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Special Educational Needs Teachers in Finnish Inclusive Vocational Education and Training

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND
PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

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This study with a qualitative approach profiles special educational needs (SEN) teachers working in Finnish inclusive vocational schools in terms of their work lives and professional learning. The purpose is to contribute to our understanding of the complexity of the SEN teaching profession in the Finnish initial vocational education and training (IVET). The data were collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews with 11 in-service SEN teachers across Finland, and a thematic approach was used for data analysis.

The findings illustrate the 4Ms (multiple roles, multiple tasks, multiple problems, multiple relationships) of SEN teachers' work within the inclusive IVET context. SEN teachers need to play multiple roles to deal with multiple tasks and problems through collaboration with multiple individuals. More specifically, various intra- and inter-personal relationships are integral in SEN teachers' daily teaching practices, which indicates that a supportive school climate matters significantly, especially when wider institutional and national contexts are important factors contributing to SEN teachers' job satisfaction. Although basic special needs education (SNE) competences can be developed through pre-service education, knowledge and skills of a more comprehensive scope are considered necessary to better tackle the increasingly complex challenges faced by SEN teachers. One solution to handle the insufficiency of preservice SEN teacher education is to make good use of SEN teachers' informal learning experiences gained through their prior vocational careers, current workplaces and private lives.

The findings suggest that up-to-date and more holistic preservice SEN teacher education should be designed and developed in accordance with the ongoing changes and the new challenges being faced by SEN teachers in inclusive IVET schools. The findings also imply that SEN teachers' professionalism is inevitably interwoven with and acquired and developed by their previous work experiences and certain important life incidents. This inquiry sheds new light and provides a more all-around view on these teachers' professional development.

Keywords: Special educational needs teachers, initial vocational education and training, inclusive education, work life, professional learning

ABSTRAKTI

Tässä laadullisessa tutkimuksessa keskitytään kuvaamaan inklusiivisissa ammattioppilaitoksissa toimivien erityisopettajien työelämää ja ammatillista oppimista. Tavoitteena on lisätä ymmärrystä ammatin monitahoisesta luonteesta toisella asteella. Aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoiduilla syvähaastatteluilla 11:ltä eri puolilla Suomea työskentelevältä erityisopettajalta. Aineiston analyysissä käytettiin temaattista lähestymistapaa.

Tutkimus havainnollistaa erityisopettajan työn monitahoisuuden neljää ulottuvuutta ("4M": monet roolit, monet tehtävät, monet ongelmat, monet suhteet) inklusiivisessa toisen asteen ammatillisessa koulutuksessa. Erityisopettaja toimii monissa rooleissa, hoitaa monia tehtäviä ja käsittelee monenlaisia ongelmia yhteistyössä monien tahojen kanssa. Erilaiset intra- ja interpersoonalliset suhteet ovat olennainen osa erityisopettajan päivittäisiä opetuskäytänteitä, joten koulun kannustavalla ilmapiirillä on huomattava merkitys. Laajemmat institutionaaliset ja valtakunnalliset kontekstit ovat myös tärkeitä erityisopettajan työtyytyväisyyttä lisääviä tekijöitä. Vaikka erityisopetuksen perusosaamista voidaan kehittää opettajankoulutuksessa ennen työelämään siirtymistä, katsotaan erityisopettajan tarvitsevan kokonaisvaltaisempia tietoja ja taitoja pystyäkseen kohtaamaan yhä moninaisempia haasteita työssään. Yksi ratkaisu opettajankoulutuksen riittämättömyyteen on hyödyntää tehokkaasti erityisopettajien informaaleja oppimiskokemuksia, joita on kertynyt aiemman työuran aikana, nykyisessä työpaikassa ja yksityiselämässä.

Tulosten perusteella olisi tarpeen suunnitella ja kehittää ajantasaista, kokonaisvaltaisempaa ammatillisten erityisopettajien peruskoulutusta. Koulutuksen tulisi huomioida meneillään olevat muutokset ja uudet haasteet, joita erityisopettajat kohtaavat inklusiivisissa toisen asteen ammatillisissa oppilaitoksissa. Erityisopettajan ammattitaito on myös väistämättä yhteydessä aiempiin työkokemuksiin ja tärkeisiin elämäntapahtumiin, jotka osaltaan kehittävät ammatillisuutta. Tutkimus tuo uutta tietoa erityisopettajien ammatillisesta kehittymisestä ja antaa siitä kattavamman kuvan.

Asiasanat: erityisopettajat, toisen asteen ammatillinen koulutus, inklusiivinen opetus, työelämä, ammatillinen oppiminen

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Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.

-- T. S. Eliot, American/British poet

Det finnes midt i skogen en lysning som bare kan finnes av den som har gått seg vill.

-- Tomas Gösta Tranströmer, Swedish poet, psychologist and translator

Honestly, I never really planned to earn a PhD at the very beginning of my study and work journeys. While studying teacher education at university, I did once dream of being a professor. I was inspired by a teacher educator who had a phenomenal teaching style, in which her lectures encouraged a pleasant, creative, inspiring and meaningful learning atmosphere. I thought about becoming a similar role model one day to pass on my passion, experiences and professional knowledge. However, this dream was diminished for some personal reasons.

Nevertheless, my later life trajectory, unexpectedly, changed in a dramatic way. I remembered the night on my bed when I considered what the next step of my life would be, just after I got my master's degree and had worked for years as a special educational needs (SEN) teacher. One idea came to head suddenly out of nowhere: Should I pursue a doctorate degree? I found no reason to say no to this notion, especially as I had been feeling in my job that I had come to a crossroads with what I felt I could give to my students. I then made a decision to start my PhD programme application, to leave my teaching job for a while and to refresh my academic view of my profession. Not surprisingly, I started out on a career that was much beyond my imagination, based upon my capacity, experience and perspective.

This is not evidence-based, but I guess at least 90% of PhD students will agree with me that the journey of pursuing a doctorate degree is extremely time-, energy-, and, for some, even financially consuming. In terms of time, it takes days or weeks to ponder over an idea and phrase it in a coherent and understandable way. Every now and then it is also necessary to go back to books or research papers to check, review and reflect on what has already been read. This reading, rereading, writing and rewriting work requires a great deal of mental energy and leads to much stress. So at times I did wonder how I ended up on the rollercoaster track with, in many instances, the feeling of not really being able to handle it all. This is a realm in which I repeatedly had to push myself to the limit of my comfort zone and abilities.

Thankfully, I was not always alone throughout the journey. There were some people who generously offered their help professionally, psychologically or physically. Without their kindness, I would have had no way to survive from the cold and dark 'PhD winter' and to see the silver lining of each phase. First and foremost, I want to give my special thanks to my supervisors: *Raija Pirttimaa*,

FIGURES

TABLES

ACRONYMS

CPD	Continuing Professional Development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
PD	Professional Development
PI	Professional Identity
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SNE	Special Needs Education
TE	Teacher Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Profiling the Lives of SEN Teachers

> I am everything I have lived throughout. My childhood, my school years, my studies, my earlier 50 years, they all have very straight influence to my current profession. […] my professional life, private life … I am … this is compact package.

This is how Linda, a participant in this research, responded to an interview question concerning the interplay between her personal lived experiences and her professional work as a special educational needs (SEN) teacher. The way Linda perceived the interweaving between *work life* and *private life* echoes my notion of the *teacher as a person*.

The teaching profession is something intensely inter-/intra-personal, which implies that working as a teacher involves much more than pedagogical practice, such as, for example, the teacher's affection and emotions *as a person*. In my career as a SEN teacher, I was aware that my teaching practices did not simply comprise the output of what I had learned from my preservice teacher education, but also reflected the embodiment of the life I, *as a person*, had lived through. More specifically, my personal lived experiences had influenced my professional teaching in various ways, and, simultaneously, my professional practices also, consciously or subconsciously, affected my interactions with people and my perceptions of daily life phenomena. In a sense, I was not able to draw a clear line of distinction between my private life and work life. These two realities of life seemed to be profoundly intertwined. That is why I designed this qualitative inquiry to explore the lives of teachers from a more holistic angle in terms of time and space, or, even more intrinsically, to look into the teaching profession by understanding the teacher *as a person* who does not live and work in a vacuum called 'a classroom' or 'a school'.

The life of a teacher is one of the major research areas of interest within the field of education. It has been studied by many researchers who have adopted

varied perspectives. Berger and D'Ascoli (2012), Jarvis and Woodrow (2005) and Moreau (2015) have investigated teachers' lives from the viewpoint of *career choice*, examining reasons behind teachers' initial decision-making in selecting the teaching profession as a career. Whereas Gu and Day (2007), Hong (2010) and Lindqvist, Nordänger and Carlsson (2014) focused their studies on teachers' *attrition* and *resilience*, revealing why or how some teachers, after entering this walk of life, were better able to cope with the same kinds of stressors that appeared to overwhelm others.

Another parallel stream of inquiry views the lives of teachers from the *professional development* (PD) perspective. In other words, how teachers learn is another aspect of teachers' professional lives that intrigues researchers. For instance, in an analysis of 34 experienced Dutch teachers' learning at the workplace, Meirink, Meijer, Verloop and Bergen (2009) identified *reflection* as one of the crucial ways teachers learn. They also highlighted the pivotal role of collaboration in teachers' learning, an observation echoed by Niemi (2015) in her introduction to four cases in Finland in which teachers' PD was successfully enhanced. In her investigation of contemporary practices, Niemi identified the significance of collaboration within the school communities. Such workplace learning experiences are, according to Eraut (2004), Hoekstra, Beijaard, Brekelmans and Korthagen (2007) and Straka (2004), referred to as *informal learning*. However, unlike Meirink et al. (2009) and Niemi (2015) who emphasised teachers' PD that is provided at the workplace, Bukor (2015), Kyles and Olafson (2008) and Smaller (2005) examined teachers' PD through the lens of learning from *personal lived experiences* gained within various teaching/learning settings over time. They argued that understanding the relation between student teachers' personal lives and their beliefs about teaching can shed new light on preservice teacher education and continuing (or continuous) professional development (CPD).

Teachers' PD has also been extensively studied in connection with *preservice teacher education*, that is, *formal learning*, which calls for reflection into the teaching profession and education reform/innovation in response to increasingly complex teaching/learning environments. As suggested by McMahon, Forde and Dickson (2015), preservice teacher education is part of the "professional continuum". It has to be "reshaped" by means of, for example, recognising in-service teachers as vital partners for providing up-to-date, practical know-how. This is identical to Mason's (2013) findings on how in-service teachers' involvement benefits the integration of theory and practice in existing programme design. Moreover, several lines of evidence suggest that *in-service teachers' knowledge of school life* is a valuable asset for the development of preservice teacher education (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006; Pohan, 2003).

Along with research on teachers' career trajectories and PD, the last two decades have seen a growing trend towards *teachers' professional identity* (PI) as a research arena for delving into the nature and characteristics of the teaching profession (Alsup, 2006; Bukor, 2015; Nichols, Schutz, Rodgers, & Bilica, 2017). A significant analysis and discussion on this subject were presented by Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004). In their review of 22 studies, Beijaard et al. classified

contemporary research on teachers' PIs into three categories: research on formation (process), research on characteristics (essence) and research on teachers' narratives (subjective interpretation). Although the focus on teachers' PIs varied from one category to the next, they identified a few shared constitutive features of PI: development of the teacher's PI is a *continuous process* interwoven with *individual* and *context* in which various *sub-identities* harmonise with each other so that the teacher can effectively exercise his or her *agency*. Their wide-ranging and systematic review of the literature about the teacher's PI provided a general framework for later investigations to further examine teachers' multifaceted PIs.

Most research on the lives of teachers, as mentioned, have only had a singular focus. Nevertheless, a few researchers have been able to draw on systematic explorations into this subject from a more comprehensive angle. Central to this discipline are works by Ball and Goodson (1985a), Day, Ferandez, Hauge and Møller (2000), Day and Gu (2010), Goodson (1992), Goodson and Hargreaves (1996), Hargreaves (1994) and Huberman (1993). With the help of their work, the lives of teachers have been profiled more extensively. Take Huberman's (1993) research as an example. Through in-depth interviews with 160 secondary school teachers, he not only delineated the *professional life cycle* of teachers but also revealed the varying *psychological landscapes* throughout the teaching profession trajectory. Huberman's (1993) findings also recognised the influences of *teachers' private lives* on their teaching practices and the *gender differences* in some aspects of teachers' career cycles. With this far-ranging and textured study, the *complexity of the lives of teachers* is portrayed, and new insights are provided on the *interplay between teachers and their workplaces*.

Similar to studies on the lives of teachers in general, previous published inquires that focused on SEN teachers have been limited to a single focus, such as PD (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011; Erickson, Noonan, & McCall, 2012), preservice teacher education (Gavish, 2017; Purdy, 2009; Young, 2008, 2011), stress/burnout/resilience (Bataineh, 2009; Hopman et al., 2018; Lavian, 2012), professional competences/beliefs (Ekstam, Korhonen, Linnanmäki, & Aunio, 2017; Guo, Dynia, Pelatti, & Justice, 2014; Moscardini, 2015) and identity/role/social image (Broomhead, 2016; Mackenzie, 2013; Regev & Ronen, 2012). More specifically, although extensive research has been carried out on the work of SEN teachers, up to now, far too little attention has been paid to a more thorough investigation into the complexity of the lives of SEN teachers.

Since 2001, when efforts to implement reform of the initial vocational education and training (IVET) in Finland began, the concept of the teaching profession in IVET has inevitably been closely examined and reconstructed (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2010; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009, 2011). However, although several studies in the field of special needs education (SNE) have concerned SNE practices within the context of Finnish inclusive vocational education and training (VET) (Hirvonen, 2006, 2011a, b; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013; Pirttimaa & Hirvonen, 2016), scarce research and international publications documenting an in-depth understanding of the SEN teachers' work in inclusive IVET schools exist. Therefore, this research seeks to make a major

and original contribution to enhancing the knowledge of the lives of SEN teachers working in Finnish inclusive vocational schools by demonstrating more multidimensional aspects of their work.

1.2 SEN Teachers in Finland

1.2.1 Special Needs Education in Inclusive Vocational Schools

In Finland, students who receive special support during comprehensive schooling (grades 1–9) are more likely to continue their studies through IVET than through academic upper secondary education (Hirvonen, 2011b; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013; Kirjavainen, Pulkkinen, & Jahnukainen, 2016). IVET here is defined as "training undertaken typically after full-time compulsory education to promote the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills and competences for entry to an occupation or group of occupations. It can be undertaken purely within a school-based and/or work-based environment. It also includes apprenticeship training" (European Agency for Development in Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2013: 5). Students in Finnish IVET, vocational upper secondary education and training, are aged 15–25 years. The school-based education system, which is the major provider of Finnish IVET, offers 119 study programmes leading to 52 broad-based basic vocational upper secondary qualifications that can be obtained via 3 years of full-time studies at Finland's vocational schools (Koukku & Paronen, 2016; Stenström & Virolainen, 2014a).

According to the Official Statistics of Finland (2018), 86% of students with SEN pursuing IVET were studying in inclusive IVET schools, 13% in special IVET schools and around 1% at other institutions that provide IVET programmes. Those who choose to study in inclusive IVET schools are integrated in the inclusive IVET system wherever possible. Among the 86% of students with SEN studying in inclusive IVET schools, 84% (21,711 students) were studying in the same groups with regular students, whereas approximately 3% (690 students) were studying in special groups (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018). Moreover, the number of students in inclusive vocational schools in need of special support has been steadily increasing since 2004: the percentage of students with SEN from among the total student population within the inclusive context was 5% in 2004, 7% in 2011 and 9% in 2017 (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018). The statistics presented here suggest that inclusive education in Finland is not just the focus of educational policy but also a prevalent educational practice, and that the provision of SNE and relevant support in Finnish inclusive vocational schools has improved and become more momentous (Bell et al., 2014; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2013, 2017; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018).

Nationally, the initiation and practice of SNE in inclusive IVET is founded on the Vocational Education and Training Act (531/2017) (Finlex, 2017) that highlighted the fact that students with SEN have the right to long-term or short-term

special support through systematic pedagogical approaches (adapted teaching, learning and assessment as well as relevant services/resources) based upon the students' individual needs, goals and abilities. The purpose of such support is to ensure the acquisition of vocational competencies required for the degree, training or employment. At the college level, it is each IVET provider's responsibility to organise corresponding measures to assist students with SEN by integrating the SEN Action Plan into its annual general educational planning, through which inclusive values, goals, tasks, duties, methods and evaluations must be developed (Bell et al., 2014; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017; Hirvonen, 2011b; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013).

Based on the Vocational Education and Training Act (531/2017) and Official Statistics of Finland, SNE in Finnish IVET is provided mainly for those with disabilities, illnesses, delayed development and other specific conditions/reasons requiring SNE intervention (Finlex, 2017; Official Statistics of Finland, 2019). Vocational schools, whenever needed, utilise 12 grounds on which students' needs for individual support are based (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019):

- Perception, attention and concentration difficulties, such as those resulting from AD/HD or ADD
- Linguistic difficulties, such as severe reading difficulty, dysphasia and dyslexia
- Interactive and behavioural disorders, such as social maladjustment
- Slightly delayed development accompanied by extensive learning difficulties
- Severely delayed development, medium or severe mental handicap
- Chronic psychological illnesses, mental health problems and rehabilitating drug abusers
- Chronic somatic illnesses, such as allergies, asthma, diabetes, epilepsy and cancer
- Learning difficulties related to autism or Asperger's syndrome
- Difficulties of mobility and motoric functions, such as musculoskeletal disorders, CP syndrome and dwarfism
- Auditory impairment
- Visual impairment
- Other reasons/problems necessitating special teaching

Once a student's learning challenges or other problems that affect learning significantly have been spotted, responsive SNE services, such as interviews, pedagogical assessment, consultation/guidance, vocational mapping, remedial instruction, adjustment of the physical environment and so on, are designed and implemented immediately (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018; Hirvonen, 2011b; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013). Normally, there is no need to have an official medical diagnosis to determine whether special support is necessary in the Finnish context. Nevertheless, whenever required, especially when remedial instruction is not sufficient and students need more intensive and long-term assistance, the personal competence development plan (*henkilökohtainen osaamisen*

kehittämissuunnitelma, HOKS) must delineate details concerning the qualification to be completed, the scope of the qualification, the individualised curriculum, the grounds for providing SNE and other services and support required for study (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2013, 2017; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018; Hirvonen, 2011a; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013).

In terms of 'other reasons/problems', Hirvonen (2011b) argued that SNE in IVET does not merely involve tackling students' learning difficulties. Given the trend in Finland towards a more inclusive, flexible and multi-level educational environment (Pirttimaa & Hirvonen, 2016), and given the increasing number of students in need of special support within the IVET context (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018), a growth in the diversity of students' needs seems like an inevitable reality. In an investigation into SEN teachers in Finnish IVET, Pirttimaa and Hirvonen (2016) reported that nowadays students' difficulties, such as lack of motivation, substance abuse or lack of life coping skills, can no longer be dealt with simply through pedagogical support. This view was supported by Honkanen and Nuutila (2013), who asserted that more and more students are studying in IVET with mental health problems or a combination of related problems. This implies that multiple dimensions of SEN are facing contemporary inclusive IVET schools. If these difficulties and problems are not identified in time and handled properly, subsequent social, psychological or behavioural complications may arise, leading to dropout and further social marginalisation (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2013; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013; Kirjavainen et al., 2016; Stenström & Virolainen, 2014b). Therefore, both the Finnish National Agency for Education (2018) and Hirvonen (2011b) have strongly called for attention to the multiplicity and complexity of students' problems and for prompt action to restructure inclusive practices in order to more effectively deal with learner diversity.

Along with the abovementioned challenges caused by student diversity, current IVET reforms also significantly impact Finnish IVET and its SNE services (Bell et al., 2014; Cedefop, 2016a, b; European Commission, 2016a; Hirvonen, 2011a, b; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017a, b, c, d; Stenström & Virolainen, 2014b; Vanhanen-Nuutinen & Majuri, 2013; Virolainen & Stenström, 2015). The goal and nature of IVET is to prepare individuals with vocational competencies required by various walks of life for a possibly uncertain future. This indicates that VET has to continually respond to the ever-changing labour market or to even bigger economic contexts and transform its ideology, organisation and practices accordingly. Since the SNE system is closely intertwined with the general structure of IVET within the inclusive context, it is unavoidably affected by the reformed/reforming IVET as well. In the past decade, IVET has undergone two major reforms in Finland: one in 2015, and the other in 2018. The 2015 reform focused on curriculum transformation aiming to strengthen the competence-based approach by increasing a three-year study from 120 study credits to 180 competence points in order to enhance the connec-

tion between IVET and the labour market and to match the European Qualification Framework (Virolainen & Stenström, 2015). The other reform, enacted in January 2018, was, according to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2017b), "the most extensive reform in education legislation in almost 20 years". This comprehensive reform covered nearly every aspect of IVET in terms of financing, structure, approach, admission, learning, teaching and other practices.

