acknowledged need for further development of in-service teacher education to  
4 keep pace with ongoing changes (See for instance Tirri, 2014). Teacher educators  
5 are instrumental in preparing future teachers, underlining the importance of a  
6 research-based methodology for professional development in this field. This  
7 approach is supported by the national strategy for research on teacher education in  
8 Finland, which is vital for informing and guiding enhancements in teacher training  
9 (see closer Toom & Husu, 2016; Husu & Toom, 2016). Further, Husu & Toom  
10 (2016) emphasize the significance of teacher autonomy and the opportunities for  
11 educators to engage in experimentation and innovation within their teaching  
12 practices, which are essential for adapting to the dynamic educational landscape in  
13 Finland.

14 In response to these evolving needs, the Finnish Ministry of Education and  
15 Culture (2016), has issued a strategic policy document aimed at refining teacher  
16 training at all levels in Finland. This policy outlines future goals for both pre-  
17 service and in-service teacher education, stressing the importance of equipping  
18 prospective Finnish teachers with extensive foundational knowledge and the skills  
19 to drive innovation, both individually and within organizational contexts. These  
20 strategic objectives are designed to ensure that educators not only acquire  
21 knowledge but also develop the capacity to apply innovative solutions in their  
22 professional environments.

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## Methodology

This study explores special education teachers' perceptions of the future skills needed and their relevance in today's education. The research question is: *What are special education teachers' perceptions of the future skills needed and its relevance in their received education?*

The data for this study (N=30) consists of responses from recently graduated special education teachers. The special needs teachers had different backgrounds in teaching at different levels of education, such as early childhood education teachers, classroom teachers, secondary school or upper secondary school subject teachers. They had attended and completed a year of separate university-level special education teacher training two months before the time of the study. All respondents were female, and their average age was 43 years. They had an average of just over 26 years of teaching experience, with 26 respondents having up to five years of experience as a special needs teacher and four having between five and ten years. A particular strength of this group of respondents in relation to the research design is that they have a long and varied experience of teaching and recent training which has enabled them to work with others at different levels of education to broaden their overall understanding of special educational needs.

The data for the study was collected using a questionnaire in the Webropol software. The questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative questions on a range of topics related to special education teacher education and future skills.

1 The analysis of the qualitative data was carried out using data-driven content  
2 analysis (see Patton, 2002; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The data was first examined  
3 holistically. As the analysis progressed, the data were structured into six thematic  
4 content themes: 1) The broad skills of a special needs teacher, 2) IT skills for  
5 special needs teachers, 3) Cultural sensitivity and multicultural competence, 4)  
6 Collaboration and communication skills, 5) Empathy and interpersonal skills, and  
7 6) Continuous professional development and critical thinking. The results section  
8 of the study is structured according to these thematic areas and direct quotations  
9 from the material are presented under each theme. Percentages of the data are also  
10 presented to support the qualitative analysis.

## 11 12 13 **Results** 14

15 In this section we answer our research question through the six thematic  
16 content themes revealed through data-driven content analysis.  
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### 18 19 **The Broad Skills of a Special Needs Teacher** 20

21 The results show that special education teachers identified the future of the  
22 special education profession as expanding, which will challenge them in several  
23 ways. Pupils' individual needs and starting points need to be identified and  
24 responded to in a timely manner.

25 Special needs teachers were satisfied that they had applied for special needs  
26 teacher training. They had identified a number of skills needed in their previous  
27 teaching experience which the training addressed. 20% of special needs teachers  
28 strongly agreed that the content of the training met the needs of the world of work  
29 and 57% said that the training was somewhat relevant to the needs of the world of  
30 work. Further, 17% of special needs teachers strongly agreed that special needs  
31 teacher training provided sufficient skills for different special needs teaching  
32 contexts and 57% somewhat agreed with this statement. 53% of respondents  
33 strongly agreed that special needs teacher training strengthened their own  
34 expertise in special needs teaching and 37% somewhat agreed. Special needs  
35 teachers mentioned that their training had given them more special educational  
36 skills, particularly in teaching methods (72%), differentiation methods (69%) and  
37 dealing with challenging behavior (59%). The least they had gained from the  
38 training was knowledge and skills on integrating pupils with special needs into the  
39 mainstream classroom (21%). Special needs teachers felt that, particularly in the  
40 early stages of their careers, a variety of concrete models and guidelines helped  
41 new special needs teachers in their work.