One of the major changes brought about by this new reform concerns the learning environment. Based on individual needs addressed in HOKS, more flexible and open learning settings are planned. Study settings, such as typical educational institutions, workplaces or digital environments, are specifically stressed and increased. Another major change is that the number of qualifications will decrease from the current 360 to 150, which implies changes in the number of study programmes (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017a, b, c). Although official claims (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017a) report that students' rights to special support will be extended, the long-term effects of certain major changes in relation to SNE remain to be seen, since the IVET reform is fundamentally a governmental response to national financial challenges (European Commission, 2016a). After a thorough study into SEN teachers working in IVET, Hirvonen (2011a, b) and Pirttimaa and Hirvonen (2016) reported that the ongoing reforms have changed both the roles and tasks of SEN teachers within the inclusive IVET environment and created uncertainty for students with SEN. Surely, versatile learning environments provide a greater flexibility of choice for students with SEN in the undertaking of their studies. On the other hand, a more open learning environment may not necessarily benefit students with SEN, as they need extensive individualised tutoring and good strcuture. Also, with the learning setting shifting from typical educational institutions to on-the-job projects, the traditional roles of teachers must be broadened to consolation and guidance.

Considering student diversity and the IVET reform, almost every paper that has been written on SNE within the Finnish IVET points out the growing significant roles of guidance, consultation and collaboration in improving inclusive practices. In her seminal articles, Hirvonen (2011a, b) highlighted the need for guidance or systematic consultation in order to deal with the diversity of students, which was supported by Pirttimaa and Hirvonen (2016) in their study on the changing face of SEN teachers in vocational schools. Furthermore, they emphasised the significance of better integrating SEN teachers into the multiprofessional network in the inclusive IVET context. This implies that closer collaboration is necessary, especially the collaboration between, for example, tutors and SEN teachers, so that a more flexible and efficient student support system can be developed (Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013).

1.2.2   SEN Teachers' Work in Inclusive Vocational Schools

As the vital factor contributing to Finland's internationally acclaimed performance in education, Finnish teachers have been extensively researched in the past two decades (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, & Hökkä, 2015; Sahlberg, 2011a, b;

Simola, 2005; Tirri & Puolimatka, 2000; Toom & Husu, 2016). This trend is also reflected in the increasing number of inquiries into the transformation of IVET teachers' professional practices, agency and identity as a gradually emerging theme during Finland's various IVET reforms (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2010; Vähäsantanen, 2013, 2015; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009, 2011; Weström, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2018). Given the strong links between the SNE system and the general structure of the IVET, as well as the growing number of students with SEN, an updated understanding of how SEN teachers' roles and tasks are affected by the contemporary changes in Finnish IVET is important and necessary. However, until now, little attention in Finland has been paid to this area of research.

Among the few researchers who have investigated SEN teachers working in inclusive IVET, Hirvonen (2006) and Kaikkonen (2010) found that structural changes caused by educational reforms significantly affected not only the way SNE was considered and implemented in the IVET but also how SEN teachers perceived their evolving roles. More specifically, after interviewing 15 vocational SEN teachers and 7 supervisors working in 5 inclusive IVET schools across Finland, Hirvonen (2006) reported that vocational SEN teachers used to work independently with their own small groups, isolated from general education; however, with the shift from separate educational settings towards more flexible and inclusive learning environments, new challenges, such as role ambiguity, multiple tasks and collaboration, inevitably faced this group of teachers. In her later investigations into SEN teachers in Finnish vocational schools, she further confirmed and elaborated on their transforming roles during this era of changes (Bell et al., 2014; Hirvonen, 2011a, b; Pirttimaa & Hirvonen, 2016).

Moreover, Hirvonen (2011a) argued that a more systematic view, or, as Emanuelsson (2001) proposed, a relational approach, should be adopted to examine today's SEN teaching profession in IVET. While SEN teachers' work focuses on teaching and assisting students at either the individual or educational institutional level, it also is aimed at preparing students with SEN to better transition from education to the labour market. Furthermore, the interpersonal dimension, such as the emotional side, ethical charge and social skills that are required in the contemporary multi-professional working environment, also plays an integral part in today's SEN teaching profession.

In Hirvonen's collaboration with Pirttimaa (2016) delving into the changing face of SEN teachers in the Finnish IVET, they explored a 'new' group of SEN teachers working in inclusive vocational schools whose work mainly involves offering instruction in general subjects. In other words, in inclusive vocational schools, special support can be provided by two types of SEN teachers: comprehensive/general/academic SEN teachers (*laaja-alainen erityisopettajat*) and vocational SEN teachers (*ammatillinen erityisopettajat*). Comprehensive/general/academic SEN teachers are responsible for teaching general subjects (e.g. Finnish language, mathematics) and learning strategies (e.g. visual imagery strategy, first-letter mnemonic strategy), whereas vocational SEN teachers are responsible for teaching vocational subjects (e.g. catering and domestic services, technology).

The primary tasks of both groups of SEN teachers in IVET are to teach and counsel, which entails substantial collaboration with other teachers and professionals (Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013). The similarities and differences in expertise between comprehensive/general/academic and vocational SEN teachers are summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1   Similarities and differences in expertise between comprehensive/general/academic and vocational SEN teachers

	Comprehensive/General/ Academic SEN Teacher (*laaja-alainen erityisopettaja*)	Vocational SEN Teacher (*ammatillinen erityisopettaja*)
Workplace	Inclusive vocational schools	
Primary Tasks	1. Teaching and counselling 2. Collaboration with a variety of individuals	
Main Subjects Taught	1. General subjects (e.g. Finnish language, maths, physics) 2. Learning strategies (e.g. visual imagery strategy, first-letter mnemonic strategy)	Vocational subjects (e.g. catering and domestic services, information and technology)

1.2.3   Preservice SEN Teacher Education for Inclusive Vocational Schools

In the last decade, Finland has received significant international attention for its impressive performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Together with Finnish teachers as a main theme under close investigation, the preservice teacher training system that produces a quality teaching force in Finland is another contributory factor coming into the spotlight of global educational forums (Kontoniemi & Salo, 2011; Lanas & Kelchtermans, 2015; Malinen, Väisänen, & Savolainen, 2012; Tirri, 2014). However, far too little research interest has been paid internationally to preservice teacher education which specifically prepares good quality SEN teachers to work in the Finnish IVET. To date, the existing accounts of the preservice SEN teacher education for inclusive vocational schools have only been demonstrated either as part of the exploration of SEN teachers working in inclusive vocational schools or as official marketing information published on the websites of the teacher education institutions. Since teacher education programmes in Finland share many similar elements (Hausstätter & Takala, 2008; Koivula, Lakkala, & Mäkinen, 2010), in the following section, I highlight the principal findings of these limited inquiries, along with presenting the teacher education schools in the University of Jyväskylä and the JAMK University of Applied Sciences as examples to briefly introduce the structure and content of preservice teacher education for SNE in Finnish inclusive vocational schools.

In Finland, the preservice teacher education for SNE in inclusive vocational schools is organised into two higher education categories. Primarily the University of Sciences (*yliopisto*) prepares SEN teachers to work within basic education (grades 1–9), yet this group of SEN teachers are also eligible to work within inclusive IVET schools teaching general subjects, such as language and mathematics. The University of Applied Sciences (*ammattikorkeakoulu*), on the other hand, equips those who already have vocational backgrounds with pedagogical knowledge and skills to work professionally in the field of SNE within the IVET context (Pirttimaa & Hirvonen, 2016). Moreover, preservice SEN teacher training can be offered either concurrently or consecutively, which means that one can study SNE within the master's degree framework (five years, 300 European Credit Transfer System [ECTS] credits) or have extra SEN-related pedagogical training (1–2 years, 60 ECTS credits) based on or after a professional qualification acquired previously (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 1998/2018; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019; Tuomainen, Palonen, & Hakkarainen, 2012). Table 2 presents an overview of the similarities and differences in preservice education between comprehensive/general/academic and vocational SEN teachers.

TABLE 2   Similarities and differences in preservice education between comprehensive/general/academic and vocational SEN teachers

	Comprehensive/General/ Academic SEN Teacher (*laaja-alainen erityisopettaja*)	Vocational SEN Teacher (*ammatillinen erityisopettaja*)
Workplace	Inclusive vocational schools	
Sources of the First Qualification Acquired	University of Sciences (*yliopisto*)	University of Applied Sciences (*ammattikorkeakoulu*)
Sources of SEN Teacher Qualification Acquired	1. University of Sciences (*yliopisto*): One- or two-year SEN teacher education programme (60 ECTS credits) (consecutive) or master's degree programme (300 ECTS credits) (concurrent) 2. University of Applied Sciences (*ammattikorkeakoulu*): Vocational SEN teacher education programme (60 ECTS credits) (consecutive)	

Preservice SEN teacher education in the University of Jyväskylä

The primary tasks of the SNE study programme in the Department of Education (University of Jyväskylä, JYU) are, in terms of practice, to prepare the SEN practitioners for various SEN-related settings and theoretically educate future academic research specialists to investigate different themes in this field so that our understanding of SNE can be broadened and deepened (Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2018a). These two main missions are manifested in three divergent SEN training

paths: early childhood education (*varhaiserityisopetus*), SNE (*erityispedagogiikka*) and SEN specialist (*asiantuntija*) (Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2018a). This section is focused on the SNE (*erityispedagogiikka*) only, as teacher candidates trained through this path can choose to work as SEN teachers in the IVET.

Within the framework of the master's degree study (5 years, 300 ECTS credits), the qualification acquisition process consists of a 3-year bachelor's degree programme (180 ECTS credits) plus a 2-year master's degree programme (120 ECTS credits). In the SNE bachelor's degree programme, the curriculum is composed of 4 full-time sub-studies: basic studies in SNE (*erityispedagogiikan perusopinnot*, 25 ECTS credits), special pedagogy subject studies (*erityispedagogiikan aineopinnot*, 50 ECTS credits), other joint studies (*muut yhteiset opinnot*, 45 ECTS credits) and elective studies (*valinnaiset opinnot*, 60 ECTS credits) (Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2018b). Basic studies in SNE provide an overview of general SNE themes, such as the basics of SNE, the SEN environments and necessary networks, student diversity and individuality, teacher PD, and inclusive practice promotion. Special pedagogy subject studies further explore a wide range of special needs as well as corresponding countermeasures with a research-based approach. Other joint studies involve the knowledge of basic/mainstream education and essential competencies required for university study and scientific communication. Elective studies in the bachelor's programme allow students to develop their multdisciplinary competences by increasing their knowledge in certain subjects. The learning outcome of the SNE bachelor's degree programme is that, after completing the studies, the student will be familiar with SEN practices and will have acquired a basic knowledge of conducting research.

The main goal of the master's programme of study is to prepare teacher candidates with research know-how for both SEN practices and independent scientific work. The curriculum covers three sub-studies: advanced educational studies (*erityispedagogiikan syventävät opinnot*, 90 ECTS credits), other joint studies (*muut yhteiset opinnot*, 6 ECTS credits) and elective studies (*valinnaiset opinnot*, 24 ECTS credits) (Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2018c). Advanced educational studies include content studies (*sisältöopinnot*, 30 ECTS credits) focused on applying theoretical and research viewpoints to a variety of SNE themes (e.g. the neurocognitive perspective for supporting learning disabilities, motivation to support learning, educators' professional ethics and moral education, cultural diversity in education and pedagogy), internship (*harjoittelut*, 10 ECTS credits), research method studies (*tutkimusmenetelmäopinnot*, 10 ECTS credits) and thesis studies (*tutkielmaopinnot*, 40 ECTS credits).

The other path to obtaining a SEN teacher qualification is through extra special pedagogy training based on or after a professional qualification acquired previously, such as a class teacher or a subject teacher, which is considered as a separate tract of SNE studies (*erilliset erityisopettajan opinnot*). This study module requires completion of 60 ECTS credits, 20 ECTS credits of which can be deducted for those who have completed basic studies in SNE, as basic studies in SNE are compulsory in all teacher education (Koivula et al., 2010); the remaining credits

are achieved through joint courses (*yhteiset opintojakso*, 30 ECTS credits) and elective courses (*valinnaiset opintojaksot*, 10 ECTS credits), which become the two main study focuses (Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2018c). The noteworthy feature of this study module is its diversity in the forms of learning. Compared to the concurrent approach (5 years, 300 ECTS credits), separate SNE studies make much more of a student's autonomy and responsibility as an adult learner through instruction, independent study and internship/teaching practice.

Overall, the preservice SEN teacher education programme provided by the University of Jyväskylä is quite similar to what Koivula et al. (2010) found in their inquiry concerning Finnish teacher education for inclusion, which integrates three basic elements: literature, lectures and teaching practice. By the very nature of the University of Sciences, preservice SEN teacher education is also developed on a solid research basis with an academic approach. As awareness of student diversity in today's inclusive educational settings has increased, SNE seems to be gaining in popularity among those who study education (Koivula et al., 2010). Still, it appears that the content of Finnish preservice SEN teacher education in the University of Sciences is category-oriented and learning-difficulty-focused (Hausstätter & Takala, 2008).

Preservice SEN teacher education in the JAMK University of Applied Sciences

Unlike the University of Jyväslylä providing a more general preservice SEN teacher education leading to teaching qualifications from early childhood level to upper secondary level, JAMK University of Applied Sciences develops and tailors its preservice SEN teacher education programme specifically for those who have already earned their teaching qualification and want to specialise in the field of SNE in IVET. The post-graduate study module designed by JAMK University of Applied Sciences, as a CPD programme, is a part-time 60-credit in-service training programme that takes about 1 to 1.5 years to complete. Updated in 2019, the study is to be accomplished in a more flexible and multidimensional manner through self-study, contact lectures, internship/teaching practice, assignments, small group studies, mentoring, project work and e-learning (JAMK, 2019). The goal of the training is to educate experienced teachers in terms of the needs of and objectives for the regional development of special support, to develop their PIs, to become familiar with learning diversity and to train them on inclusive practices so that they can work as SEN experts in various IVET settings (JAMK, 2019).

The goal of the training is directly reflected by its competence-based curriculum emphasising three expertise areas: evolving PI (*kehittyvä ammatillinen identiteetti*), inclusive education development (*inklusiivisen koulutuksen kehittäminen*) and learning diversity (*oppimisen moninaissus*) (JAMK, 2019). Evolving PI focuses on developing students' reflection competence and knowledge management. As lifelong learners, the vocational SEN teachers must be reflective practitioners with the ability to examine and develop their own expertise in relation to the work community, and they need to know how and where to search for empirical

knowledge and update their know-how in SNE. Inclusive education development pays more attention to the contextual factors influencing inclusive IVET practices in terms of legislations, cultural concepts of SNE, attitudes, ethics, societal changes, physical/social/digital accessibility or multidisciplinary cooperation. With such a broad view, vocational SEN teachers can find solutions or formulate action plans to nurture students' academic and social inclusion. Learning about topics on diversity prepare teachers to assist students with diverse SEN. This implies awareness of the theoretical and pedagogical foundations of SNE, the understanding of the individual learner's difficulties and acquisition of proactive/reactive teaching and guidance skills to design learning objectives, materials, evaluations and environments.

The dimension of evolving PI (*kehittyvä ammatillinen identiteetti*, 12 ECTS credits) involves 2 study units: study individualisation (*opiskelun henkilökohtaistaminen*, 7 ECTS credits) and elective studies (*valinnaiset opinnot*, 5 ECTS credits). For the development of reflection competence and knowledge management, student teachers are required to set goals, draft personal study plans (HOKS) and compile portfolios of their own throughout the learning process togher with other fellow student teachers under the mentoring of teacher educators, by which their PIs can be established gradually. Elective studies create a platform where student teachers can expand and deepen their educational skills according to their professional and personal development needs.

The dimension of inclusive education development (*inklusiivisen koulutuksen kehittäminen*, 20 ECTS credits) relates to 3 fundamental study elements: networking skills and multidisciplinary cooperation (*verkosto-osaaminen ja moniammatillinen yhteistyö*, 5 ECTS credits), basics of vocational SNE 1 & 2 (*ammatillisen erityisopetuksen perusteet*, 10 ECTS credits) and activity environment development (*toimintaympäristön kehittäminen*, 5 ECTS credits). In order to advance inclusive practices, it is necessary for student teachers to understand SNE in terms of space and time by exploring national and international documents so that their personal SEN know-how and know-why can be further developed. More specifically, after completing their studies, vocational SEN teachers can better plan, implement and assess their own work within the institutional context. Based on their established understanding of contemporary SNE in IVET acquired through the studies of inclusive environments and basics of vocational SNE, student teachers are expected to prepare and actualise a developmental project for their own schools. Throughout the development of inclusive education, multiprofessional cooperation, consulting and networking skills are important requirements.

The dimension of learning diversity (*oppimisen moninaisuus*, 28 ECTS credits) covers the course of inclusive individual support and inclusive pedagogy (*yksilöllinen tuki ja inklusiivinen pedagogiikka*, 22 ECTS credits) and teaching practice (*harjoittelu*, 6 ECTS credits). These two study units focus on developing practical pedagogical skills, that is, the ability to identify and consider the diverse abilities and needs of learners in shaping teaching methods with a collaborative approach and a systematic view.

Differences between the University of Jyväskylä and the JAMK University of Applied Sciences

Generally speaking, preservice SEN teacher education offered by the University of Sciences is more conventional, taking an academic approach focused on research and comprehensive knowledge of SNE, especially on learning difficulties at the individual level, whereas preservice SEN teacher education at the University of Applied Sciences seems more practical with its competence-based approach focused on inclusive education at the institutional level. To some extent, preservice SEN teacher education at the University of Sciences is, according to Blanton and Pugach (2007), more of an integrated model in comparison with the University of Applied Sciences' discrete model. (These models will be elaborated in 2.4.1). In other words, preservice SEN teacher education at the University of Sciences appears to provide a platform where the basic knowledge of SNE/inclusive education is widely shared, as it gains in popularity among those who study education (Koivula et al., 2010), while preservice SEN teacher education at the University of Applied Sciences targets a more specific groups of teachers with more hands-on SNE competences.

As indicated in 1.2.1 (SNE in Inclusive Vocational Schools), the major challenge nowadays facing IVET is to provide support and guidance to students with diverse SEN in a more open learning environment. Based on the evidence presented thus far, it appears that the JAMK University of Applied Sciences preservice vocational SEN teacher education programme has been quite responsive to the constant changes of IVET in Finland. Compared to the SEN teacher education programme offered by the University of Jyväskylä, the concept of teacher PI seems to be more explicitly introduced. However, according to Bell et al. (2014) and Hirvonen (2011a), the competences of SEN teachers are changing in response to the challenges of role ambiguity, role conflict and lack of collaboration in the field. Whether the updated preservice vocational SEN teacher education can help restructure SEN teachers' work and how their PIs evolve throughout the training are worth further exploration.

1.3   Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is about the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers employed in inclusive vocational schools across Finland. It is the first presentation in English of an in-depth perspective on what it is like to be a SEN teacher within the Finnish inclusive IVET context during an era of challenges and changes. Drawing on empirical findings from research conducted with a qualitative approach, this dissertation discloses how the SEN teaching profession currently demands more wide-ranging expertise in response to the increasingly diverse population of students.

I begin, in this chapter, with a wider background inquiry as the essential preliminary to my research. The motivations, purpose and significance of this

study are briefly outlined. Thereafter, the contemporary practices of SEN teachers in Finnish inclusive vocational schools are presented. The focuses are on SEN teachers' roles and tasks in such inclusive environments in general and the corresponding preservice SEN teacher education for working in inclusive vocational schools. At the end of this chapter, the organisation of the dissertation is outlined. Chapter 2 conceptualises the study of the SEN teachers' work and professional learning. The concepts of the SEN teachers' career choice, roles and tasks and their professional learning are introduced. Chapter 3 provides the framework of this qualitative inquiry. To achieve the research purpose, three major themes, followed by three research tasks and five corresponding research questions, are presented. Chapter 4 consists of six sections and gives a more detailed explanation of the research methodology. The first section presents the methodological approach adopted in this study, followed by three sections describing the research participants, data collection procedure and data analysis procedure. The final two sections cover research trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

From Chapter 5 to Chapter 9, the significant findings which emerged from the data are revealed. All the five chapters are built around the realities of the SEN teaching profession within the inclusive IVET context experienced by the 11 research participants. The chapters provide illustrative examples of the multidimensional aspects of SEN teachers' work. Chapter 5 demonstrates the process of reasoning behind the teachers' choices regarding their SEN teaching careers. Why did they decide to become a teacher? Why did they choose to be a teacher in the field of SNE? What influenced their decisions to work in inclusive vocational schools instead of other educational settings? Chapter 6 uncovers the complexity of SEN teachers' work in today's inclusive vocational schools. It focuses especially upon three topics:

- Characteristics and competences of the SEN teaching profession;
- Emotions and resilience in the SEN teaching profession;
- The gap between preservice teacher education and work reality.

Chapter 7 presents the teachers' reflections on their preservice teacher education, as a means of formal learning, from three angles: what they found useful, what they found insufficient and what they suggest improving. In terms of structure, this chapter uses 'coursework', 'fieldwork' and 'teacherhood' to examine preservice teacher education. Chapter 8 focuses on SEN teachers' informal learning through their various personal lived experiences. This chapter presents a vivid illustration concerning how teachers' experiences gained from prior vocational careers, present workplaces, negative life incidents, married lives and child raising benefit their SEN teaching profession. In Chapter 9, the reasons for teachers' willingness to remain in or intention to leave the SEN teaching profession are revealed. Moreover, the job satisfaction of SEN teachers is also examined in relation to whether the teachers would recommend this profession to others who are interested in it.

Finally, in Chapter 10, the main findings of this qualitative inquiry are summarised and further discussions on the themes in question are presented. Given

the fact that this study, conducted with a qualitative approach, is particularly focused on SEN teachers working in Finnish inclusive vocational schools, certain research limitations are clarified. Corresponding suggestions for future research and practical implications for policymakers, teacher educators and school leaders are also given.

2 CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

This chapter provides the conceptual background of this research to theoretically capture the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers. The first section (2.1 The Teacher as a Person) presents a brief description of three dimensions to the teacher-as-a-person. Section 2.2 (SEN Teachers' Professional Trajectories) presents an overview of SEN teachers' career choice, attrition and retention. In Section 2.3 (SEN Teachers' Work), the complexity and evolving landscape of the SEN teaching profession is illustrated. The last section (2.4 SEN Teachers' Formal and Informal Learning) synopsises preservice SEN teacher education and SEN teachers' professional learning that takes place outside preservice teacher education.

2.1 The Teacher as a Person

> Consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously, we teach who we are.
>
> – Hamacheck (1999: 209)

To date, a few researchers have tried to shift our attention from an instrumentalist perspective to a more holistic view of the teaching profession. In these studies, 'the teacher as a person' was explicitly highlighted as a cornerstone, closely relating to school improvement, educational change and students' motivations, achievements, well-being and identities (Ball & Goodson, 1985b; Hargreaves, 1994; Korthangen, 2004; Läänemets, Kalamees-Ruubel, & Sepp, 2012; Meng, Muñoz, & Wu, 2016; Stonge, 2007; Watson, Miller, Davis, & Carter, 2010). Three major dimensions concerning their emphases on the teacher-as-a-person are identified. Firstly, the teacher's humanistic role is central to the students' learning. In Glatthorn's (1975) terms, it is the authentic nature of the teacher that makes a difference. Läänemets et al. (2012) echoed this observation, noting that such authenticity is expressed through teachers' affective, social and emotional characteristics and embodied in their daily behaviours of caring, fairness and respect. Accordingly, the primary concern of the teacher as an authentic individual is not

about a student's learning achievement but about a student's individuality (Stonge, 2007).

The second dimension of the teacher-as-a-person focuses on the teacher's inter-/intra-personal connections. As noted, the teacher's humanistic role plays a vital part in student learning, which clearly implies the significance of interactions between teachers and students. The quality of the teacher-student relationships not only enhances students' learning processes but also legitimises the humanity of teachers (Stonge, 2007). However, teachers are no longer performing solo in providing educational services, as the inclusion of students with diverse needs has become a more universally supported and legislated practice (Stemler, Elliott, Grigorenko, & Sternberg, 2006). Consequently and inevitably, teachers today must work in collaboration with other staff members so that an inclusive environment for all students can be created (Stonge, 2007). The quality of these two kinds of interpersonal connections, teacher-student relationships and teacher-colleague relationships, are highly dependent on and continually examined and improved through teachers' reflective practices. In other words, ongoing self-dialogue, self-evaluation and self-critique, as the manifestations of intrapersonal connections, are important facets of a teacher's professionalism for dealing with the complexity of school realities (Ball & Goodson, 1985b; Stonge, 2007). During this reflective practice, as suggested by Korthagen (2004), teachers should reflect on six levels (the 'onion model'): mission, identity, beliefs, competences, behaviour and environment. Based on their reflections of the different levels, teachers' personal growth can be achieved and sustained and their quality connections with students and colleagues can be stimulated and maintained.

The third dimension of the teacher-as-a-person places emphasis upon how teachers' lived experiences and demographic factors affect their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes. Stonge (2007) claimed that effective teachers must understand themselves. This does not just refer to a formal or informal self-reflection process as mentioned in the previous section. A fundamental knowledge of which and how a teacher's personal life history and personal factors interplay and interweave with his or her professionalism is also required in order to capture the comprehensive picture of the work life of the teacher-as-a-person (Crow, Levine, & Nager, 1990; Goodson, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Kenyon, 2017; Kyles & Olafson, 2008). Take career choice as an example. In Crow et al.'s (1990) research on career changers who become teachers and Goodson's (1991) study on teachers' lives and development, both found that the motivational impetus to either enter the teaching profession or change career direction cannot be adequately explained apart from teachers' personal lived experiences. This corresponds with Hargreaves' (1994) findings indicating that teachers do not teach purely according to the skills they have acquired; instead, teachers' careers and teaching practices are shaped and grounded by their backgrounds and biographies. Within the same vein, Kenyon (2017) and Kyles and Olafson (2008) maintained that teachers' lived experiences of authority and multicultural schooling can, to some extent, determine their ideological understanding of school authority and attitudes towards diversity.

Together, these studies indicate the need for a more comprehensive view of the teaching profession, as teachers are not merely instruments by which subject and educational services are taught and delivered. Teachers, consciously or subconsciously, bring 'the whole package of self', which is shaped and reshaped by their professional and personal lives, into their teaching careers, where various humanistic roles are performed so that quality professional relationships can be established.

2.2 SEN Teachers' Professional Trajectories

2.2.1 Career Choice of VET Teachers

As stated, it is important not to isolate the teaching profession from the teacher him/herself as a person with regard to his or her work life and professional learning, which implies that a teacher's professionalism is consciously or subconsciously intertwined with his or her personal universe. Correspondingly, increasing attention has been paid to a more expansive view of the teaching profession. One of the major research interests shown by policymakers, scholars, researchers and practitioners is the question of why people choose teaching as a professional career. It is believed that a better understanding of the motivating factors in becoming a teacher may help our comprehension and even prediction of teachers' enthusiasm, commitment, efficacy, sense of autonomy, satisfaction, attrition, retention, pedagogical knowledge and classroom behaviour. More specifically, career choice motivation is viewed not solely as one significant integral constituent of professionalism but also as a crucial explanatory factor for the teacher shortage worldwide (Freidman, 2016; König & Rothland, 2012; Richardson & Watt, 2010; Rots, Aelterman, Devos, & Vlerick, 2010).

Given the fact that those who decide to choose teaching as a career are not a homogeneous body of people and their decisions are affected by a multiplicity of factors, such as personal characteristics, influences of significant others, perceived social status, national labour market or availability of other opportunities, an integrative conceptual framework seems necessary so that various intrinsic, altruistic, extrinsic or other motivations can be examined and compared across different sociocultural contexts by researchers. One well-known and widely adopted frame of reference is the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) Scale, which was developed by Richardson and Watt (2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014). In the FIT-Choice Scale, personal and contextual, intrinsic and extrinsic, as well as active and passive aspects are considered. More specifically, within the FIT-Choice framework, motivations for choosing a teaching career comprise eight main constructs, which include one to four subconstructs: socialisation influences (social dissuasion, prior teaching and learning experiences, social influences), task demand (expert career, high demand), task return (social status, salary), self-perception (perceived teaching abilities), intrinsic value, personal utility value (job security, time for family, job transferability), social utility value (shape future of children/adolescents, enhance social equity, make social contribution,

work with children/adolescents) and fallback career. As a common and comprehensive scale of measurement, the FIT-Choice Scale can be applied to comprehend and contrast motivations for entering the teaching profession.

Among those who chose to become teachers, many are, in fact, career changers. They decide to leave other vocations to pursue teaching as a career. As career changers usually have several years of practice in other professional fields with specific vocational knowledge and skills, many of them end up pursuing their teaching careers at IVET schools. As mature and knowledgeable individuals in their disciplines, they are viewed as valuable assets to the teaching force since they have both a sense of mission and a wealth of relevant hands-on experiences (Tigchelaar, Brouwer, & Vermunt, 2010). Such a career trajectory was confirmed by Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant (2003), who asserted that the desire to apply one's specialist subject knowledge and skills is a vital 'pull' factor contributing to his/her motivation for entering the teaching profession at the secondary school level.

Despite the career choice tendency of career changers, there remains a relatively small body of published studies concerned with the reasons for deciding to work as an IVET teacher. Much of the current literature on career choice motivations pays more attention to teachers of elementary or general lower/upper secondary educational levels rather than to those working within the IVET context. This probably results, in part, from the lower profile of IVET around the globe. In most countries, IVET has suffered from the problem of low esteem and the stigma of being considered a 'dead end alley' diversion from higher education (Deissinger, Aff, & Fuller, 2013; Olofsson & Wadensjö, 2012; Polesel, 2010). Nevertheless, the motivations for working as IVET teachers are usually not much different than the motivations of those who choose teaching as their initial or second career. From the perspective of the FIT-Choice Scale, intrinsic value is still rated as the most influential determinant of IVET teachers' career choice (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012; Berger & Girardet, 2015). In other words, career changers decide to work as IVET teachers not because teaching seems easy for them but because the teaching profession entails variety, challenges and psychic rewards more than what it may offer in terms of task return (e.g. social status and level of salary), which, based on their prior teaching and learning experiences, much more adequately fits their abilities, aptitudes and values. Furthermore, just like those switching from other occupations to teaching, people who choose to work as IVET teachers also bear the sense of mission to share their professional know-how with the younger generation and the wish to balance work and various aspects of their personal lives (Berger & Girardet, 2015; Bestvater & Nägele, 2010).

Other facets of career changers' motivations to teach are also covered in the discussion on the reasons for choosing to become an IVET teacher as a second career, including personal utility value (e.g. job security, time for family), perceived teaching ability or social utility value (e.g. enhance social equity, work with children/adolescents) (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012; Berger & Girardet, 2015; Bestvater & Nägele, 2010). It is worth noting that, one new dimension, that is, *opportunity*, was explicitly pointed out in Berger and D'Ascoli's (2012) and Berger

and Girardet's (2015) studies on IVET teachers' occupational choices in Switzerland. Unlike the fallback motivations presented by the FIT-Choice Scale that views teaching as a 'career back-up plan' (Richardson & Watt, 2006), the opportunity to work in IVET seems to play a more positive role because such a 'career switch', as noted by Berger and D' Ascoli (2012), is not entirely a career turnaround but more like a continuation of their career development, since the transition is made within the same professional discipline.

2.2.2 Career Choice of SEN Teachers

SEN teachers are appreciated mostly for their passionate and professional commitment to serving groups of students with widely diverse needs, and their jobs tend to be considered the most difficult and most complex compared to other fields of education (Payne, 2005). Consequently, it is not surprising that a chronic shortage of qualified educators in the area of SNE exists (Berry et al., 2012; Katsiyannis, Zhang, & Conroy, 2003; McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004; Payne, 2005). While a large and growing body of literature has investigated SEN teachers' attrition and retention, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section, there is still, to date, very little scientific understanding of teachers' intentions to pursue careers in SNE.

Like many other studies focused on identifying decisive contributing factors to explain people's motivations to work as teachers, several lines of evidence have shown that teachers' decision-making about careers in the field of SNE largely depends on either their altruistic/intrinsic concerns or realistic considerations (Feng, 2015; Gavish, 2017; Hausstätter, 2007; Stephens & Fish, 2010; Zhang, Wang, Losinski, & Katsiyannis, 2014). Gavish (2017) analysed questionnaire data from 98 SEN teacher trainees who were about to start their preservice training. She concluded that they espoused to a certain 'spiritual' idea of the SEN teaching profession and bore a sense of mission to help those in need. In a more specific sense, she labelled these motivations as *ethical-moral*, *practical* and *intellectual*. The ethical-moral aspect of motivation, the inner drive, consists of three factors: the desire to contribute to disadvantaged others, to gain personal satisfaction and to bring about social change. The practical aspect of motivation includes personal compensation and self-improvement, to right prior injustices, reinforcement of abilities, reproducing personal successful experiences and profitability (i.e., as a stepping stone for professional and personal mobility). The intellectual aspect of motivation refers to being intrigued by the field of SNE and by those with SEN.

A broader perspective was adopted by Stephens and Fish (2010) and Zhang et al. (2014), who emphasised the complexity of interplay among various significant factors in determining people's intentions to enter the SEN teaching profession. Drawing on their empirical inquiries, they identified three contributing variables influencing SEN teachers' career choice: *interest/commitment*, *outcome expectations* and *personal and work experiences*. The aspect of interest/commitment implies one's empathy towards students with SEN. By way of explanation, it is a "heart call"' (Stephens & Fish, 2010: 584) when people decide to work as SEN

teachers, as they want to commit themselves to serving individuals with disabilities. According to Zhang et al. (2014), this aspect is a strong and direct predictor of one's intention to enter the SEN teaching profession. On the other hand, the aspect of outcome expectations involves financial components, employability components and social components, which is consistent with the view of Richardson and Watt (2006) on task return and personal utility value within their FIT-Choice Scale framework. That is, people choose to pursue careers in SNE also out of their concerns for job security, social status and salary, as well as job availability and transferability. As for the aspect of personal and work experiences, even though those experiences seem to play an indirect role in people's career choice, life histories of interacting or working with individuals with SEN, or even of having personal experience as a student with learning difficulties, provide a biographical understanding of one's motivations to work in the field of SNE.

In a slightly different vein, two case studies are worth mentioning. First, in her seminal article, Feng (2015) argued that teachers' motivations need to be viewed with both a country- and culture-specific lenses. For example, in contrary to the findings of multiple studies presented previously, teachers in China were mainly extrinsically motivated to enter the SEN teaching profession. In general, they chose to work as SEN teachers not out of any intrinsic motivation but simply due to the constraints of the reality of life, such as family economic pressure, health or lack of other opportunities. Moreover, by means of both survey and interview, Purdy (2009) examined the attitudes of male student teachers towards a career in SNE and found that male student teachers are less likely to consider work as SEN teachers at the end of their preservice education programme due to other presuppositions and fears or lack of experiences. They assumed their female counterparts to have more appropriate dispositions and to be more professionally suitable for working in the field of SNE. These two case studies, to some extent, highlight the significance of nation/culture and gender in affecting one's motivation to work as a SEN teacher.

In view of all that has been reviewed regarding motivations for entering the teaching profession, two important themes emerge: the intricacy of reasons for such a career choice and the paucity of research in this field, especially regarding the group of SEN teachers working in inclusive IVET schools. There is very little research on the reasons for working as a SEN teacher in such educational settings. In order to reach the purpose of this investigation, one sub-theme is to explore the motivations behind SEN teachers' career choices to work within the inclusive IVET context.

2.2.3 Attrition and Retention of SEN Teachers

In the past two decades, a large and growing body of literature has explored SEN teacher attrition/retention due to the chronic shortage of qualified educators in the area of SNE (Berry et al., 2012; Katsiyannis et al., 2003; McLeskey et al., 2004; Payne, 2005). The chronic shortage of SEN teachers ensues from the common perception that, compared to other fields of education, SEN teachers' work is the

most difficult, most challenging and most variegated for its diversity and complexity (Payne, 2005). This was confirmed by Lavian (2012), Lazuras (2006) and Stempien and Loeb (2002), who suggested that SEN teachers experience higher levels of stress, less job satisfaction and more burnout symptoms than their counterparts in general education; they further noted that these difficulties were particularly shared among younger and less experienced SEN teachers. This phenomenon can be explained by the unavoidable gap between the harsh real world of teaching and the idealistic expectations/sense of mission of teachers (Lavian, 2012). On the other hand, Lavian (2012) and Lazuras (2006) both concluded that SEN teachers' job stress and dissatisfaction appear to arise significantly from issues regarding institutional aspects of their work, that is, school organisational climate. Before proceeding to further review the reasons behind SEN teacher attrition and retention, it is now necessary to briefly clarify some key concepts related to teacher attrition and retention in general.

Huberman and Grounauer (1993) and Watt and Richardson (2008), in their studies on motivations for teaching, observed that the initial motivation to enter the teaching profession does not mean everything: they are certainly influential from the onset of entering the teaching profession, but they do not guarantee job satisfaction or subsequent willingness to continue in the career. Teaching motivation should be, according to Watt and Richardson (2008), delved into across various stages of teaching throughout teachers' careers, as it provides insightful understanding of the issues of attrition and retention. Attrition, by definition, refers to either transfer attrition (transferring to another teaching position within or outside the previous workplace) or exit attrition (exiting the teaching profession), and reasons for attrition differ from one teacher to another based on gender, qualification or teaching experiences (Billingsley & Tech, 1993; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Also, attrition may not be a "clear-cut" action but may involve a "drawn-out process" that takes a few years (Towers & Maguire, 2017: 955). Conversely, retention refers to those who remain in the same teaching assignment within the same workplace that they were in the prior years (Billingsley & Tech, 1993).

The issue of teacher attrition/retention can be categorised into two major directions: one focuses on the reasons to leave with detailed discussions about stressors and burnout, whereas the other is more concerned with the reasons to stay in light of job satisfaction/rewards and resilience. To better understand the sources of teacher stress, Kyriacou (2011) reviewed extensive research and identified ten stressors facing teachers: teaching pupils who lack motivation, maintaining discipline, time pressures and workload, coping with change, being evaluated by others, dealing with colleagues, self-esteem and status, administration and management, role conflict and ambiguity, and poor working conditions (p. 29). When teachers cannot cope well with these stressors, that is, chronic dissonance exists between personal expectations and factors in the work context (Gu & Day, 2013; Pines, 2002; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Towers & Maguire, 2017), they are very likely to experience emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation (cynical attitudes towards one's clients and work) and a sense of ineffectiveness

(negative image of personal accomplishment) as the physical and psychological symptoms of burnout syndrome, which, consequently, results in the decision to leave (attrition) (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Alternatively, when teachers seem to successfully deal with the abovementioned stressors, they tend to stay in teaching (retention), which is viewed as the manifestation of resilience (Billingsley & Tech, 1993; Howard & Johnson, 2004). The concept of resilience "offers a useful lens which allows us to probe teachers' internal and external worlds to explore which factors, individually and in combination, influence their capacity to sustain their passion, enthusiasm and strong sense of fulfilment" (Gu & Li, 2013: 288–289). Moreover, resilience has been found to be positively related not only to teachers' identity development, agency, commitment, passion, effectiveness and eudemonia but also to students' attainments and well-being (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Gu, 2014; Gu & Day, 2007, 2013; Hong, 2012). As noted by Fletcher and Sarkar (2013), resilience is an innate psychological construct based on two pivotal concepts: adversity and positive adaptation. Hence, traditionally, resilience is first understood as a capacity/process of adapting to/negotiating with the challenging teaching context, that is, 'bouncing back', by means of employing specific strategies so that the moral purpose and commitment of helping children and adolescents and of professionalism can be fulfilled (Castro et al., 2010; Gu, 2014; Gu & Day, 2007).

The second approach to resilience views it as an unstable, multidimensional, relative and socially constructed process (Gu & Day, 2007). More specifically, resilience as a dynamic process much relies on the interplay of personal, professional and situational factors in teachers' work and personal universes. In view of this social dimension of resilience, the notion of *relational resilience* has received considerable critical attention and provides a useful account of how teachers' social relations play a prominent role in their decision-making process concerning staying or leaving (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Gu, 2014; Lindqvist et al., 2014; Mansfield, Beltman, & Price, 2014). The interactive nature of resilience implies the significance of leadership, personality traits and teacher-student relationships. Under other conditions, as an individual's perception and interpretation of certain challenges may differ from one time/space to another, personality traits are also associated with teachers' well-being and effectiveness (Hong, 2012; Smith & Ulvik, 2017; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). With regard to professional relationships on the issue of teacher retention, students have been the most evident and significant category, since they contribute the very source of teachers' job motivation and satisfaction (Gu, 2014; Hong, 2012; Kelchtermans, 2017; Kitching, Morgan, & O'Leary, 2009; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Such emotional attachment between teachers and students is critical for building the capacity for resilience.

Considering SEN teacher attrition/retention, Billingsley (2004) in her review on this topic proposed a thematic synthesis to provide more comprehensive comments on this issue, which encompasses four main themes (teacher characteristics and personal factors, teacher qualifications, work environment factors

and affective reactions to work) and several general subthemes. Based on Billingsley's perspective together with other studies, Table 3 presents a synopsis of the factors affecting SEN teacher attrition/retention that have informed this study.