42  
43 *"Very concrete help for work. Clear procedures for the novice. Start here, remember*  
44 *these, at some point these and finally these - the basic ramifications."*  
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1 Although the special needs teachers had a very recent education in special  
2 needs teaching, the need for additional training and skills had already been  
3 identified. This contributes to the fact that the profession of special needs teacher  
4 is a very multidimensional one, and that a broad range of competences is a starting  
5 point for continual updating.

6  
7 *"Developing emotional and interpersonal skills in yourself and teaching them to*  
8 *others. This is what I am training for."*  
9

### 10 **IT Skills for Special Needs Teachers**

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12  
13 In addition, future special needs teachers will need to have strong IT skills.  
14 Digitalization and the role of technology in learning are constantly growing.  
15 According to the respondents, the work of a special needs teacher involved a lot of  
16 administrative work, various electronic systems and documents to be recorded on  
17 electronic forms. According to the teachers, some of the administrative work and  
18 data entry in the systems were legally defined and obligatory tasks, and therefore,  
19 according to them, a particularly careful task. According to the special needs  
20 teachers, these required a lot of time at the beginning of a new job, which was  
21 away from the actual substantive work of the special needs teacher. As a result,  
22 teachers felt that good skills in IT systems were an advantage.

23  
24 *"Drafting, planning and organizing pedagogical documents."*  
25

26 *"Increasing expertise in special education, recording of support and related*  
27 *legislation are important contents that the special education teacher must master."*  
28

29 Special education teachers should be able to use a variety of digital tools and  
30 resources to provide effective support and accessible learning opportunities for  
31 their pupils. Special needs teachers perceived that the various web-based tools  
32 were meaningful for the pupils and facilitated the work of the special needs  
33 teacher. For example, they found the web applications on reading challenges to be  
34 excellent. Teachers envisaged that in the future the use of different web-based  
35 applications would become more common and that they would need more training  
36 and in-service training in this area in the future.

37 Special needs teachers said that there is a lot of work to be done and that  
38 digital planning would help to manage it all. This had not been given concrete  
39 form in the training, but in the future this aspect was, according to the teachers,  
40 one of the issues to be developed.

41  
42 *"A compilation and systematization of the tests that have proved their worth over the*  
43 *years. Some kind of annual calendar would give a better overview."*  
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## **Cultural Sensitivity and Multicultural Competence**

The results further suggest that special needs teachers need to develop cultural sensitivity and multicultural competences. Societies are becoming more diverse, and special needs teachers will encounter pupils from different cultural backgrounds. The ability to recognize and respect different cultures and their impact on learning is essential.

For example, special education teachers were concerned about pupils whose mother tongue was not Finnish and who had special educational needs. According to special education teachers, the needs of these pupils were acute, but there were not enough qualified special education teachers, and they did not have the up-to-date knowledge and skills to help multilingual pupils. To address these issues, teachers felt that a more consultative approach was needed in the future to support the whole school community. Cultural sensitivity and cooperation with different families were also issues that the special needs teacher felt would be more important in the future.

*"Special education issues for Finnish as a second language pupils are lagging behind. Also issues of interaction with different families are related to the special needs teacher's field of work, especially in the future these will be emphasized."*

The special needs teachers were surprised that the school had no ready-made structure for special needs education, so they had to start building their own policies, structures and systems. This was a demanding task, according to the teachers, for which they had not been trained. Different schools and cities also had different and varying practices in relation to special needs education. The special needs teachers considered that awareness of varying practices would be useful content for future training.