TABLE 3   Synopsis of factors contributing to SEN teacher attrition/retention

Main themes	Subthemes	Relations to attrition/retention	References
Teacher characteristics & personal factors	Age	• The more experienced (usually older) have lower intentions to leave. • The younger and less experienced have more stress and frustration.	Billingsley (2004); Conley & You (2017); Hoffman, Palladino, & Barnett (2007); Williams & Dikes (2015)
	Gender	• The male, younger and uncertified have more apparent intent to leave. • Male teachers suffer more from depersonalisation, whereas female teachers are more susceptible to emotional exhaustion.	Conley & You (2017); Platsidou (2010); Williams & Dikes (2015)
	Personal factors (personality and family)	• The fit between personalities and the job demands as well as the connection between personality and burnout • The need to balance work with family and children, relocation and the availability of sufficient family support • The differences in experiencing emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation between married and unmarried respondents	Bataineh (2009); Bianca (2011); Billingsley (2004); Kaff (2004); Mackenzie (2012a); Williams & Dikes (2015)
Qualification factors	Certification	• The uncertified have more apparent intent to leave compared to the certified. • Providing services beyond the scope of teachers' typical certification, may place teachers at risk of attrition.	Berry et al. (2012); Billingsley (2004); Conley & You (2017)
Work environment factors	Salary	• Salary should be strategically used as an incentive to enhance retention.	Billingsley (2004); Mackenzie (2004)
	School climate	• School climate is highlighted as a strong predictor of teacher stress, burnout and attrition. • The more unsupportive teachers perceive their school climate to be, the more likely they experience stress and burnout. • Role ambiguity and role conflict are two principal aspects of school climate teachers constantly experience at work.	Billingsley (2004); Conley & You (2017); Lavian (2012); Major (2012); McLeskey & Billingsley (2008)

TABLE 3 (continues) Synopsis of factors contributing to SEN teacher attrition/retention

Main themes	Subthemes	Relations to attrition/retention	References
Work environment factors	Administrative support	• Administrative support is highly relevant to job satisfaction, commitment and efficacy. • Insufficient administrative support has the most profound impact on SEN teachers' intent to stay or leave.	Berry (2012); Billingsley (2004); Conley & You (2017); Lavian (2012); Mackenzie (2012a, 2013); Stephens & Fish (2010)
	Colleague support	• Professional relationships with fellow workers contribute to either reducing stress or increasing job satisfaction and commitment, which directly or indirectly affects teachers' intention to stay. • Frustrations with colleagues in general education may lead to job dissatisfaction and stress.	Beltman et al. (2011); Gehrke & Murri (2006); Lazuras (2006); Lindqvist et al. (2014); Stephens & Fish (2010)
	Support through induction and mentoring	• Beginning/early career SEN teachers are at higher risk of leaving the profession than other beginning teachers. • With accessible, adequate and strong support through induction and mentoring, they are more likely to thrive and their retention can be improved.	Billingsley (2004); Gehrke & Murri (2006); McLeskey & Billingsley (2008); Payne (2005); Whitaker (2000)
	Paperwork	• Commonly criticised as necessary yet overwhelming, redundant or even ludicrous. • It not only results in role overload and conflict but also leads to job dissatisfaction, stress and burnout.	Billingsley (2004); Kaff (2004); Williams & Dikes (2015)
	Professional development (PD)	• It can help better tackle stressful situations. • PD in leadership can meet some teachers' desire to assume greater responsibilities to work more effectively. • Tactics acquired through PD are necessary to level up self-efficacy and enhance job satisfaction and resilience.	Emery & Vandenberg (2010); Kiel, Heimlich, Markowetz, Braun, & Weiβ (2016); Mackenzie (2012a; 2013); Major (2012)
	Teacher roles	• Without sufficient resources, multiple roles with wider responsibilities lead to role overload and stress. • A lack of proper understanding among administrators and general education teachers regarding the multiplicity and complexity of SEN teachers' roles and responsibilities	Billingsley (2004); Gehrke & Murri (2006); Kaff (2004)

TABLE 3 (continues) Synopsis of factors contributing to SEN teacher attrition/retention

Main themes	Subthemes	Relations to attrition/retention	References
Work environment factors	Service delivery and changing roles	• SEN teachers nowadays are required to provide professional services in close collaboration with general education teachers and other professionals. • SEN teachers' roles have been shifting to offering professional consultation and assistance to both colleagues and students in inclusive settings.	Billingsley (2004); Hoffman et al. (2007); Kaff (2004)
	Role problems	• Diverse role demands cause role ambiguity, role overload, role conflict and role dissonance. • Role ambiguity is a lack of clarity concerning what the job entails and requires and what is expected, and role conflict is defined as the struggle between two or more competing roles. • Role dissonance (the discrepancy between expectations and actual job demands) often contributes to stress, and the reasons behind are challenges in understanding students' needs due to lack of time to adopt corresponding teaching strategies. • The importance of the design of SEN teachers' roles	Billingsley (2004); Conley & You (2017); Hoffman et al. (2007); Payne (2005)
	Students and caseload issues	• Unclear relation between caseload issues and attrition • Challenges of handling student disengagement, student diverse needs or student indiscipline are closely • Through "the little things", students play a dominant role as the source of job satisfaction and resilience. • The satisfaction/dissatisfaction caused by interacting with students entails at times the satisfaction/dissatisfaction caused by dealing with students' parents.	Berry et al. (2012); Billingsley (2004); Conley & You (2017); Gavish (2017); Hopman et al. (2018); Kitching et al. (2009)

TABLE 3 (continues) Synopsis of factors contributing to SEN teacher attrition/retention

Main themes	Subthemes	Relations to attrition/retention	References
Affective reactions to work	Stress	• Excessive and higher stress is a shared experience. • Triggered by an individual's personal characteristics and issues, the number of years of teaching experiences, teacher-student ratio, the level of autonomy and manageability, poor job design, unreasonable paperwork, unsupportive school climate, difficulties in handling students' parents, perceived isolation or underappreciation from colleagues and role problems • Stress can be reduced through coping strategies training, positive interpersonal communication or mentorship.	Conley & You (2017); Hoffman et al. (2007); Kiel et al. (2016); Lavian (2012); Lazuras (2006); Williams & Dikes (2015)
	Job satisfaction	• Students are one of the sources contributing to SEN teacher job satisfaction and resilience. • Appropriate job design, greater autonomy, sufficient mentoring, collaborative and supportive school climate and PD have a positive association with job satisfaction.	Berry (2012); Conley & You (2017); Gavish (2017); Gehrke & Murri (2006); Kitching et al. (2009); Mackenzie (2013)
	Commitment	• Commitment can be maintained and enhanced through challenging yet intellectually rewarding tasks, supportive leadership, collaborative collegiality, PD and well-organised induction and mentoring.	Berry (2012); Billingsley (2004); Conley & You (2017); Emery & Vandenberg (2010); Mackenzie (2012a)

Considering these studies, it appears that, similar to the factors contributing to teacher attrition/retention in general, leadership and relational resilience also play crucial roles in affecting SEN teachers' decisions to remain in the profession or to leave. Moreover, the evidence clearly indicates that there is a real need to help SEN teachers develop corresponding strategies to better deal with the stressors facing them at work.

2.3 SEN Teachers' Work

2.3.1 Complex and Evolving Landscape of the SEN Teaching Profession

As a consequence of the continuous movement with a social approach towards a more inclusive school climate, that is, more students with SEN included in general schools/classes rather than segregated special schools/classes, the roles of

SEN teachers who work in inclusive educational settings have inevitably undergone a series of changes. This implies the growing diverse needs of the students that SEN teachers must deal with in terms of, for instance, languages, cultures, learning styles and disabilities (Gavish, 2017; Slanda, 2017). Students' multidimensional needs expressed at school may be the manifestation of the radical challenges they are facing socio-psychologically, emotionally or behaviourally, which SEN teachers need to adeptly handle so that students' well-being can be better facilitated (Vlachou, Didaskalou, & Kontofryou, 2015).

Students' multifaceted needs inevitably necessitate complexity in SEN teachers' roles and tasks (Klang, Gustafson, Möllas, Nilholm, & Göransson, 2017; Lavian, 2015; Slanda, 2017; Vlachou et al., 2015; Wasburn-Moses, 2009). In a study investigating SEN student teachers' perceptions of their future careers, Gavish (2017) reported that, in order to work in an inclusive and complex school context, SEN teachers are expected to play the diverse roles of an inclusive practice leader, service advisor and support system developer. Such role complexity was confirmed by a number of inquiries focused on SEN teachers working in inclusive educational settings, in which SEN teachers, in addition to the abovementioned roles, must also serve as subject instructors, caseload managers, colleague coaches and student welfare advocates (Fisher, Frey, & Thousand, 2003; Klang et al., 2017; Lavian, 2015; Lindqvist, Nilholm, Almqvist, & Wetso, 2011; Slanda, 2017). In their case study of Swedish SEN teachers, Klang et al. (2017) identified seven categories of work tasks and six roles commonly practiced, in varying degrees, by SEN teachers, dependent upon local school contexts. The seven major work tasks comprise teaching, social relational work, assessment, informing and following up on pupil cases, supporting and providing materials, school development and practical chores; the six essential roles consist of social counsellor, systematic investigator, supervising maths teacher, inspection teacher, executive supporting teacher and school developer.

The evidence reviewed here suggests that the SEN teachers' work settings have been shifting from self-contained classrooms or resource rooms to regular classrooms, and their roles and responsibilities as homeroom teachers have been replaced by or expanded to the roles of supportive professionals for both students and colleagues (Ekstam et al., 2017; Gavish, 2017; Kaff, 2004; Liasidou & Antoniou, 2013). A more detailed account of the complexity of SEN teachers' roles and tasks within the inclusive context is provided in the following sections.

Instruction

No matter how inclusive a school system is, instruction remains as one of the fundamental aspects of the SEN teachers' work (Ekstam et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2003; Vlachou et al., 2015). Although, compared to subject teachers in general education, SEN teachers might have less domain-specific knowledge, they still show higher efficacy in coping with students' diverse learning needs, either on an individual basis or in small groups (Brownell et al., 2009; Ekstam et al., 2018). The complexity of SEN teachers' work is also embodied in their intricate instruc-

tion process. According to Fisher et al. (2013) and Vlachou et al. (2015), the instructional dimension of the SEN teachers' work involves four major procedures: assessment before teaching, planning for teaching, teaching and follow-up on student performance. Assessment before teaching refers to the diagnosis and identification of students' needs and prior knowledge/skills, based on which teaching, learning materials and and settings are adapted to facilitate the student learning and outcomes. Subsequently, individualised instruction is provided, followed by continual monitoring of student performance either informally by teachers' personal work log or formally through individualised education plan (IEP) records.

Providing, coordinating, evaluating and supervising resources and services

A variety of resources and services are necessary to better facilitate student learning. Responsibilities for coordinating, evaluating and supervising the provision of resources and services required to meet students' diverse needs within the inclusive context are shared by SEN teachers (Klang et al., 2017; Lindqvist et al., 2011; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003). In practice, SEN teachers are expected, for example, to attend meetings to co-plan curricular and instructional modifications or co-solve students' problems. These activities require significant amounts of communication, either orally or in written form (e.g. IEP), in order to gather, exchange, integrate and circulate relevant information so that the daily operation of services and provision of resources, such as paraprofessionals, early intervention or assistive technology, can be closely overseen, reasonably secured and properly maintained. To some extent, this could be why SEN teachers view themselves as taking an administrative leadership role in searching and managing SEN-related resources and services (Fisher et al., 2003; Pearson, Mitchell, & Rapti, 2015; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003).

School development of inclusion

Many recent studies have shown that SEN teachers are leading advocates for school inclusiveness development (Gavish, 2017; Lindqvist et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2015; Vlachou et al., 2015). In a seminal study exploring the roles, duties and challenges of SEN teachers working in secondary education, Vlachou et al. (2015) mentioned that SEN teachers' responsibilities for inclusion are actually twofold, comprising both academic and social inclusion. Academic inclusion concerns students' academic performance in relation to their general education and is considered as the *sine qua non* for their social inclusion. The social dimension of inclusion relates to students' inclusion within the broader school context, which implies, as Fisher et al. (2003: 45) opined, much encouraging of natural support and friendships. At the same time, several researchers have further indicated that SEN teachers, as leaders of school inclusion practices, provide practical advice and organise capacity-building activities in the whole school through, for instance, in-service staff training or colleague coaching (Allison, 2012; Gavish, 2017; Pearson et al., 2015). Such an organisational school development role, according to Gavish (2017), stems from the holistic contextual views SEN teachers

professionally hold. That is, with better understanding of students' diverse needs and familiarisation with relevant resources and services, SEN teachers are spontaneously assumed to be systematic examiners, facilitators and agents.

Collaborating with students, students' parents/caregivers, teachers and professionals/agencies within and outside schools

Considering all that has been mentioned so far, one may argue that the SEN teachers' professional relationships are variegated and multi-layered. This view was supported by Klang et al. (2017), Lavian (2015) and Williams and Dikes (2015), who investigated the complexity of the SEN teaching profession. In her significant narrative analysis and discussion on SEN teachers' work in comparison with the work of their counterparts in general education within an inclusive context, Lavian (2015) concluded that, due to the intensive, intimate and committed nature of the SEN teaching profession, SEN teachers have to deal with more multiplex relationships at work, which was labelled as "social relational work" by Klang et al. (2017) in their case study of six Swedish SEN teachers. Based on Williams and Dikes' (2015) findings, SEN teachers may share professional relationships with general education teachers, students' parents, administrators, school nurses or other individuals as needed. This wide variety of interpersonal interactions that SEN teachers need to handle throughout their careers serves as the necessary and useful means by which students' academic and social inclusion can be promoted; hence, the facet of collaboration is required for inclusion practices (Lindqvist et al., 2011; Williams & Dikes, 2015).

The existing literature around the SEN teaching profession has been highly consistent concerning the significance of collaboration in SEN teachers' work within the inclusive context (Allison, 2012; Duchnowski, Kutash, Sheffield, & Vaughn, 2006; Findler, 2007; Forlin & Rose, 2010; Gavish, 2017; Malone & Gallagher, 2010). Regardless of the tasks SEN teachers have or the roles they play, they must always necessarily provide professional services in a collaborative manner. As the largest and major recipients of SNE resources and services, students with SEN tend to experience more intensive and intimate interactions with SEN teachers. In this sense, students with SEN can be regarded as the first main group SEN teachers need to liaise with in terms of their multiple working relationships (Regev & Ronen, 2012; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Since some of the students with SEN might be under 18 years old, SEN teachers' must also work in cooperation with students' legal guardians. Therefore, the second aspect of the working relationship that SEN teachers must manage is with the students' parents/caregivers (Devecchi, Dettori, Doveston, Sedgwick, & Jament, 2012; Findler, 2007; Fisher et al., 2003). Pearson et al. (2015) further established that SEN teachers do not merely work in partnership with students' parents/caregivers but also play an important role in fostering parents/caregivers' participation and in connecting them to other needed resources and services.

In addition to students with SEN and their parents/caregivers, the close collaboration between SEN teachers and general education teachers has been clearly highlighted in a large volume of published studies (Kaff, 2004; Klang et

al., 2017; McCray, Butler, & Bettini, 2014; Strogilos, Nikolaraizi, & Tragoulia, 2012). General education teachers in inclusive educational settings are considered crucial, helpful and integral teammates with whom and to whom SEN teachers offer their professional services. SEN teachers work together with general education teachers in numerous ways, such as providing advice about teaching/learning strategies, raising awareness of students' challenges and corresponding accommodations and co-teaching (Klang et al., 2017; McCray et al., 2014; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Co-teaching appears to be an appreciated instruction approach, yet it is not well practiced in inclusive schools (McCray et al., 2014). According to the review of McCray et al. (2014), co-teaching can be done in a variety of forms that benefit both teachers and students; however, in most cases, general education teachers maintain the primary teaching role, whereas SEN teachers act subordinately and are viewed more as assistants.

The fourth aspect of SEN teachers' collaboration is exhibited in the relationships they maintain with professionals/agencies within and outside schools to better respond to students' diverse challenges (Devecchi et al., 2012; Fisher et al., 2003; Lindqvist et al., 2011; Slanda, 2017). One comprehensive study on competences for teachers of children with SEN conducted by Holland and Hornby (1992) confirmed the same requirement, finding that SEN teachers should be able to properly maintain occupational relationships with other professionals, to contribute their expertise to joint efforts and to coordinate with relevant agencies. Likewise, in their call for increasing the use of evidence-based instructional strategies, Duchnowski et al. (2006) placed great emphasis on partnerships between academicians, practitioners, parents/caregivers and administrators so that student learning outcomes can be improved.

Emotional dimension of work

The complex and evolving landscape of the SEN teaching profession is manifested in the emotional dimension of the SEN teachers' work as well (Mackenzie, 2012b, 2013; Vlachou et al., 2015). This view, in general, echoes the perspectives of Hargreaves (1998) and MacBeath et al. (2006). They drew our attention to the emotional aspect within the teaching profession that exists in addition to the instructional one. Within the SNE discipline, Mackenzie (2012b, 2013) identified a strong, profound and diverse emotional attachment to the profession shared among SEN teachers. The emotions they experienced were both positive and negative, like care, love, frustration, isolation and anger, which do not only bear upon the ups and downs they intensivelyundergo while interacting with students with SEN but also are associated with their personal lived experiences. This emotional labour/work may come at the price of emotional exhaustion, but it can also be counteracted by the small daily rewards the job brings, such as students' making progress or gaining confidence or organisational advancement in school inclusiveness. Correspondingly, Mackenzie (2012b) suggested that particular emotional characteristics are desirable for working resiliently in the high emotional density of the SEN teaching profession. In a later section I will return to

this and provide possible suggestions to counter the challenges and difficulties facing SEN teachers within the inclusive environments.

2.3.2   A Different Professional World Perceived by Preservice SEN Teachers

Co-teaching, as noted previously, is considered a valuable instruction strategy yet is not commonly practiced in inclusive schools (McCray et al., 2014). A gap between expectation and practice was confirmed by Wasburn-Moses (2009) in her comparative study on preservice SEN teachers' expectations for their future roles and in-service SEN teachers' perceptions of their current work. She argued that preservice SEN teachers tended to be overoptimistic about the amount of time in-service SEN teachers spent in nearly every role and setting, especially in the area of co-teaching. They assumed that co-teaching was a common practice and that it filled more than two hours of the SEN teacher's work per day. Yet, conversely, from the viewpoint of in-service SEN teachers, the amount of time they spent on co-teaching was in fact 'none'; instead, they spent most of their time providing alternative curriculum and subject instruction alone. This implies an 'idealised/unrealistic' professional image preservice SEN teachers may hold concerning their future careers.

In another small-scale study, Gavish (2017) also explored preservice SEN teachers' perceptions of their professional world. She identified a close interconnection between career choice motivation, perception of the role and expectations about the teacher training programme. In other words, what motivates individuals to enter the SEN teaching profession shapes their views of the profession and their outlooks as to the knowledge and skills needed to be acquired through their teacher education. In the same vein as Wasburn-Moses (2009), Gavish was concerned about the complexity of the SEN teaching profession that trainee teachers did not anticipate. Trainee teachers predicted that they would work solo in a closed environment, but what is actually awaiting them is a more multidimensional working context requiring intensive and close cooperation with a variety of individuals as well as the exercising of leadership. This 'real world shock' may affect their self-efficacy at the beginning of their careers, a position supported by Wasburn-Moses (2009) and Zhang et al. (2014). According to Wasburn-Moses (2009), while experiencing the unanticipated gap between the idealised expectations of the professional world and the harsh adversities at work, SEN teachers at the beginning of their careers are likely to abandon what they learned from their preservice training courses and adapt themselves to the working environment.

Taken together, these studies highlight the notion that, as Regev and Ronen (2012) state: "The more realistic the students' perception of the teacher's role, the more likely they are to perform this role effectively". Although the idealism of preservice SEN teachers is understandable, the teacher education institutions play a vital role in helping student teachers better transit from study to the labour market by offering them opportunities to be exposed to diverse SEN practices

and settings so that they, as agents of change, can have a more realistic understanding of the complexity of the SEN teaching profession (Wasburn-Moses, 2009).

2.3.3   Challenges and Difficulties Facing SEN Teachers

SEN teachers' work is accompanied by many-sided challenges and difficulties (Allison, 2012; Layton, 2005; Lavian, 2015; Liasidou & Antoniou, 2013; Mackenzie, 2012b, 2013). A recent systematic study by Slanda (2017: 211) examining the role ambiguity issue for SEN teachers who work in inclusive settings pinpointed five major challenges facing SEN teachers at work: (a) adhering to the school's master schedule; (b) addressing student deficits and filling gaps in student knowledge and skills; (c) exhibiting lowered expectations of students with disabilities; (d) developing a growth mindset to improve student motivation and (e) navigating ethical concerns arising from limited time to provide support. Based on her categorisation and several other relevant studies on the varied challenges of the SEN teaching profession, I condense the adversities faced by SEN teachers into five overarching themes: context, complexity, collaboration, resources and emotions. Each theme is elucidated in the following sections.

Context

Inclusive education is, without a doubt, a continuous movement launched, promoted and driven by the political attitudes of the time, which indicates a close link between policy, school and teacher. A number of authors have established that the uncertainty, ambiguity, strain, discrepancies and intricacies created by broader policy reform or regional legislative educational systems undermine SEN teachers' professionalism and provoke contradictory emotions in this group of teachers (Mackenzie, 2012b; Pearson et al., 2015; Strogilos et al., 2012). For example, both in Greece and Cyprus, SEN teachers expressed their concern about losing their autonomy and experienced a series of unpleasant collisions all through a set of policy changes (Liasidou & Antoniou, 2013; Vlachou et al., 2015). Furthermore, within the narrower policy scope, school culture and education levels may create barriers against SEN teachers' roles and work, such as an uncollaborative work climate that facilitates exclusion and isolation or greater complexity in secondary settings that belittles and shackles SEN teachers' professionalism (Klang et al., 2017; McCray et al., 2014; Strogilos et al., 2012).

Complexity

The challenges associated with the complicated nature of the SEN teaching profession are revealed in four intertwined dimensions (4Ms): *multiple relationships*, *multiple roles*, *multiple tasks* and *multiple problems*. As mentioned previously, SEN teachers must work together with a variety of individuals within and outside schools; that is, in the SEN teaching profession, multifarious working relationships need to be handled constantly. This denotes different expectations and

needs that must be addressed and fulfilled (Klang et al., 2017; Lavian, 2015; Layton, 2005; McCray et al., 2014; Slanda, 2017). For instance, Vlachou et al. (2015) pointed out that it is challenging for SEN teachers to meet national curriculum requirements and to satisfy students' individual needs at the same time, especially when the resources needed are scarce. In terms of cooperation with general education teachers, similarly, the experiences are not always positive due to the contrasting perceptions or values general education teachers carry (Devecchi et al., 2012; McCray et al., 2014; Slanda, 2017; Strogilos et al., 2012).

The second dimension of complexity is the multiplicity of the SEN teachers' roles. In order to cope with different professional relationships, SEN teachers have to, consciously or subconsciously, act as 'chameleons', varying their roles depending on whom they interact with and under what circumstances they are expected to contribute their expertise (Klang et al., 2017; Lavian, 2015; Layton, 2005). This role multiplicity, as several researchers (Lavian, 2015; Layton, 2005; Vlachou et al., 2015) have claimed, if not well moderated with a supportive work climate, may lead to role ambiguity, eventually contributing to burnout. The reason behind such a chain reaction is that, for example, SEN teachers are not viewed as professional equals to their general education counterparts, nor do they take a leading role in dealing with SNE-related matters, which substantially reduces their sense of autonomy and decreases job satisfaction (Layton, 2005; McCray et al., 2014; Vlachou et al., 2015).

The third dimension of complexity is the multitasking experience shared amongst SEN teachers. In her research into the complexity of SEN teachers' roles, Lavian (2015) defined 'the role' as "a recurring set of actions or tasks with a specific purpose", whereas 'tasks' were defined as "small, integrated actions performed serially or simultaneously" (p. 105). Furthermore, she pointed out that role multiplicity entails multitasking. The multiple tasks SEN teachers must deal with on a daily basis involve, as discussed previously, teaching, coordinating and overseeing resources and services; promoting school inclusiveness; and cooperating with different groups of people within and outside schools to facilitate the students' welfare. Such multitasking, according to Kaff (2004), is actually 'multitaxing' to SEN teachers, gradually wearing out their energy and likely to cause attrition in the end.

The last dimension of complexity is that, unavoidably and frequently, SEN teachers need to solve multiple problems simultaneously. In the teaching profession, it seems common to have many problems on our plate at one time, but that reality is truer for those who work as SEN teachers (Lavian, 2015). These problems may result from a lack of collaboration, insufficient resources, excessive paperwork load, devalued PI, negative staff attitudes towards inclusion or unresolved conflicts of expectations between teachers, professionals and parents (Mackenzie, 2012b; McCray et al., 2014; Vlachou et al., 2015; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003; Williams & Dikes, 2015).

Collaboration

Considering the various aspects of SEN teachers' roles and work discussed so far, it is undeniable that collaboration in many ways plays a fundamentally significant role in the SEN teaching profession within an inclusive context. It not only serves, to a greater degree, as the backbone of the SEN teaching profession nowadays, but also contributes to SEN teacher retention or attrition. Therefore, SEN teachers must continually tackle collaboration-related challenges, which are embodied in two aspects: lack of time/knowledge/awareness to collaborate and lack of mutual respect/understanding in collaboration (Allison, 2012; McCray et al., 2014; Strogilos et al., 2012; Vlachou et al., 2015; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003).

Isolation, according to several studies, is a feeling shared by SEN teachers due to lack of collaboration (Allison, 2012; Mackenzie, 2013; McCray et al., 2014; Vlachou et al., 2015). A number of researchers, such as Allison (2012), Mackenzie (2012b), Strogilos et al. (2012) and Devecchi et al. (2012), connected this issue to the lack of time/knowledge/awareness between SEN teachers and general education teachers. More specifically, due to, for instance, job intensification and ludicrous amounts of paperwork, time for detailed discussions with colleagues on how to implement inclusion is very limited. This becomes a vicious cycle: the less time SEN teachers have to establish and maintain effective cooperative relationships with general education teachers, the less likely general education teachers will have sufficient awareness of the need for teamwork and sound knowledge on how to implement inclusion.

On the other hand, even if general education teachers, school support staff or other professionals inside or outside schools accept or recognise the necessity of working together with SEN teachers, they do not necessarily appreciate the expertise of, or share the same views on inclusive educational practices as SEN teachers (Mackenzie, 2012b; McCray et al., 2014; Vlachou et al., 2015). This probably has something to do with, as McCray et al. (2014) observed, SEN teachers usually having less profound knowledge concerning the subjects taught in regular classrooms. Such limitations inevitably result in SEN teachers being belittled by their counterparts in general education and not being considered professional equals. The negative attitudes of school staff members towards inclusion also drain and frustrate SEN teachers at work in terms of collaboration (Mackenzie, 2012b).

Resource

One contributing factor behind these adversities related to the multiplicity of problems or collaboration challenges is the lack of resources. As I have previously stated, the lack of time cripples the effectiveness and efficiency of SNE services (Devecchi et al., 2012; Slanda, 2017; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Another resource lacking that is regularly mentioned in the literature is learning/teaching materials (Devecchi et al., 2012; Vlachou et al., 2015). Given the considerably diverse learning needs of students with SEN, individualised instruction is a required

practice. However, the scarcity of differentiated learning/teaching materials often greatly troubles SEN teachers, especially those who are fresh off the boat entering the SEN teaching wonderland (Strogilos et al., 2012).

Emotion

In prior sections, the emotional dimension of the SEN teaching profession has been repeatedly brought into the discussion. In terms of the hardships facing SEN teachers at work, the adverse emotions SEN teachers experience throughout their careers represent a critical issue worth further attention. In the evidence reviewed concerning how policy or school climate relates to the challenges facing SEN teachers, the feeling of uncertainty was highlighted (Mackenzie, 2012b; Pearson et al., 2015; Mitchell & Rapti, 2015; Vlachou et al., 2015). Other negative feelings, such as depreciation, frustration, exhaustion, loneliness, marginalisation and isolation, also have been widely singled out in several inquiries on the SEN teachers' roles and work in inclusive schools (Mackenzie, 2012b, 2013; Strogilos et al., 2012; Vlachou et al., 2015).

2.3.4 Suggestions for Countering Challenges and Difficulties

In the last section pertinent to SEN teachers' work, I present countermeasures for coping with the work-related challenges and difficulties identified previously. These countermeasures have been shared by several researchers based on their investigations into the complexity of the SEN teaching profession. Seven countermeasures have been proposed through which the quality of SNE services can be better facilitated: *leadership role*, *administrative support*, *collaboration*, *professional network*, *personal/emotional characteristics/competences*, *teacher education* and *CPD* (Allison, 2012; Klang et al., 2017; Mackenzie, 2012b; Malone & Gallagher, 2010; McCray et al., 2014; Strogilos et al., 2012).

The leadership role, from the viewpoints of Klang et al. (2017) and Layton (2005), refers here to being strategically part of senior management teams so that relevant resources and services can be provided more effectively to meet students' diverse learning needs. Meanwhile, administrative support also plays a significant part in promoting inclusion practices in terms of either the provision of resources/services or collaboration (Allison, 2012; Malone & Gallagher, 2010; McCray et al., 2014). Several authors have underlined that, without administrative support, collaboration cannot be effectively established and maintained, especially with regard to co-teaching (Malone & Gallagher, 2010; McCray et al., 2014). Continuing with the aspect of collaboration, teamwork itself, as repeatedly mentioned, is a useful and necessary means to propel inclusive educational practices. Hence, more effective collaboration is desired (Devecchi et al., 2012; Malone & Gallagher, 2010). Successful collaboration requires, in addition to administrative support, the increased awareness amongst general education teachers of the significance of their roles in relation to cooperation (Strogilos et al., 2012). Such awareness, according to Allison (2012), is an integral factor contributing to the

mutual respect between general education teachers and SEN teachers working together in inclusive schools.

Professional networks, personal characteristics and other relevant competences appear to contribute to better coping with the challenges and difficulties at work as well. Professional network here refers to the local SEN teacher network through which members offer emotional support to one another (Mackenzie, 2012b). As described previously, due to multiple roles/tasks/challenges, SEN teachers lack time to liaise with colleagues at school and, consequently, feel marginalised and lonely. Therefore, the opportunities to associate with other SEN teachers within the same region may be helpful to foster their resilience. Mackenzie (2012b) concluded that resilience is one of the desirable (or even required) personal characteristics if one wants to work and thrive in the SEN teaching profession. Along with resilience, the abilities to deal with challenges, such as isolation, frustrations, diverse student needs and illnesses, multiple expectations and constant educational reform, are prerequisites for working as a SEN teacher (Mackenzie, 2012b). Wigle and Wilcox (2003) specified several professional competences cardinal to the complex and evolving current landscape of the SEN teaching profession, such as cooperation skills, leadership skills and increased knowledge concerning subjects or inclusive practices. From their viewpoints, the acquisition and updating of these professional competences place the responsibility firmly on the shoulders of both teacher education and CPD. This view was supported by Wasburn-Moses (2009) regarding the critical role preservice teacher education programmes play in preparing student teachers for the current SEN teaching world of complex and demanding practices.

In order to raise awareness and establish a common understanding of inclusive education, several researchers have suggested the convergence of preservice training programmes for both general education teachers and SEN teachers (Brownell et al., 2010; McCray et al., 2014; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003). That is, all teachers should be initially prepared to provide adapted instruction and have shared knowledge of inclusive educational theories and practices in general, including the role of assistive technology and specific strategies to tackle the learning or behavioural challenges of students with disabilities. Also, considering the differences in physiological and psychological development between younger and older students, McCray et al. (2014) found it necessary to separate teacher preparation into elementary and secondary education levels. Lastly, CPD has been deemed an important countermeasure in response to work-related challenges and difficulties. CPD does not merely increase general education teachers' awareness of their roles for creating a supportive school atmosphere for inclusion but also functions as a practical way to cultivate the abilities required for effective collaboration (Allison, 2012; McCray et al., 2014; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003).

In summary, there is clear evidence to indicate the close interconnection between teacher education, real work world and CPD for the SEN teaching profession. The necessary abilities and desirable personal characteristics and competences for working as a SEN teacher in inclusive settings need to be developed

and updated through both preservice teacher education and in-service teacher training.

2.4   SEN Teachers' Formal and Informal Learning

2.4.1   SEN Teachers' Formal Learning: Preservice Teacher Education

The term 'formal learning' here is defined as intentional, structured and purposeful learning experiences leading to officially recognised diplomas and qualifications, which are mostly gained in schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions (Grosemans et al., 2015; OECD, 2003; The Lifelong Learning Platform, 2019). Accordingly, formal learning and preservice teacher education in this dissertation are used interchangeably. Blanton and Pugach (2007) identified three basic models for teacher preparation programmes for inclusive education: merged, integrated and discrete, based on which, in the following sections, SEN teacher formal learning (preservice SEN teacher education) will be illustrated in greater detail.

Merged model

In order to raise awareness and to develop a common understanding of inclusive practices, a number of researchers have indicated the significance of amalgamating the preservice training programmes of general education teachers with those of SEN teachers (Brownell et al., 2010; Forlin, 2010; Fullerton, Ruben, McBride, & Bert, 2011; McCray et al., 2014). In other words, according to their viewpoints, every teacher should be initially prepared to provide adapted instruction and have the general knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for inclusive education, such as understanding the role of assistive technology, knowing specific strategies to tackle the learning or behavioural challenges of students with disabilities and appreciating learner diversity. This kind of 'merged' programme (Blanton & Pugach, 2007), as part of the changes made internationally by preservice teacher training institutions to address the move towards inclusion (Fullerton et al., 2011; Oyler, 2011; Ryan, 2009; Young, 2011), requires both general teacher education and SEN teacher education to closely and extensively collaborate so that a cross-disciplinary programme can be developed in which all student teachers acquire core professional competences to work effectively in inclusive educational settings.

The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2011, 2012) identified four key competences, in addition to subject knowledge, pedagogical skills and knowledge of child/adolescent development, that should be developed through 'inclusive' teacher education: *personal PD*, *working with others*, *valuing learner diversity* and *supporting all learners*. Personal PD here refers to the need for teachers to see themselves not only as reflective practitioners but also as lifelong learners with the ability to develop research skills and apply research

findings to teaching practices. Working with others implies the ability to collaborate with a variety of individuals within or outside schools and to coordinate necessary resources to provide individualised yet holistic services to students (and their families) in need of special support. Valuing learner diversity means attending to each student's personal academic, social and emotional needs, which are responded to with practical teaching methods in order to support and promote all learners' well-being.

Such an inclusive approach to preservice teacher education has been proven successful in advancing student teachers' skill sets to deliver high-quality education to every student in the inclusive classroom and in increasing their self-efficacy to work in inclusive educational settings (Fullerton et al., 2011; Ryan, 2009). Take the Secondary Dual Educator's Programme (SDEP), for instance. In light of the mismatch between the reality of contemporary inclusive practices in schools and traditional teacher preparation strategies, Fullerton and her colleagues (2011) developed a merged teacher education model, that is, SDEP, to prepare student teachers with the versatility to better meet the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms. Their experiences, along with responses from graduates, showed SDEP had a very positive influence on the readiness of student teachers for inclusive practices. Meanwhile, Mock and Kauffman (2005) and Young (2011) adopted a more conservative perspective on the effectiveness of such merging of two traditional teaching profession disciplines. In Young's (2011) exploration concerning how physical and social spaces manifested in the merged preservice teacher training programme, she pointed out that historical inertia and fixed PIs still implicitly presented significant 'roadblocks' hindering the institutional, programmatic and pedagogical changes integral to both teacher education and inclusive education development. Mock and Kauffman (2005), after examining cases in medicine and other fields, further commented that it is unrealistic to develop such an 'inclusive' preservice training to prepare 'generalists' with professional competences to tackle the needs of ALL learners, because teachers must be aware of their strengths and limitations. Full inclusion is favourable, but it should not be implemented at the expense of undermining the SEN teacher professionalism.

Integrated model

Another type of preservice teacher education Blanton and Pugach (2007) categorised is an integrated model, in which two disciplines, general teacher education and SEN teacher education, retain their respective identities and own licensure programmes separately yet accomplish a certain degree of curricular overlap by developing a set of courses and/or field experiences cooperatively, where general education student teachers are well prepared to meet students' diverse needs in inclusive classrooms and SEN student teachers are familiar with the general education curriculum. The ideology behind the considered and coordinated programme-level efforts can, in part, be attributed to the different attitudes of preservice teachers towards inclusion found in the literature (Park, Chitiyo, & Choi, 2010; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008). In their studies, Park et al. (2010) and

Sharma et al. (2008) reported the correlation between preservice teachers' attitudes and their academic major and different types of exposure to children with disabilities. Preservice teachers who either majored in SNE or had more direct and systematic interaction with persons with SEN were more likely to have positive attitudes towards inclusive practices. Given that appropriate training appears to play an influential role in preservice teachers' perceptions towards pupils with SEN and their inclusion, and that a growing number of students with SEN are studying in regular schools, in the past two decades, integrated preservice teacher education for inclusion has been developed, implemented and examined in response to the ongoing challenges facing in-service teachers within the inclusive education context (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Lancaster & Bain, 2007, 2010; Oswald & Swart, 2011; Rajap, Cig, & Parlak-Rakap, 2017; Sharma & Sokal, 2015).

Generally speaking, the purposes of integrated preservice teacher education are to foster positive attitudes towards inclusion, lower the degree of concerns and enhance teaching efficacy (Oswald & Swart, 2011; Sharma & Sokal, 2015), based on which, the major focuses in such an integrated model are on providing courses about the *knowledge of SNE*, *instructional strategies* and *fieldwork experiences* (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003; Lancaster & Bain, 2007, 2010; Rajap et al., 2017; Richards & Clough, 2004; Sharma et al., 2008). In both Canada and Australia, for example, the integrated programmes investigated by Sharma and Sokal (2015) involved introduction courses to SNE and inclusion, which were found to positively influence teacher candidates' attitudes towards inclusion and their self-efficacy. This practice was supported by several researchers (Carroll et al., 2003; Lancaster & Bain, 2007, 2010; Richards & Clough, 2004), who examined whether favourable changes in attitudes towards inclusive education could be brought about through integrated coursework. Nevertheless, Purdy and Guckin (2015) pointed out that courses provided by such integrated programmes sometimes can be too theoretical to prepare teacher candidates to properly handle certain specific issues, such as disablist bullying, in schools.

Instructional strategies comprise another focus for the integrated teacher preparation model (Carroll et al., 2003; Lancaster & Bain, 2007, 2010; Rajap et al., 2017). According to the module developed by the University of Queensland and the University of Southern Queensland, the abilities to identify students' needs, draft IEPs, adapt and modify curricula and follow up on student performance progress were highlighted in response to the continued movement towards inclusive practices in Australia (Carroll et al., 2003). In the same vein, Lancaster and Bain (2007, 2010) in their seminal articles noted that the ability to use a variety of instructional strategies to accommodate learners' diverse needs is very much desired by preservice teachers, and some cognitive strategies, like SQ3R (survey, question, read, recite and review) and spelling tactics, can be introduced to expand teacher candidates' skills and material banks.

Fieldwork experiences have been considered crucial in this integrated model of preservice teacher education (Lancaster & Bain, 2010; Rajap et al., 2017; Richards & Clough, 2004; Sharma et al., 2008). In their analysis of the perspectives

of preschool teacher candidates on inclusion, Rajap et al. (2017) drew on considerable attention paid to the significance of practical experiences in applying instructional strategies learnt from coursework. They strongly concluded that teacher candidates should be provided field-based placement opportunities so they can visit, observe and practice in inclusive settings. Likewise, Campbell et al. (2003) confirmed the great value fieldwork experiences can contribute when combined with information-based instruction. After examining a total of 274 preservice teachers' attitudes towards disability and inclusion at the beginning and end of an integrated one-semester programme comprising both formal instruction and interviewing Down syndrome community members, they found that student teachers not only had a more accurate understanding of disabilities but also bore more positive attitudes towards disabilities in general. The well-planned fieldwork, as one of the key factors in preparing student teachers to work inclusively, offers not only a platform for student teachers to immerge themselves in inclusive practices but also various types of exposure to individuals with diverse needs.

Discrete model

Although the number of merged and integrated modelled programmes has been increasing and the models are gaining more attention, most preservice teacher education for inclusion falls into the third category that Blanton and Pugach (2007) identified as the discrete model. In a discrete model, collaboration between preservice general and SEN teacher education is scarce. General education teachers and SEN teachers are prepared independently with distinct professional portfolios and identities and very different licensure procedures. Basically, the two disciplines represent completely divergent universes with dissimilar values, ideologies, attitudes and practices. Furthermore, traditionally in a discrete model, regardless of the approach, length, focus or sequences, instructional pedagogy and teaching skills practices are emphasised within 4-year programmes (Vernon-Dotson, Floyd, Dukes, & Darling, 2014), which seems to still effectively serve to produce professional and competent SEN teachers (Nougaret, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2005).

As noted, SEN teachers have multiple roles to play at work in order to deal with multiple tasks and solve multiple problems simultaneously. In this sense, there is a clear need to ensure today's SEN student teachers are well prepared to effectively respond to these roles (Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson, & Morgan, 2016). Firstly, as the SEN teaching profession entails a high degree of emotional and caring demands (Gavish, 2017; Purdy, 2009), certain *personal dispositions* should be cultivated and developed during the preservice teacher training (Gavish, 2017; Levi, Einav, Raskind, Ziv, & Margalit, 2013). In her study of special education trainee teachers' perceptions of their professional world, Gavish (2017: 166) mentioned that SEN student teachers expected their training to enhance certain traits, such as warmth, listening, giving and believing, which are required to become "the best teachers possible". This view was supported by Levi and his

colleagues (2013), who highlighted the significance of hopeful thinking development as a personal resource for SEN teachers in preservice SEN teacher training.

After exploring the changing roles of SEN teachers, Wigle and Wilcox (2003) suggested four main competences on which preservice SEN teacher education programmes should focus: *content knowledge, collaboration skills, inclusive practices* and *leadership skills*. Despite the fact that, from the viewpoint of Brownell et al. (2010), it is entirely unpractical to expect SEN teachers to become as highly qualified in subjects as their peers in general education, basic content knowledge is necessary, based on which students' needs can be identified; realistic learning objectives can be established; appropriate learning materials can be evaluated, developed and adopted; various teaching methods can be utilised; and student learning progress can be traced (Holland & Hornby, 1992). This inevitably entails necessary *SNE-related instructional knowledge and skills*, such as knowledge of disabilities, knowledge of available resources, knowledge of different teaching/learning strategies and pedagogical skills in practice, which are also integral to preservice SEN teacher training (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010; Gavish, 2017). Secondly, since SEN teachers have to work closely with a variety of individuals on a daily basis, collaboration skills have also been highlighted as an important competence required in the SEN teaching profession in the literature (Holland & Hornby, 1992; Robertson et al., 2017; Shepherd et al., 2016; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003). Moreover, as an essential part of collaboration, *social skills*, such as listening, communication or conflict resolution, are the abilities SEN teachers are expected to demonstrate (Gavish, 2017; Holland & Hornby, 1992).

In Section 2.3 on SEN teachers' work, I explained that SEN teachers do not only coordinate and supervise resources and services but also promote school development of inclusion. Therefore, it seems critical that competences for inclusive practices be acquired through preservice SEN teacher preparation programmes. In their classic critique of competences for teachers of children with SEN, Holland and Hornby (1992) determined that the abilities to integrate relevant information, assess new programmes, promote the social inclusion of pupils with SEN and secure pupil and staff access to other resources are fundamental in effectively serving students with SEN. This implies two sub-competences: *administration skills* and *leadership skills*. Since the roles and responsibilities of SEN teachers are changing, they are expected by their administrators to have the administration skills needed to locate and access necessary resources for inclusive practices; in addition, a certain level of leadership authority is expected of SEN teachers for implementing inclusive practices effectively (Gavish, 2017; Klang et al., 2017; Lindqvist et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2015). Development of both skills should be incorporated into preservice SEN teacher education programmes.