*"There has been no clear system or yearly calendar of how work is done in schools. Basic support materials have had to be created from scratch."*

## **Collaboration and Communication Skills**

According to special needs teachers' collaboration and communication skills are also essential. Special needs teachers need to work closely with other teachers, parents, and specialists. According to the teachers, the work of the special teacher was an ongoing multidisciplinary collaboration. They mentioned that the consultative approach of the special needs teacher was becoming more common in schools, with an emphasis on good interpersonal skills, listening and understanding.

*"Quick response and application skills, excellent collaboration skills both within the team and with carers and other partners. Knowledge of curriculum and compliance with laws, pedagogical writing. And, of course, attention to the student and positive pedagogy and teaching skills cannot be forgotten."*

1 High-quality communication and collaboration contribute to pupils' well-  
2 being and learning. This was reflected in the perceptions of special needs teachers  
3 that in the future they will need even more cooperation skills, for example with  
4 child protection services. The working communities of special needs teachers can  
5 be very diverse in different schools, and they felt that training could not prepare  
6 them for all situations. For example, a special needs teacher may be a teacher of  
7 the disabled and there may be several assistants in the classroom.

8  
9 *"Incidentally, there should have been more guidance on this community of trainers in*  
10 *the training."*

### 11 12 13 **Empathy and Interpersonal Skills**

14  
15 In addition, special needs teachers say that empathy and interpersonal skills  
16 are relevant for special needs teachers both now and in the future. Supporting  
17 pupils with special needs requires the ability to put oneself in the shoes of the pupil  
18 and pupils' carers, to understand their needs and to build trust.

19  
20 *"A strong vision of multifaceted pedagogical support, a clear picture of each child's*  
21 *the overall situation of each individual, encounter and interaction skills, empathy*  
22 *and emotional skills, and both as a teacher and in teaching."*

23  
24 According to the special needs teachers, it was important for the teacher to  
25 remember the importance of presence and encounter in the midst of all the hustle  
26 and bustle. A relationship of trust with students had to be built and maintained in a  
27 respectful way. The child-centredness of all activities and a creative and flexible  
28 way of working were also reflected in the teachers' reflections.

29  
30 *"Genuinely meeting the student, stopping and listening. Giving time. Flexibility.*  
31 *Resourcefulness, creativity, finding inspiration from the child's interests."*

32  
33 Managing the special education teacher's own work and monitoring their own  
34 behavior was also an element of empathy and interpersonal skills according to the  
35 special education teachers. The special teacher had to maintain a planned and  
36 controlled approach despite rapid changes in the context.

37  
38 *"The ability to work calmly and methodically in very challenging and fast-paced*  
39 *situations is important."*

40  
41 According to the special education teachers, the training included important  
42 and useful content on various neuropsychiatric special education topics. According  
43 to them, there could have been even more. Also, different issues of specific  
44 support for challenging behavior, even the management of violent situations, were  
45 content that they felt future special needs teachers needed.

46



1 *"More concrete tools will be needed in the future to address behavioral challenges.*  
2 *Simply focusing on positive behavior is not enough when dealing with challenging*  
3 *students. I have to deal with aggressive behavior in my work and I could have used*  
4 *some support in training."*

## 7 **Continuous Professional Development and Critical Thinking**

9 Special needs teachers also need continuous professional development and critical  
10 thinking. As education systems and pupils' needs change, special needs teachers  
11 need to be prepared to learn new skills and develop their practice to meet these  
12 challenges. Special needs teachers emphasized that continuous professional  
13 development took place while doing the actual work and reflecting critically on it.  
14 For example, the criticality of allocating working time was a theme that was  
15 reflected upon.