In addition to the competences described, three concerns merit attention in relation to SEN teacher preparation. According to Wasburn-Moses (2009), due to the gap between expectations held by preservice SEN teachers concerning their future roles and the reality awaiting them, it is imperative for preservice SEN teacher education programmes to help teacher candidates better transit from preservice education to the school realities by preparing student teachers both for

the contemporary *teaching practices* and to be *agents of change*. Moreover, Robertson et al. (2017) pointed out that disabilities must be understood within the framework of intersectionality between disability and other aspects of diversity, such as culture, socioeconomic status and linguistic communities, since individuals with disabilities do not live in a 'vacuum' but in the "full contexts of their lives" (Pugach, 2001: 447), where the way in which each individual's disability interplays with his or her personality and environmental and cultural factors is unique. Therefore, *understanding* how an individual experiences his or her *disability in the context of* his or her *sociocultural or linguistic communities* appears to be a fundamentally crucial competence for SEN teachers, broadly speaking, which requires the alignment of coursework and fieldwork to provide student teachers with opportunities for *experiences* and *reflection*.

Finally, the *partnerships* between teacher preparation institutions and schools have been considered highly valuable in the process of SEN student teachers' training (Mclaughlin, Valdivieso, Spence, & Fuller, 1988; Norwich & Nash, 2011; Purdy & Guckin, 2015). As usual, in cooperation with teacher education institutions, in-service teachers tend to serve as mentors to guide teacher candidates in terms of teaching and classroom practices, and they have great influence on the development of student teacher professionalism (Mason, 2013). Along with mentorship, another substantial benefit school-teacher education institution partnerships can provide is to bridge the gaps between theory and practice that are often experienced by student teachers and beginning teachers (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Mason, 2013; Perry et al., 1999; Pohan, 2003; Sigurdardóttir, 2010). Suggestions for accomplishing this include either involving experienced in-service teachers in developing a teacher preparation programme development or having them teach in preservice teacher education (Mason, 2013).

Collectively, these studies outline a critical role for transforming preservice SEN teacher education for current inclusive practices. Orthodox professional competences, such as SNE-related knowledge and skills, remain significant; however, it seems that a broader competence set, including proficiencies such as collaboration skills, leadership skills and administration skills, have become increasingly vital to and considerably required in today's SEN teaching profession.

2.4.2   Teachers' Informal Learning

The term 'informal learning', in contrast to formal learning, refers here to learning experiences that are at no time intentional, structured or institutionalised. Most informal learning is acquired through experiences or simply serve as experiences. Moreover, informal learning is closely associated with personal daily work, family, leisure activities or routines; that is, it is context-laden (Eraut, 2004; Grosemans et al., 2015; Marsick & Volpe, 1999; OECD, 2003; Straka, 2004; The Lifelong Learning Platform, 2019).

Informal learning has been drawing closer attention and gaining more appreciation recently in terms of teacher PD, as formal learning, that is, preservice teacher education, no longer seems sufficient to prepare SEN teachers for their

daily teaching practices, considering the challenges they face resulting from the fast-changing society, educational reforms and inclusive education movement (Grosemans et al., 2015; Hoekstra et al., 2007; Lohman, 2006; McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006). In the field of teachers' informal learning, much of the research up to now has been focused on either general education teachers or teachers in general (Grosemans et al., 2015; Hoekstra, Brekelmans, Beijaard, Korthagen, 2009; Jones & Dexter, 2014; Lohman, 2006; Meirink et al., 2009). However, surprisingly, it appears that no studies can be found that provide a systematic understanding of informal learning of SEN teachers. Due to the paucity of published data specifically concerning SEN teachers' informal learning, in this section, I simply present a basic picture of informal learning of teachers in general, which, based on the literature review, is acquired via three main contexts: personal life history, prior career and current workplace.

Personal life history

At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that current research on the teaching profession has been shifting from an instrumentalist perspective towards a more comprehensive view, that is, 'the teacher as a person'. One of the three major inquiry dimensions regarding the teacher-as-a-person focuses on how teachers' lived experiences and their demographic factors affect their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes. In other words, in order to have a more holistic understanding of teachers' work lives, the knowledge of which and how personal life histories and personal factors interplay and interweave with teacher professionalism is of great significance (Bukor, 2015; Gavish, 2017; Goodson, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Kyles & Olafson, 2008).

As pointed out by Tripp (1994), "Knowing something about what had happened to us and what we had done told us something about who and where we are, who we might become, and where we might be going" (p. 65). In the past three decades, a considerable amount of literature has been published on how personal histories influence teachers' career choices, instructional practices, educational philosophies and PIs (Bukor, 2015; Gavish, 2017; Goodson, 1991; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Smaller, 2005), that is, how the knowledge teachers gain informally from their lived experiences is 'transferrable' to their later teaching profession. Figure 1 illustrates the relation between different aspects of personal lives and their influences on teachers as persons as well as on the teaching profession.
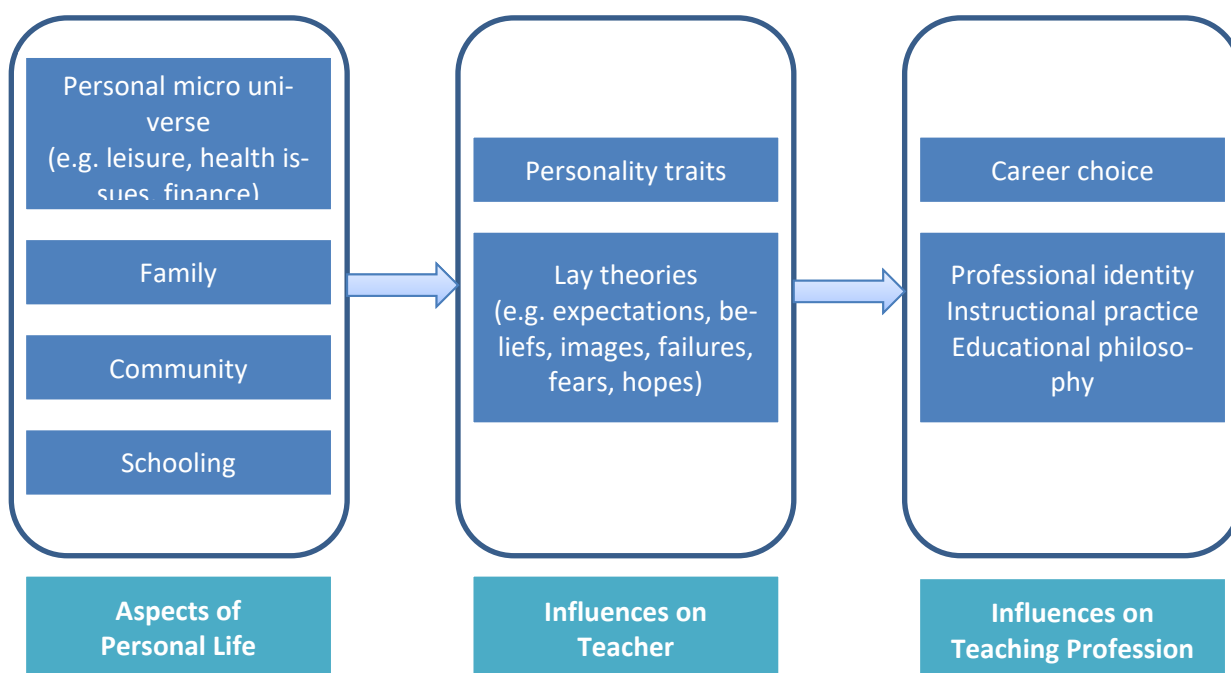
FIGURE 1   Relations between teachers' personal lives, teachers themselves and the teaching profession

Four main aspects of personal life have been identified as the sources of informal learning: *personal micro universe*, *family*, *community* and *schooling* (Bukor, 2015; Gavish, 2017; Goodson, 1991; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Smaller, 2005). In a nationwide study by Smaller (2005) on Canadian teachers' informal learning, teachers reported that, in addition to the workplace, they had engaged in informal learning in the community and elsewhere. For example, by volunteering in community organisations, teachers acquired interpersonal skills, community knowledge and organisational/leadership skills. Also, various recreational activities and daily routines, such as sports, hobbies, health issues or even finance/investing, also play occasional roles in their informal learning.

Family has been significantly highlighted in relation to the development of teachers' personality traits and lay theories (Bukor, 2015; Gavish, 2017; Goodson, 1991; Holt-Reynolds, 1992). Family greatly contributes to the development of teachers' personality traits; these traits, according to Bukor (2015), have much to do with teachers' relationships with their mothers, and, in turn, exercise substantial influence on their choosing teaching as a profession. Moreover, what had been learned from the family, combined with schooling experiences, inevitably shapes teachers' views, that is, lay theories, on different dimensions of the teaching profession, like beliefs, expectations, images, hopes and fears, which subsequently affect teachers' PI, relationships with students, educational philosophies, instructional practices and so on (Gavish, 2017; Goodson, 1991; Holt-Reynolds, 1992).

Also related to informal learning through family, *child raising experiences* within the context of an individual's extended family have been implicitly confirmed as part of informal learning contributing to teachers' confidence and communication skills (Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003; Tigchelaar, Brouwer, & Korthagen, 2008). Although the influence of teachers' life histories on their professional practices have been explored, a *critical incident approach* seems to provide an alternative way to reflect on, understand and illuminate teacher professionalism (Tripp, 1994; Goodson, 1991). Instead of seeking biographical information as a whole to gain a broader picture of the teaching profession, the critical incident approach focuses on a certain event(s) or situation(s) that lead to a long-term and profound impact on the perceptions and practices of teachers. Tripp (1994) argued that it is a method that empowers teachers not to merely be a research subject but to have the autonomy to interpret their own experiences.

Prior career

Apparently, personal life history covers much more than experiences of personal micro universe, family, community and schooling; it also, to a great degree, concerns teachers' professional biographies, especially in terms of those shifting from their prior careers to the teaching profession (Williams, 2010). As stated previously, among those who chose to become teachers, many are, in fact, career changers. They decide to leave other professions in order to pursue teaching as careers. It is now well established from a variety of studies that, while transitioning to teaching, career switchers also bring with them the diversity, complexity and richness of competences and experiences that they acquired from their prior careers (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2010; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014). The transferrable knowledge and skills learned from previous work can undoubtedly be regarded as the fruits of informal learning that benefit career switchers in their functioning in the present school context, as those competences are not obtained from formal preservice teacher education but through different professional contexts.

According to Defillippi and Arthur (1994), Mayotte (2003) and Tigchelaar et al. (2008), second-career teachers developed *know-why*, *know-how*, and *know-whom* career competences through their previous work, and they transfer these competences to teaching. Mayotte (2003) also identified *knowledge*, *skills* and *qualities* as three transferrable competences developed from prior careers that career switchers bring with them to the teaching profession. The know-why competences pertain to individuals' career motivations, personal meanings, beliefs, values and identities attached to the organisational culture, which correspond to Mayotte's (2003) category of quality. Three major qualities are enhanced through second-career teachers' previous work experiences: *maturity*, *intrinsic/altruistic motivation* and the *humanistic approach* (Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014). Second-career teachers, as Tigchelaar et al. (2008) claimed, are more aware of the consequences of their behaviours; meanwhile, they have developed a well-defined sense of self. This view was supported by Mayotte (2003), who argued that, in the move to teaching, second-career teachers

bring a strong sense of mission, agency and commitment. In addition to maturity, Zuzovsky and Donitsa-Schmidt (2014) pointed out that second-career teachers are aware before entering into the teaching profession that the rewards of salary or career prestige will not be obtained on this career path, yet they still choose to teach with a wish to work with young people. This implies the intrinsic and altruistic motivation they hold for the job and the humanistic view they take about the teaching profession when they leave their previous work and embark on teaching careers, which is manifested in their student-centred approach (Tigchelaar et al., 2008).

The know-how competences relate to occupation-related knowledge, skills, routines and tacit practices (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008), corresponding to Mayotte's (2003) category of knowledge and skills. Second-career teachers can draw on four transferable knowledge and skill areas from their previous profession: *adaptation ability*, *discipline expertise*, *administration knowledge and skills* and *technical skills* (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Tigchelaar et al., 2010; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014). First, from earlier experiences in their work lives, second-career teachers are considered capable of adapting themselves to new situations and more quickly and precisely locating their professional standing within the educational context (Tigchelaar et al., 2008). Moreover, prior work experiences help second-career teachers accrue a vast array of expertise in their disciplines, which they can continue to apply to curriculum design and instruction in the classrooms (Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Tigchelaar et al., 2010; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014). Thirdly, a wealth of administration knowledge and skills have been identified that can contribute to second-career teachers' teaching practices, such as the abilities of problem-solving, planning, managing (e.g. time management, classroom management), thinking and multitasking (Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Tigchelaar et al., 2010). The fourth skill set second-career teachers acquire from their previous work settings are technical skills, including information and communication technology (ICT) skills, writing skills and presentation skills (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2010).

The know-whom competences are defined as the abilities to create, develop, foster and maintain career relevant networks (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008), which also corresponds to Mayotte's (2003) category of knowledge and skills. In this category, Anthony and Ord (2008) and Tigchelaar et al. (2008) mentioned that second-career teachers experienced continuity notably in the *domain of interaction* while transitioning their careers to the teaching profession. In other words, they had developed a wealth of *practical knowledge of people* through their prior work experiences (Tigchelaar et al., 2008). Based on the *sophisticated understanding of human nature*, second-career teachers demonstrate useful *human relation skills*; more specifically, they obtain various *communication skills*, such as negotiating skills and interpersonal problem-solving skills (Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Tigchelaar et al., 2010).

Considering this evidence, it seems that individuals teaching as a second career can bring valuable competences to the profession and benefit the profession as a whole (Mayotte, 2003). Nevertheless, a number of researchers have highlighted the significance of preservice teacher education in relation to expertise transferability (Crow et al., 1990; Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Tigchelaar et al., 2010; Williams, 2010). As transferring qualities, knowledge and skills into teaching is not an automatic process, career switchers might not intuitively understand how to put these competences learned from previous work experiences into pedagogical practice (Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Tigchelaar et al., 2010). Hence, it is teacher educators' weighty responsibility to recognise the professional biographies of career switchers and address their individual needs so that their awareness of competence transferability can be raised (Crow et al., 1990; Williams, 2010). At the same time, career switchers' prior job-related knowledge and skills need to be incorporated into formal learning programmes; that is, they need to be taught pedagogical strategies so that they know how to play to these strengths in coping with the demands of the teaching profession (Mayotte, 2003; Williams, 2010).

Table 4 shows an overview of the transferrable competences developed through previous work experiences as informal learning.

TABLE 4   Transferrable competences developed through prievious work experiences

Know-Why	Know-How	Know-Whom
Maturity *Awareness of behaviour consequences* *Sense of self* *Sense of mission and agency* *Sense of commitment* **Intrinsic/altruistic motivation** **Humanistic approach** (*e.g. student-centred*)	**Adaptation ability** **Discipline expertise** (*e.g. curriculum design*) **Administration knowledge and skills** *Problem-solving* *Coping* *Planning* *Managing* *Multitasking* *Thinking* **Technical skills** *Writing* *ICT* *Presentation*	**Interaction domain** **Knowledge about people** **Human relation skills** **Communication skills** (*e.g. negotiating, interpersonal problem-solving*)
Quality	Knowledge + Skills	Knowledge + Skills
Professionalism		

Current workplace

Among the three main contexts of informal learning, informal workplace learning has been become a more integral part of European lifelong learning policies (European Commission, 2001; OECD, 2003; The Lifelong Learning Platform, 2019), as teachers are required to keep up with continual changes in society at large and in educational settings specifically (Grosemans et al., 2015; Hoekstra,

Korthagen, Brekelmans, Beijaard, & Imants, 2009; Lohman, 2006). There is also a consensus among teachers that, due to the inadequacy of formal learning activities, the majority of professional learning is, in fact, embedded in daily teaching practices in the workplace (Bound, 2011; Grosemans et al., 2015; Hoekstra et al., 2007; McCormack et al., 2006). Informal learning is an aspect of workplace learning that occurs in the work process and through work activities, most often initiated by people in their work settings outside of systematic programmes or without support organised explicitly to facilitate learning; it aims to develop professional knowledge and skills (Hoekstra et al., 2007; Hoekstra et al., 2009; Jones & Dexter, 2014; Lohman, 2006). Furthermore, this kind of informal learning not only contributes to acquiring professional competences but also leads to changes in teachers' conceptions, beliefs, behaviours, motivations and emotions (Hoekstra et al., 2007; Hoekstra et al., 2009; Meirinki et al., 2009).

Several studies have shown that teachers learn through a variety of informal learning activities (Grosemans et al., 2015; Hoekstra et al., 2009; Jones & Dexter, 2014; Kwakman, 2003; Lohman, 2006; McCormack et al., 2006). Collectively, based on the evidence reviewed, five major learning activities are identified: *doing*, *learning from others without interaction*, *learning from others with interaction*, *experimentation* and *reflection*. Learning by doing implies learning from daily practices, such as organising extracurricular activities, performing administration tasks or teaching in itself (Kwakman, 2003; Lohman & Woolf, 2001; Meirinki et al., 2009). Learning from others without interaction covers activities like reading and information searching/gathering/updating (Grosemans et al., 2015; Kwakman, 2003). Learning from others in interaction implies various forms of collaboration (Grosemans et al., 2015; Jones & Dexter, 2014; Kwakman, 2003; Meirinki et al., 2009). In Kwakman's (2003) seminal article on factors affecting teachers' participation in professional learning activities, she found four sub-categories included in teachers' informal learning activities through interaction: *storytelling*, *help*, *sharing* and *joint work*. Storytelling indicates that by observing or listening to colleagues and their experiences, teachers can gain valuable insights into their own teaching methods or challenging situations (Meirinki et al., 2009). Help entails asking for assistance or offering advice or resources. This perspective was shared by Meirinki et al. (2009), who argued that teachers often learn by involving colleagues in problematic cases. Sharing involves the exchange not merely of materials but also ideas concerning instruction, classroom management or other important educational issues, either by email, social media or in face-to-face conversations among fellow staff inside the same school or with professional practitioners from other institutions (Jones & Dexter, 2014). Joint work refers to cooperating with fellow teachers in terms of designing/teaching lessons, coordinating resources or implementing innovations together. Regardless of the form it takes, collaboration is considered by teachers to be the most valuable and important informal learning activity (Grosemans et al., 2015; Lohman, 2006; McCormack et al., 2006); therefore, those who come together for support, sharing and cooperating are termed by Jones and Dexter (2014) as 'informal communities of practices' (COPs). Although so far it seems that teachers' learning experiences consist of

solo activities, Meirinki et al. (2009) state that, for example, collaboration can actually inspire teachers and trigger subsequent experimentation. As a result, teachers learn by intentionally trying or introducing something innovative, i.e., experimenting, in terms of assistive technology, teaching approach, learning strategy, material selection, evaluation model and so on.

The last category of informal workplace learning activities pertains to reflection. According to Grosemans et al. (2015), reflection is 'the action where teachers consider their own teaching practice' (p. 152), which can be better understood by Schön's theory relating to two types of reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983; Van den Bossche & Beausaert, 2011). Reflection-on-action means practitioners think back to what they have done or lived through so that their knowing-in-practice can be reviewed and improved, whereas reflection-in-action involves examining the action in progress without interrupting it in order to make necessary simultaneous adjustments in response to the current practice. Through reflection, teachers make sense of their work and improve their professional practices.

A few researchers have attempted to further draw attention to critical factors that positively or negatively contribute to informal workplace learning quality (Grosemans et al., 2015; Lohman, 2006; McCormack et al., 2006). These factors concern both environmental and personal characteristics. For example, in their study, McCormack et al. (2006) focused on the informal learning experiences of early career teachers, concluding that organisational factors like additional responsibilities, unrealistic expectations, lack of status and professional feedback can inhibit teachers' learning. In the same vein, Lohman (2006), in his inquiry on factors influencing teachers' informal learning experiences, listed four aspects of work environments that may hinder teachers' engagement in informal learning activities: lack of time, lack of proximity to learning resources, lack of meaningful rewards for learning and limited decision-making power. Lohman additionally highlighted seven personal characteristics to counter the aforementioned environmental inhibitors: initiative, self-efficacy, love of learning, commitment to lifelong learning, interest in content area, a nurturing personality and an outgoing personality.

The evidence presented in this section on teachers' informal learning suggests that the multifarious experiences gained through personal life history, prior careers and current workplace have a truly fundamental and long-term impact on teachers' PD. Commenting on inclusive practices, Allison (2012: 36) argued: "Successful implementation of inclusion is dependent on professional development". As PD involves both formal and informal learning, the synergy between these two types of learning is certainly worth further exploration, especially when there is too little understanding concerning SEN teachers' informal learning experiences.

3 RESEARCH PURPOSE, THEMES, TASKS AND QUESTIONS

3.1 Research Purpose

The main purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers working in Finnish inclusive IVET schools. Through profiling the roles and tasks of SEN teachers working within the inclusive context, the fundamental professional competences required for the SEN teaching profession can be recognised. Furthermore, understanding the multiple dimensions of the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers has implications for both preservice teacher education and in-service PD. The challenge of this inquiry, compared to prior research, is to present a wider view of the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers which will delve into various aspects of their roles and tasks in inclusive IVET schools. While the themes, such as career choice, work reality, formal learning, informal learning and job satisfaction, applied to this study are, to a certain degree, pre-defined, they are also a part of what spontaneously emerged from the data.

3.2 Research Themes, Tasks and Questions

This inquiry aims at profiling the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers within the context of Finnish inclusive IVET and to further our knowledge of the complexity of the SEN teaching profession. In order to achieve this goal, five important themes, as shown in Figure 2, were examined: SEN teachers' career choice, work reality, formal learning, informal learning and job satisfaction.
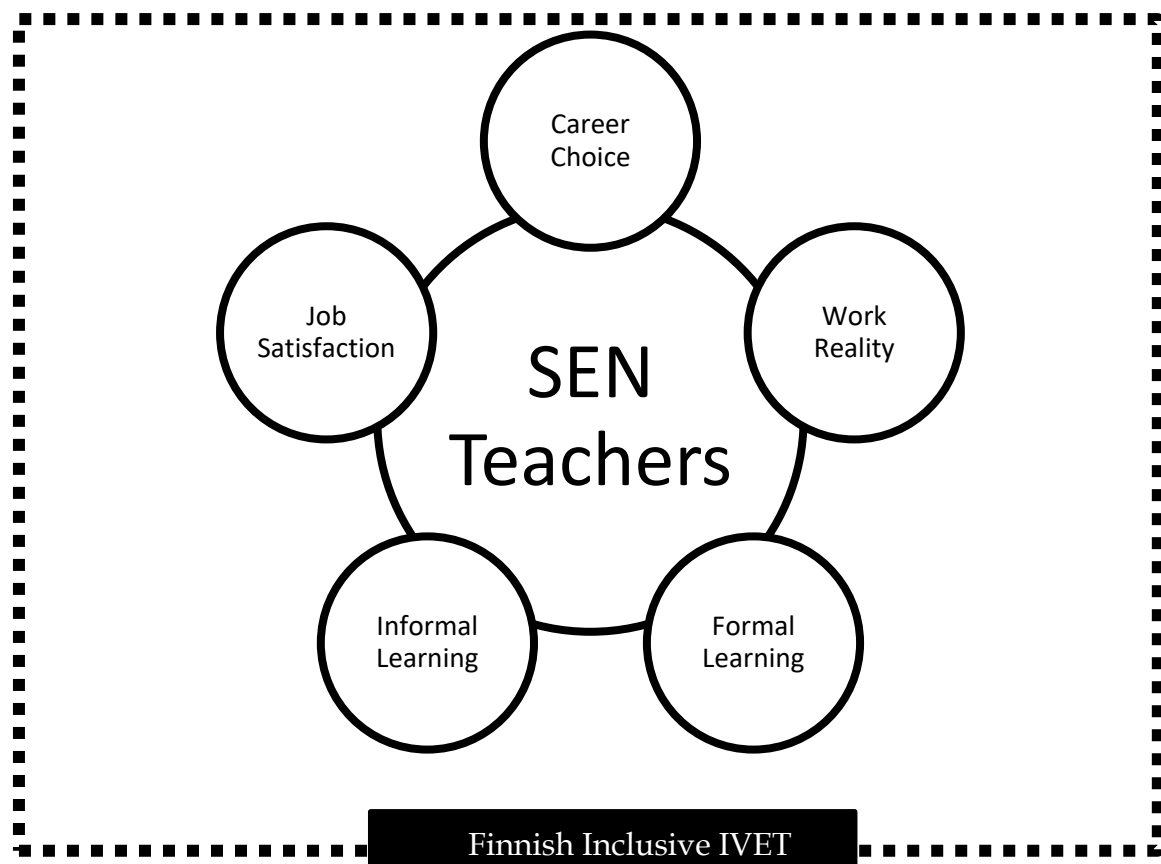
FIGURE 2   Research themes

Each of the five themes is elucidated by a research task and supported by a cor-
responding research question. The relations between the research themes, tasks
and questions are presented in Table 5 along with the relevant chapter in this
dissertation in which the theme is discussed.

TABLE 5   Relations between the research themes, tasks, questions and associated chapters

Themes	Tasks	Questions	Associated Chapters
Career Choice	To uncover the reasons behind SEN teachers' career choice	1. Why do people choose to work as SEN teachers in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?	5
Work Reality	To obtain a comprehensive picture of SEN teachers' work reality	2. How do SEN teachers perceive their work in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?	6
Formal Learning: Preservice Teacher Education	To explore the influence of preservice teacher education on SEN teachers' work	3. How do SEN teachers reflect on their preservice teacher education in preparing them for their work in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?	7
Informal Learning: Lived Experiences	To obtain an interpretative understanding of SEN teachers' informal learning through lived experiences	4. How do SEN teachers develop their expertise through their lived experiences?	8
Job Satisfaction	To examine how content SEN teachers are with their jobs	5. How satisfied are SEN teachers with their jobs in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?	9

4 RESEARCH METHODS

This section covers the methods used for data collection and data analysis in this research. Firstly, the rationale behind the qualitative methodological approach used is presented. Next, I will explain the research participant recruitment procedure, followed by a description of the data collection and data analysis processes. Lastly, the research trustworthiness and ethical considerations are portrayed.

4.1 Methodological Approach

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?
>
> – James P. Spradley, Anthropology Professor (1933–1982)

> Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.'
>
> – William Bruce Cameron, Sociologist (1960–present)

Although apparently, in a narrow sense, this inquiry does not have much to do with anthropology or social sciences in general, intrinsically, my initial personal intent in conducting this inquiry was on the same page with Spradley's and Cameron's views. In this way my inquiry became primarily oriented in a qualitative direction. This initial personal research impetus must be elaborated on with the recollection of my previous teaching career.

Prior to pursuing my doctorate degree, I had been working as a SEN teacher in an inclusive vocational school for years. During my teaching career, I kept asking myself questions about work life and professional learning. I was aware of

how my previous negative lived experiences shaped my SEN teaching professionalism. In the eyes of some teachers and my family members, I was considered a 'stupid' and 'lazy' student/child because of poor academic performance. These negative experiences had a considerable influence on how I dealt with my students' difficulties in learning. In my class of 15 students with SEN, everyone knew that I would never, ever judge, label or punish them for their challenges with their studies. I placed more emphasis on my students' personal development and on encouraging them to be lifelong learners who enjoyed learning rather than focusing on their exam results. The reason behind my educational ideology was that I did not want my students to severely suffer or have their self-esteem negatively affected as a result of their learning difficulties. Of course I am not saying that every previous negative experience in our lives can always have a positive impact on our vocational careers, but I often wondered if other teachers' existing educational philosophies also partly stemmed from their past instead of merely being the product of pre-service teacher education programmes?

Another example was my curiosity about whether the experiences of raising a child influenced teachers' attitudes towards their students with diverse needs. This is because, again, while working as a SEN teacher, I noticed that my colleagues who were parents seemed to deal with their students' problems or difficulties in a markedly different way than those who were not parents. In their interactions with students, they appeared to express indescribable tenderness, tolerance and firmness, which was something I could not clearly locate from my work fellows who had no child raising experiences. I was not clear at that time if there was any direct association between our professionalism and the experiences of child-raising. Nevertheless, I believed that, since work is part of our lives and inevitably interwoven with our lived experiences, each event, incident or process in our lives has a certain influence on how we teach and interact with people at work.

The third phenomenon experienced in my seven-year work experience as a SEN teacher that much intrigued me was the gap in understanding of the SEN teaching profession between us, as SEN teachers, and others. Whenever people found out that I was working with students with SEN, they expressed their surprise at and admiration for my 'significant and extraordinary contribution to humankind'. They considered the SEN teaching profession as charitable work, earning those who chose the profession merits on behalf of their own families in this life and in the hereafter. Also, some teachers and staff working in the same school had a considerable respect for us and for our 'incredible patience and love' we displayed by teaching and guiding those teenagers with various difficulties and problems. Every now and then we were told by our colleagues who did not work in the field of SNE that they would never be able to do the same demanding job that we did due to the great challenges they observed in our daily work. Yet, there was also another group of teachers who regarded SEN teachers as 'less professional' because they thought the content we taught was relatively simple and because our work usually involved nothing more than handling students' behav-

ioural problems. Ostensibly, the SEN teaching profession seemed, to some, 'noble', and, to others, even 'unorthodox'. We were viewed as having chosen this career path either out of a 'sacred sense of mission' or merely because we were not 'good enough' to be a regular teacher.

These three personal experiences imply in a few ways my rationale for adopting a qualitative approach to this inquiry. According to Creswell (2014), Metsämuuronen (2017) and Silverman (2013), what the researcher is trying to discover will determine the selection of his/her research approach, which depends, to a great extent, on the researcher's personal experiences and the research problem being addressed. In regard of the researchers' personal experiences, the first reason I chose a qualitative approach is that qualitative research is *personal* (Patton, 2015). As noted previously, throughout my teaching career, I found myself asking various questions about work life and professional learning: How have my personal lived experiences influenced my way of dealing with students' learning difficulties? Why do those who are parents seem to interact with students in a more caring manner than those who are childless? How is the SEN teaching profession viewed by others and by me? In the past decade, Finland has been spotlighted by the world, including by my native Taiwan, for its phenomenal performance on the PISA. With increasing publications in Taiwan praising and even 'adoring' the Finnish educational system, my personal inquiry horizon was broadened, which inevitably made me wonder if my experiences were shared by those Finnish SEN teachers working in a similar educational setting: Is their professionalism also, to some extent, shaped by their previous lived experiences? What do they usually do as SEN teachers in an inclusive IVET context? Do they hold the same perspective that I do that being a parent is beneficial to their work? Therefore, this inquiry did not come into existence by simply being drafted as a doctoral dissertation research proposal. Rather, it began with my continual exploration of and reflection on my own and my colleagues' experiences, that is, as Patton (2015: 18) noted, "a form of qualitative inquiry". In Patton's view, the basis for qualitative inquiry is what the researcher is interested in and passionate about, which perfectly describes my first reason for selecting a qualitative approach to this inquiry.

Another reason I chose a qualitative approach is that qualitative research is *constructivist* (Creswell, 2014; Metsämuuronen, 2017). Ontologically, for qualitative researchers, there is no one single absolute, transcendent, realist, objective and universal reality; instead, reality is relative, contextual, nominalist, subjective and individual (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018; Metsämuuronen, 2017; Newby, 2010; Silverman, 2013; Sofaer, 1999). In other words, the reality perceived, experienced and interpreted varies from one person to another. The way every individual understands the world constituted with a variety of events, incidents and objects to which he or she constructs subjective meaning is different. This stance also applies to the reality of work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers in inclusive vocational schools. From the ontological perspective, despite the similarities in practices shared across different teachers or settings, I believe that there

is no single truth concerning the SEN teaching professional world. The reality of SEN teachers' work, based on my experiences, observations and literature review, is complex, multi-layered and context-laden, which is a result of SEN teachers' tasks and roles changing across personal educational ideologies, across institutional practices and even across time. In light of such realisations, a qualitative approach seems more appropriate for me to explore and make sense of the complexity of SEN teachers' work lives and professional learning from the perspectives of those who actually live through the issues under examination.

Furthermore, a qualitative approach is preferable for this research because of its epistemological standpoint. As previously stated, qualitative research is *constructivist*. Since the reality is not absolute, transcendent, realist, objective and universal but relative, contextual, nominalist, subjective and individual, it is reasonable to say that the views of those who live within the phenomena under investigation have more value and validity in illuminating accounts relevant to this research. In other words, the *voices* of research participants should be appreciated and should be expressed through interactions between the researcher and the participants so that the knowledge of relative, contextual, nominalist, subjective and individual realities, which the researcher is eager to uncover, can be acquired (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2014; Lincoln et al., 2018; Metsämuuronen, 2017; Newby, 2010; Patton, 2015; Silverman, 2013). Hence, for this exploration into the multiple dimensions of the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers within the Finnish inclusive IVET context, the qualitative approach was taken, as in-service SEN teachers' subjective views on their daily work can better render the multiplicity of this teaching profession.

In summary, driven by these ontological and epistemological stances, that is, the philosophical worldview assumptions (Creswell, 2014), a qualitative methodology was adopted for this research to capture in depth the complex picture of SEN teachers' work lives and professional learning from the multiple viewpoints of SEN teachers who subjectively make sense of their experiences within the context under study. The selection of a qualitative approach was echoed by the growing body of qualitative research with shared research interests in investigating the association between teachers' personal lived experiences and their teaching careers. These studies have probed into how various personal and contextual factors interplay and shape teachers' professionalism and into how the dramatic and comprehensive professional landscape is perceived by teachers over time and across settings (Alsup, 2006; Ball & Goodson, 1985a; Bukor, 2015; Berg, 2013; Day & Gu, 2010; Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007; Hargreaves, 2005; Huberman, 1993; Mackenzie, 2012b). By means of a qualitative approach with the capacity to provide thick description and a more holistic outlook, we can re-examine what we used to take for granted in relation to the multifaceted images of SEN teachers' work and roles (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2014; Newby, 2010; Patton, 2015).

4.2   Research Participants and Recruitment

The interviews conducted involved 11 SEN teachers working in 11 different inclusive vocational schools across Finland. The 11 SEN teachers were chosen with a purposeful selection strategy. The recruitment procedure was implemented in two phases. Firstly, due to my limited personal contact resources, potential participants were contacted with the help of the Faculty of Education and Psychology (University of Jyväskylä) and the Vocational Teacher Education School (JAMK University of Applied Sciences) via phone call or email. Here they were asked initially about their interest in participating in a research project concerning their work lives and professional learning. Based on my research plan, at least two participants from each region (eastern Finland, western Finland, central Finland, northern Finland and southern Finland) had to be identified, as I hoped to recruit 10 teachers in total across Finland for this study. Ideally, one male and one female from each of the five regions would be recruited so that I could explore if teachers of different genders experience and interpret their work lives and professional learning differently. Through the first-round inquiries, 14 teachers expressed interest in participating. Given the fact that I used to work as a SEN teacher in an inclusive IVET context in Taiwan, I was more intrigued as to how the same teaching profession works here in Finland. At the end of the first phase of recruitment three of the 14 teachers were excluded from this research because they were not working in inclusive IVET schools, but in segregated ones, where every student there has a special need.

In the second recruitment phase, I contacted the remaining 11 teachers personally via email to further confirm their willingness to voluntarily participate. I included with each email an information sheet (Appendix 1) that provided more details about the research, and I also asked the participants for their contact address so that the consent form (Appendix 2) and the interview guidelines (Appendix 3) could be delivered by post before the interview(s). After being well-informed through the information sheet, all 11 teachers agreed to be interviewed for this study. All participating teachers not only understood their right to withdraw at any time from the project and what participation entailed but also were reassured that declining would not affect them in any way. Then the time and place for the interview(s) were arranged via email, followed by the delivery of the consent forms and the interview guidelines.

In the very beginning I had hoped to find both male and female teachers from each region so that gender-based comparisons could possibly be made in terms of the teachers' perceptions of work and professional learning, but in the end I did not manage to recruit any male participants. Ultimately, all participating teachers were female with an average age of 46.5 years old. This corresponds to a study carried out by Kumpulainen in 2013 where she found that more than 80% of SEN teachers in vocational schools were women, and that virtually 90% were above the age of 40 (Kumpulainen, 2014). The average length of this study's participants' working experience as a SEN teacher was 7.5 years, with an average

5.3 years' experience as a regular teacher and an average of 9 years as employees in non-educational industries. Despite the small number of teachers participating in this study due to the research design and practical limitations of time/financial resources/manpower, the richness of the data was confirmed later through the data collection and analysis detailed in the following sections. Table 6 summarises the background information of each teacher participating in this study.

TABLE 6   Participants' characteristics

Participant		Niina	Jonna	Hilla	Päivi	Suvi	Sofia	Tuulia	Linda	Laura	Katri	Anna
School		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
Age	Mean						46.5					
	Range						32—58					
Years of work as SEN teacher												
	Mean						7.5					
	Range						1-19					
Years of work as regular teacher												
	Mean						5.3					
	Range						0-20					
Years of work in non-educational industry												
	Mean						9.2					
	Range						0-18					
Source of SEN teacher qualification												
University of Applied Science: Vocational SEN Teacher Education Programme (60 ECTS credits)				X	X	X	X	X				X	
University of Sciences: One-Year Programme (60 ECTS credits)								X	X	X			X
University of Sciences: Master's Degree Programme (300 ECTS credits)		X	X			X						

4.3   Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected through semi-structured conversational interviews. Data collection for qualitative research studies can usually be carried out in various ways, such as documents, audio-visual materials, observations and interviews. Among these data collection methods, the interview, as a professional conversation for the specific purpose of obtaining descriptions and interpretations of the interviewees' lived worlds (Kvale, 1996; Wengraf, 2001), is the most commonly used tool for enabling interviewees to fully express their views, opinions and feelings, which the interviewer would not be able to directly observe (Patton, 2002). In other words, the interview gives the interviewer access into the interviewees' mental worlds, that is, for example, how they organise their lived worlds and how they attach meaning to their experiences. As the primary purpose of this study was to explore in depth how SEN teachers working in inclusive IVET contexts perceive their work lives and professional learning, interviews provided a definite advantage for me not only to understand the issues under investigation from the teachers' viewpoints but also to unfold the meanings of the teachers' experiences. The teachers' perspectives provided personal meaning and empirical knowledge to offer a better understanding of the SEN teaching reality.

After selecting the interview as the data collection method, I decided to conduct the interviews in a semi-structured manner by asking a series of predetermined, open-ended questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The benefits of a semi-structured interview are its spontaneity and flexibility (Given, 2008). On the one hand, semi-structured interviews encourage interviewees to respond in detail. The interviewees can answer in any way, and the probes are used to elicit further elaboration or exploration (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). On the other hand, such an approach may disclose some issues that the researchers had not previously considered. While systematic information on certain topics is collected through predefined questions, the emergence of new themes is prompted by following-up questions (Wilson, 2013). Given the fact that I already had some general knowledge about the SEN teaching profession but still needed further details on how it is put into practice within the Finnish context, and that I wanted to be open to other possible themes emerging from the conversations, I adopted the semi-structured interviews to allow room for variations in the responses.

Prior to scheduling the semi-structured interviews, I needed to develop interview guidelines that included a variety of predetermined, open-ended questions to cover the issues under examination. Based on the literature review on SEN teachers' work and my personal work experiences in this field, I drafted a preliminary list of questions to investigate various aspects of the SEN teaching profession within the inclusive IVET context. After refining and further categorising the questions, I formulated 60 questions that explored six major themes: PI, job involvement, professional ethics, PD, professional relationships and retention

tendency. Although the 60 questions and six themes were predetermined to set the tone for the interviews and to ensure that the same significant information was obtained from every teacher interviewed within the limited time available, some questions that emerged during the research conversations were derived directly from the participants' sharing rather than from my own preconceptions. In this sense, throughout the process of each interview, I was not merely, as described by Kvale (1996), a "miner" who unearthed objective facts and essential meanings "buried"' in the teachers' mental worlds but also a "traveller" who explored the professional landscapes by "wandering together with" the teachers.

Once the interview questions were phrased, the validity of the interview guidelines was confirmed by practitioners and educational experts in Finland to ensure that the framework of the interviews properly covered SEN teachers' work lives and professional learning in the Finnish inclusive IVET system, while I still had the freedom to word questions spontaneously and to redirect conversations. Furthermore, in order to check the appropriateness of the terms and the sequence of questions, pilot interviews were held. The pilot interviews revealed that the research instrument seemed to work well. More practically, the pilot interviews better prepared me for the research interviews by giving me four advantages: *rehearsal*, *revision*, *redirection*, and *rejoicing*. In terms of *rehearsal*, I became more familiar with the whole interview procedure, such as when it was necessary to use probes and how the interaction would go. Another advantage of conducting the pilot interviews was *revision*, which means that I learned how to state the questions in a more concrete and understandable way. Some unclear questions were, thus, further revised. The third advantage was *redirection*. In other words, I learned how to reorientate the interview flow so that the breadth and depth of the interview could be improved. Last, *rejoicing* resulted from the feedback received from the pilot interviews, as the research significance was confirmed and appreciated by practitioners, which placed more practical value to this inquiry.

After finalising the interview guidelines, I sent the document to the teachers in advance of the interviews (Appendix 3). The interviews were scheduled and conducted in English either via Skype or in face-to-face meetings over a period of about one year, from November 2012 to November 2013. At the outset of each interview, I collected the teacher's background information and formally restated the purpose, procedures, application and ethical considerations of this study. The clarification and probes of questions were addressed whenever necessary. The interview with each teacher lasted between two and five hours, consisting of one to three sessions of follow-up questions according to the teacher's work schedule. With the teachers' consent, I audio recorded all interviews with a digital audio recorder, and then I transcribed the sessions verbatim using Express Scribe Pro v 5.51 and Word software. Audio recording was integral to the data collection because it helped make possible a complete transcription of the interviews, which enabled me to carefully review the data together with the teachers interviewed. The overall duration of the interviews was about 35 hours, resulting in 489 pages (200,164 words) of transcripts.

Using English in interviews with native Finnish-speaking teachers could probably jeopardise the authenticity of the data. Hence, in this study, the interview questions and concepts used were, as noted, examined by practitioners and educational experts in Finland, and the pilot interviews were implemented to confirm the reliability of the data collection method. The Finnish-English interview guide was sent to each participating teacher before the interview was conducted to ensure that she had reasonable time to better understand the interview questions and concepts. During the interview sessions, teachers also had enough time to ponder their ideas and formulate their answers.