17 *"Use of time and limitation of time for work, unclear which meetings to attend, etc."*

19 *"Lack of time, diversity of workload, challenging behavioral situations with pupils,*  
20 *dealing with ongoing bullying. These are things that make me think and demand*  
21 *professional development from myself."*

23 Newly qualified special needs teachers stressed that it was not enough to have  
24 been trained as a special needs teacher and to start work on that basis. The first  
25 step after the training was to emphasize the importance of the induction of the  
26 special needs teacher. As well as the challenges at community level of what the  
27 job of a special needs teacher entailed and what kind of culture they wanted to  
28 create at school level.

30 *"Induction is really lacking, the challenges are mainly related to the way the work*  
31 *community operates."*

33 According to special needs teachers, the issues of special education and the  
34 demands of teaching were constantly changing. In their special education teacher  
35 training, they had ingrained in them the idea of using researched knowledge and  
36 then more practically applying it to the everyday life of a special education  
37 teacher.

39 *"Access to research-based knowledge is important both during training and in the*  
40 *future. The practical tips gained during the training have also proved valuable."*

42 According to special needs teachers, many of them were working as  
43 unqualified special needs teachers before their training, making the work  
44 particularly demanding and difficult to define and control. Even after qualification,  
45 the challenge of defining the work and their own well-being at work remained.  
46 The diversity of practices among different employers was also an issue that  
47 challenged continuous professional development, according to the special needs

1 teachers. Special needs teachers had a strong intrinsic motivation to learn and take  
2 on new areas of special educational needs. However, this intrinsic motivation was  
3 overshadowed by the ever-increasing workload and the pressure of external  
4 pressures. The needs of the pupils were varied and more and more needs were  
5 emerging all the time. The training had provided a good basis for the work, but in  
6 everyday life there was a constant need to build up structures and, at the same  
7 time, to supplement one's own skills and help colleagues in a consultative  
8 capacity.

9  
10 *"The job description and responsibilities of the special needs teacher were not clear*  
11 *to everyone in the work community, and the broad special needs teacher was used to*  
12 *being used as a resource teacher."*

13  
14 *"What is a special category? Who is studying there? Small class size, so no*  
15 *instructors needed??? What is the special needs teacher allowed to plan for herself*  
16 *or does she follow the wishes of the class teacher to progress at the same pace as the*  
17 *general education group? How to change these and many other everyday things in a*  
18 *pupil-friendly way."*

19  
20 According to special needs teachers, training and its theoretical nature  
21 provides a basis for continuous learning on the job. However, the practical skills  
22 included in the training, linked to the initial career of a special needs teacher, were  
23 seen as important. Without concrete tools, many new special needs teachers  
24 reported being at risk of exhaustion. Special needs teachers' understanding of  
25 continuous learning in their work was seen as a natural continuum and a built-in  
26 starting point. 84% of respondents strongly agreed that their position in the world  
27 of work was strengthened by their training as a special needs teacher. 57%  
28 strongly agreed that their training and skills enabled them to strengthen their work  
29 community and its competences.

## 30 31 32 **Discussion**

33  
34 Teachers in special education play a pivotal role, as highlighted by Harju-  
35 Luukkainen et al. (2022). This includes a range of responsibilities from being  
36 researchers and critical thinkers to functioning as knowledge processors, digital  
37 experts, multi-professional networkers, and assessors of personal development, as  
38 outlined by Ranta et al. (2022; 2023). These roles emphasize the necessity for  
39 teachers to be "future-oriented" and proactive in their own professional  
40 development, an aspect that is increasingly recognized in policy debates and  
41 research (UNESCO, 2024). What are the future competencies of special education  
42 teachers then? The future competences are not clearly defined, but they consist,  
43 according to this research of a wide range of elements, including technical  
44 competence, cultural sensitivity, collaboration and communication skills,  
45 continuous professional development, critical thinking and empathy. Mastering  
46 these skills enables special needs teachers to respond effectively to the diverse

1 needs of students and ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn and  
2 succeed.

3 This research looked at newly graduated special education teachers'  
4 perceptions of these future skills and their relevance in current education. This  
5 research topic is timely, as special education teachers play a crucial role in  
6 identifying and addressing pupils' individual needs. As these needs become more  
7 diverse, future special education teachers will need a broader skill set. The  
8 research question was: what are special education teachers' perceptions of the  
9 future skills needed and their relevance in their received education? The data for  
10 this study (N=30) consisted of responses from recently graduated special  
11 education teachers. The data was analyzed using a data-driven content analysis.  
12 The study indicates that special education teachers anticipate an expanded role in  
13 addressing diverse challenges. They emphasize the importance of promptly  
14 identifying and catering to individual pupil needs. Moreover, future educators  
15 must possess proficient IT skills for leveraging digital tools. Cultural sensitivity  
16 and collaboration are deemed crucial, necessitating effective communication with  
17 colleagues, parents, and specialists. Empathy remains paramount, as it enables  
18 teachers to understand and support both pupils and caregivers, fostering trust and  
19 meeting evolving demands in special needs education. A spectrum of skills, from  
20 technical proficiency to empathy, defines the future competencies of special needs  
21 educators. Mastery of these diverse elements empowers teachers to adeptly  
22 address students' varied needs, fostering an environment where all learners can  
23 thrive and succeed. According to this research, it is obvious that future special  
24 needs teachers need a wide range of skills, and these skills are essential in special  
25 education teacher training.

26 These evolving roles of special education teachers, indicated in this research,  
27 highlight the increasing complexity of educational demands (UNESCO, 2024),  
28 necessitating a broader skill set to effectively address the diverse needs of pupils  
29 (Harju-Luukkainen & Kangas, 2020). This expansion of roles necessitates that  
30 future educators not only possess proficient IT skills to effectively utilize digital  
31 tools in their pedagogical practices but also develop robust capabilities in cultural  
32 sensitivity and collaborative work. This complexity underscores the importance of  
33 both initial teacher training and ongoing professional development in equipping  
34 educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to support each student's  
35 potential in many ways. These skills are essential from many perspectives. They  
36 are important for fostering effective communication with colleagues, parents, and  
37 other educational specialists. Moreover, a strong emphasis on empathy is  
38 highlighted as a critical trait for teachers, enabling them to better understand and  
39 support both pupils and their caregivers, thus cultivating trust and effectively  
40 meeting the evolving demands in special needs education.

41 It is important to keep in mind that the quality of teacher education programs,  
42 encompassing both pre-service and in-service training, remains critical in  
43 preparing educators for these multifaceted roles. Kangas & Harju-Luukkainen  
44 (2021) have pointed out that the methods to meet these complex expectations are  
45 often not clearly defined in policy guidelines, with a notable focus on current  
46 competencies rather than preparing teachers for future demands. This issue is

1 particularly pronounced in special education, where the need for resilience,  
2 transversal competencies, and continuous professional growth is crucial (Ranta et  
3 al., 2023).

4 From these premises, we argue that in order to address these challenges, it is  
5 essential that teacher education programs integrate robust training modules that  
6 not only focus on current educational practices but also anticipate future  
7 educational needs. This is something that also Harju-Luukkainen and Kangas  
8 (2021) stress as important, highlighting the importance of teacher agency,  
9 advocating for an educational framework that supports teachers as active agents in  
10 shaping their professional paths. This approach will not only enhance the adaptive  
11 capacities of teachers but also ensure that they are well-prepared to meet the  
12 evolving demands of the societies.

### 13 14 15 **Conclusion**

16  
17 The work of special education teachers is becoming increasingly critical as  
18 they identify and cater to the unique needs of each pupil. The future of special  
19 education will demand a wider array of skills to effectively manage the growing  
20 diversity among students. Thus, teacher education programs must be forward-  
21 thinking and dynamic, offering comprehensive training that prepares educators to  
22 thrive in a continuously evolving educational environment.

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