4.4   Data Analysis Procedure

Qualitative data analysis is a procedure through which data are transformed into findings (Patton, 2015). In other words, it is a continuous and iterative process where data are systematically and meaningfully interpreted, reconstructed and organised into patterns and themes, while remaining faithful to research participants' original accounts, to glean insightful descriptions of the phenomena under study (Cohen et al., 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Noble & Smith, 2014). Based on his or her judgement, the researcher determines what constitutes the activities in qualitative data analysis, as there is no one right way to implement the procedure; instead, it has much to do with the research purpose (Patton, 2015). Nevertheless, Creswell (2014) and Patton (2015) identified two major methods of analysis applied in most qualitative data research: deduction-oriented and induction-oriented. Deduction-oriented qualitative data analysis employs an existing structure or predetermined theoretical framework, whereas the structure or theory emerges from the data in an induction-oriented analysis.

This study aimed to understand and collect diverse aspects of SEN teachers' perceptions, opinions and beliefs concerning their work lives and professional learning. While the semi-structured interview questions were formulated according to the literature review and my personal work experiences (deductive), I was still very interested in remaining open to the possibility of themes emerging from the conversations (inductive) so that more room for interpretation variation could be given. Hence, I adopted a thematic analysis as the analytic approach to examine the interview data in this qualitative inquiry. As a descriptive and fundamental qualitative analysis method incorporating both deductive and inductive perspectives, thematic analysis is not only suitable for discovering, recognising and identifying patterns and themes that appear random within data but can also provide a rich, nuanced and detailed, yet manifold, account of the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lapadat, 2010; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

Given that thematic analysis is a general sense-making process commonly used by researchers across different disciplines (Lapadat, 2010; Schwandt, 2007), the thematic analysis approach is not necessarily exclusive from other qualitative analysis methods. This implies that, in a broader sense, thematic analysis shares some similarities with other qualitative data analysis methods related to paying

close attention to potential patterns within the data in the beginning of analysis, reconstructing the data in a meaningful manner and coming to an end when the final conclusions of the discovered themes are reported. Generally, qualitative data analysis, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), consists of three concurrent phases: *data reduction*, *data display* and *conclusion drawing/verification*. Data reduction refers to a process of (re-)organising the data; data display indicates that the (re-)organised data are transformed into extended text, such as graphs, charts, matrices and so on; conclusion drawing/verification refers to the phase when the preliminary or final conclusions are reached. These three phases were echoed by and, to some degree, overlap with Braun and Clarke's six explicit flows of activity in thematic analysis: *familiarising yourself with the data* (data reduction), *generating initial codes* (data reduction), *searching for themes* (data reduction), *reviewing themes* (data reduction), *defining and naming themes* (data reduction and data display) and *producing the report* (conclusion drawing/verification) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study I condensed Braun and Clarke's six steps of analysis into four phases to illustrate the data analysis procedure: *data familiarising*, *data coding*, *data thematising* and *data reporting*. Before continuing with the description of each data analysis phase, one thing is worth mentioning: Although it seems that the qualitative analysis process can be divided into different steps, it is important to consider that analysis is a not a linear but an iterative process essentially (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, the four phases I applied were not applied in isolation but interplayed simultaneously. Indeed, the analysis did not proceed simply from one phase to the next. A constant back and forth movement between the phases occurred throughout the analysis.

4.4.1   Data Familiarising

The data familiarising phase consisted of transcribing, reading, re-reading and summarising the transcripts. As described previously, all 11 teachers' interviews were transcribed word for word, resulting in 489 pages (200,164 words) of transcripts. The data were transcribed in full instead of focusing on selected sections so that the nuances of the teachers' views could be captured (Noble & Smith, 2014). Transcribing the interviews by myself allowed me to begin preliminary comprehension of the meanings of what the teachers said. By listening to repeated replaying of the audio files, I acquired greater familiarity with the data. In other words, analysis took place spontaneously in doing my own transcription work.

Once the transcriptions were made, each teacher was sent the transcript of her interview, not just to clarify some terms or phrases recorded in the audio files but also to allow the teachers to check the accuracy of the textual representation, that is, to ensure the text was true to its original nature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the teachers confirmed the accuracy of their transcripts, I reorganised the transcripts based on the interview questions across all teacher participants so that patterns and themes could be identified more easily.

The reorganised transcripts were read and re-read a number of times in order to immerse myself in the data to such an extent that familiarity with the

depth and breadth of the data could be acquired (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While repeatedly reading, I kept asking myself what the data were communicating and wrote down in the margins my general impressions and summaries as marginal remarks (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of the main idea the teachers tried to convey through each sentence/paragraph. Some keywords or phrases in the data were highlighted in the form of vivo codes to retain the teachers' original accounts. The (re)reading of the transcripts with remarks allowed me not only to make my first attempt at coding but also to establish 'signposts' for further coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tuckett, 2005). As an example of this phase of data analysis, Table 7 presents the extracts, with corresponding remarks, of data taken from the interviews in which the teachers were expressing how they felt about their pre-service SEN teacher education.

TABLE 7   Data extracts with marginal remarks

Teacher	Extract	Marginal Remarks
Jonna	Um … actually no, I think I have needed most studies during the last 10 years. Nowadays many young people have, for example, psychological problems, and I have needed more information about them. […] Joo … um … for example, those psychological problems which I have mentioned … more about them. There was something, but it was … very little information, but more … and how to work with these problems. […] Um … in my studies … there was … there was all of information about learning and reading and writing disabilities, and they were really useful.	1. Preservice teacher education, to some extent, did not benefit my later work. Nowadays more students have psychological problems, and I need more information about that field. 2. Psychological problems should be more emphasised in pre-service teacher education. 3. In my preservice teacher education there was much useful information about learning disabilities.
Suvi	Um … yes, I think I couldn't work … I think this work is very demanding, like I think I like … if you would be the perfect person for this job, you would have, like, a special education degree, and doctor's degree, and psychology you would know, and … and nurses … so then everything … so… but it's … obviously it's not possible, but… yes … and … like especially when you have to set long-term goals for the students, you need this education … if you would just …like pass one day and then a next day … it's easier in a way but you have to think of their lives as a bigger picture, so … but that means … education … and … yes … but on the other hand … and if I … if I think of this education what I had in Jyväskylä, I think especially the … when you are going to see other places, observing … other people's teaching … that is very important, and I think … that could be even more … even though it's quite a lot now, but could be even more like … when you start the profession … then you don't have the opportunity to go in other people's classroom in the same way and look what's happening there.	1. Preservice teacher education benefited my work. 2. This work is very demanding. 3. If you want to be a 'perfect' SEN teacher, you must know almost everything. 4. Setting long-term goals for students and thinking of students' lives from a broader view require this pre-service teacher education. 5. It would be better to include more observation in the preservice teacher education programme because it is very important and cannot be done after starting to work.

4.4.2 Data Coding

The data coding phase involved becoming re-familiar with the data and generating codes. After the transcripts were re-organised (based on the interview questions) and broken down into more manageable remarks, I re-read through the original words uttered by the teachers and the marginal remarks I had made in order to confirm the consistency between these two accounts. As mentioned previously, by nature, qualitative data analysis is a not a linear but an iterative process that requires the researcher to move back and forth between analysis phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Hence, engaging myself actively with the data was a continuous practice even during this stage.

At the same time, when I was re-immersed in the transcripts and the remarks, I began to generate some initial codes that identified the features of the data. Initial codes indicate "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998: 63). In other words, in this phase the data were being organised into meaningful categories. The coding was done both deductively and inductively. On one hand, I did not approach the data collection and analysis without prior knowledge of existing research insights, so the interview questions provided a certain framework. In this sense, to some extent, the data were analysed deductively, as I could not free myself from coding in an "epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). On the other hand, although the 59 interview questions and themes were predetermined to set the tone for the interviews and to ensure the same significant information was obtained from each teacher within the limited time available, some issues that emerged during the conversations resulted directly from the teachers' sharing rather than from my own preconceptions. Therefore, to a certain degree, the analysis was data-driven, that is, induction-oriented.

Another decision I made in terms of coding was that the data were analysed on a semantic (explicit) level, not on a latent (interpretative) one (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), with a semantic approach, the analysis focus is placed on the explicit or surface meanings of the data, not anything beyond what an interviewee has said. In this qualitative inquiry, the interviews were carried out in English due to my limited command of the Finnish language. As English was not the mother tongue of the teachers interviewed, their responses were straightforward without many implications that required reading between the lines. Under such circumstances, examining the underlying notions or ideologies behind the teachers' words was never my focal concern in this coding phase.

The transcripts were coded by me via the ATLAS.ti version 7 for Windows. This computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package was used to help manage the codes and facilitate easier retrieval of the data needed for subsequent identification of patterns or themes. Table 8 shows the development of the data analysis that took place during this phase. Based on the

marginal remarks made in the stage of data familiarising, the initial codes were generated correspondingly.

TABLE 8   Marginal remarks with initial codes

Teacher	Marginal Remarks	Initial Codes
Jonna	1. Preservice teacher education to some extent didn't benefit my later work. Nowadays more students have psychological problems, and I need more information about that field. 2. Psychological problems should be more emphasised in preservice teacher education. 3. In my preservice teacher education there was much useful information about learning disabilities.	Not beneficial Teacher education Psychological/mental/behavioural/emotional problems SEN expertise SEN work Suggestions Learning difficulties Useful
Suvi	1. Preservice teacher education benefited my later work. 2. This work is very demanding. 3. If you want to be a 'perfect' SEN teacher, you must know almost everything. 4. Setting long-term goals for students and thinking of students' lives from a broader view require this preservice teacher education. 5. It would be better to include more observation in the preservice teacher education programme because it is very important and cannot be done after starting to work.	Beneficial Teacher education Demanding SEN expertise SEN work More comprehensive Long-term goal setting Observation Suggestions

4.4.3   Data Thematising

The data thematising phase involved becoming re-familiar with the data, refining codes and identifying patterns/themes. After the initial codes were generated, I re-read the transcripts again along with my marginal remarks and the codes I had assigned to the text concurrently to make sure that the codes adequately and faithfully embodied the teachers' original accounts. If necessary, the codes were refined to more accurately represent the teachers' ideas, which was followed by (re)sorting different codes to identify patterns and grouping them into potential themes. The term *pattern* here, according to DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) and Patton (2015), indicates a smaller unit of a recurrent descriptive finding, whereas *theme* refers to a larger unit of a more topical form conveying the shared meaning of the pattern.

Although CAQDAS facilitated the coding, retrieval and comparison of the data, I was the primary *agent* to conduct the analysis. Considering how different codes might combine to reveal a pattern and form a meaningful theme was, de facto, very time-consuming, as it required, for example, several cycles of the recursive process of cutting, pasting and categorising different codes with passages. I also used tables or figures to visualise the relationships between the codes to make the patterns more easily identifiable. Once some patterns were spotted, I tried to develop the patterns into a candidate theme. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest

that the keyness of a theme relies on whether it reveals the significant concept overarching the phenomena under exploration. Bearing this in mind, as previously noted, I conducted the analysis both deductively and inductively. Some themes, therefore, to a certain extent, were determined by the kinds of research and interview questions asked initially, while other themes were identified directly from the teachers' sharing.

The candidate themes were gradually refined and adjusted by my repeatedly reviewing the data. The process of data thematising can be compared to putting together a *puzzle* of a picture with which I am familiar, and at the same time, is also like putting together a *tangram* that takes a new, unfamiliar shape after I have collected and examined the parts. By the end of this stage, I had identified 14 main themes. Table 9 briefly showcases an example of the relationships among codes, patterns and an overarching theme. During the interviews, the teachers expressed their ideas about the preservice teacher education they received/are receiving in terms of what benefitted them, what they found insufficient, and what they suggested to improve the quality of preservice teacher education. The codes were grouped into three patterns: beneficial, not beneficial, and suggestions. In this instance, these three patterns all shared an overarching theme: the reflection on preservice teacher education.

TABLE 9   Example of relationship among codes, patterns and an overarching theme

The Reflection on Preservice Teacher Education			
	Beneficial	**Not Beneficial**	**Suggestions**
Niina	Beneficial Knowledge of special challenge Knowledge of learning Knowledge of different methods SEN attitude Diverse teaching practice institutions Mentorship The importance of social interactions		Suggestions Mentorship
Jonna	BeneficialLearning difficulties	Not beneficial Psychological/mental/behavioural/emotional problems	Suggestions Psychological/mental/behavioural/emotional problems
Hilla	BeneficialQualification/certificate		
Päivi	BeneficialLearning difficulties Pedagogy		Suggestions Diagnosis
Suvi	BeneficialLong-term goal setting More comprehensive	Not beneficial Severe disability	Suggestions Observation

TABLE 9   (continues) Example of relationship among codes, patterns and an overarching theme

The Reflection on Preservice Teacher Education		
Beneficial	**Not Beneficial**	**Suggestions**
Sofia			Suggestions Educational policy National curriculum
Tuulia Beneficial		
Linda Beneficial		
Laura			Suggestions Lack of time
Katri BeneficialLearning difficulties	Not beneficial Life skills Psychological/mental/behavioural/emotional problems	Suggestions Life skills
Anna BeneficialTheory/practice		Suggestions Psychological/mental/behavioural/emotional problems

4.4.4   Data Reporting

The last phase of data analysis was data reporting, beginning with reviewing the relationships among codes, patterns and themes, finalising the themes and then reporting the findings. While continuing to re-examine the data and the identified themes simultaneously, I further refined the themes and conceptualised the ideas embedded within them; that is, I determined and confirmed which aspects of the data each theme captured. The themes were then visualised to better illustrate their reconstructed meanings. The name of each theme, as shown in the following chapters documenting the research findings, was given in a distilled manner so that the 'kernel' of the theme could be immediately recognised.

As described in the data collection section, the total duration of the interviews with all 11 SEN teachers equalled about 35 hours, resulting in 489 pages (200,164 words) of transcripts. This corresponded with one of the features of qualitative inquiry observed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (2015). They argued that qualitative inquiry is characterised by its rich, holistic and detailed descriptions to reveal the complexity of the phenomena under study, which implies not only the researcher's personal interpretation (i.e., storytelling) of and the direct quotations from the data but also the instrumental purpose to manifest the multilayer of the collected and analysed data. Because academic reports should be written with the target audience in mind, (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012), the process of reporting the findings primarily comprised two orientations: conference abstract and doctoral dissertation.

In terms of the conference abstract, the research findings were submitted to and presented at four international conferences: The Inaugural Conference on Human Development in Asia (COHDA) (2014), the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) (2014), the Annual Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) Conference (2016) and the Biennial International Study Association on Teachers and Teaching (ISATT) Conference (2017). The conference abstracts capsulised some preliminary themes identified from the data. Due to the limited space in the abstract submission format, the research information included in the abstracts was rather condensed. Nevertheless, through the comments of the conference abstract reviewers and the conversations with the audiences during the presentations, the themes were refined, and the findings were confirmed as sufficiently significant to raise the level of public discussion.

Compared to the writing for the conference abstracts, the writing for the dissertation was more *reflective*. As Braun and Clarke (2006) maintained, "Writing is an integral part of analysis". Formally, the writing must comply with the schematic and constraining structure requirement of the University of Jyväskylä. Intrinsically, throughout the writing process, I had to move back and forth between different sections of the manuscript over and over again in order to ensure and maintain the coherence of this qualitative inquiry and to vividly portray the dramatic landscape of SEN teachers' work lives and professional learning. For example, Chapter 6 (The Work Lives of Finnish Special Educational Needs Teachers) was, at first, drafted as part of Chapter 5 (The Career Choices of Finnish Special Educational Needs Teachers). With the progress of data (re)analysis, more themes were unanticipatedly identified regarding SEN teachers' work lives. At that point, I recognised the need to restructure the research findings chapters, so the findings about SEN teachers' work lives were removed from Chapter 5 and, instead, presented as an independent chapter. The same level of introspection is also reflected in the chapter names, headings, subheadings, figures and tables, as well as in the selection of quoted text to include. As noted by Roulston (2014), any interpretation represents only part of a phenomenon. During the dissertation writing journey, I had to keep asking myself various questions: Is this exactly what the teacher tried to express? Do these quotations deliver the messages consistent with my interpretations? Does this figure appropriately capture the main ideas of this section? Does the name of this figure clearly convey the key ideas embedded within the data? Can the flow of the writing/manuscript provide a complex yet clear picture of SEN teachers' work lives and professional learning? Is the statement understandable and readable? Can this writing tone create a feeling of immediacy so that the readers are intrigued to keep reading? This continual reflective analysis practice was adopted from the very beginning of the writing through to the finalisation of this manuscript.

4.5   Research Trustworthiness

The terms *validity* and *reliability* seem relatively inappropriate when used in reference to qualitative inquiry because they are not addressed and understood in the same way as they are for quantitative research, that is, through a positivist paradigm (Cohen et al., 2007; Metsämuuronen, 2017). Instead of using the terms validity and reliability, *trustworthiness* is preferred by some qualitative researchers (Anney, 2015; Elo et al., 2014; Guba, 1981; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1982, 1985; Metsämuuronen, 2017; Rolfe, 2006; Shenton, 2004) to better convey the idea of research rigour. In other words, a high degree of trustworthiness supports the argument that the findings are trusted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The most widely accepted criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry are those developed by Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). They proposed the following four constructs (and corresponding measures) by which the trustworthiness of qualitative research can be assessed: *credibility* (equivalent to internal validity), *transferability* (equivalent to external validity/generalisability), *dependability* (equivalent to reliability) and *confirmability* (equivalent to objectivity). More specifically, credibility refers to the plausibility of information that was drawn from the data and is represented in the findings, that is, how well the findings match the reality/the participants' original views. Credibility can be promoted by, for example, prolonged engagement in the field, peer debriefing, triangulation and member checking. Transferability indicates the degree to which the findings can be transferred to other settings. Although generalisation is not a major concern of the qualitative inquiry because the phenomena are always context-relevant (Guba, 1981), through thick description and purposive sampling, readers can make their own judgement as to whether the research process and the findings are applicable to their specific situations (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability refers to the extent to which data remains stable over time. It can be achieved through, for instance, triangulation, stepwise replication, an audit trail and peer examination. Confirmability concerns the aspect of objectivity. In other words, it refers to the degree to which the findings of an inquiry can be corroborated by other researchers pertaining to the data's accuracy, relevance or interpretations. A few strategies can be employed to help ensure confirmability, such as triangulation, an audit trail and reflective practice.

In this study trustworthiness was first established by means of *peer debriefing*. Peer debriefing, according to Guba (1981), is a process during which inquirers check their developing insights and expose themselves to searching questions by interacting with other professionals who are qualified to play the role of scrutiniser. Throughout the inquiry journey, constant and continuous supervision was provided by my supervisor and three additional experienced researchers on the follow-up team. From the very beginning of the research design until the findings were reported, my 'peers' closely examined the research context framing,

research participant recruitment, data collection process, data management, transcripts, data analysis procedure and research findings. They made critical comments to improve the quality of the research implementation and the data interpretations. Moreover, I also received feedback from other researchers and doctorate candidates at the national and international seminars/conferences. Their feedback not only confirmed the credibility and transferability of this study but also enhanced the inquiry quality.

Secondly, the trustworthiness of this research was examined through *purposive sampling*. In qualitative research the sampling approach is not employed for the purpose of generalisation but for the methodology adopted and the topic under investigation (Higgingottom, 2004). In other words, the sample, that is, the research participants, are purposefully selected to best represent and maximise the scope of information explored (Guba, 1981). In this research, the 11 teachers were chosen because their various professional backgrounds and diverse work experiences could best help me answer the research questions and provide more in-depth findings. Each of the teachers interviewed was highly knowledgeable of the issues under study. Demographically, their ages ranged from 32 to 58; their work experiences as SEN teachers ranged from 1 to 19 years, as regular teachers from 0 to 20 years, and in non-educational industries from 0 to 18 years (Table 6). Geographically, among these 11 teachers, two worked in eastern Finland, two in western Finland, two in central Finland, three in northern Finland, and two in Southern Finland (including the Helsinki metropolis). In terms of education background, 7 of the 11 teachers did not study educational sciences as a major for their tertiary education. Instead, they studied, for example, economics, social sciences, hospitality management, business administration, information technology and fashion design. Although the other four teachers' initial training background was education, none of them majored in SNE: two of them studied to be kindergarten teachers, two to be class teachers. The composition diversity of research participants not only helped approach data saturation but also allowed a certain degree of transferability.

The third criteria to examine the trustworthiness of this study is *negative case demonstration*. A negative case arises when the data emerging from the inquiry contradicts the researcher's expectations or the general view of the theme (Creswell, 2014). Reporting negative cases improves the credibility of the study because life reality comprises various perspectives that do not always fuse. For example, in the research finding sections that follow this chapter, the discrepant information concerning school leadership and gender equality of employability is presented. Teachers in Finland are generally considered as highly autonomous (Crouch, 2015; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017, 2018; Paronen & Lappi, 2018), and, as one of the most gender-equal countries around the world (World Economic Forum, 2020), gender inequality in Finland has been earnestly eliminated by the Finnish government (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2018). However, when I collected the interview data, I was greatly surprised to hear that some teachers were still suffering from a lack of administrative support or from unemployability due to their gender (female) and status as a

mother of a young child. By demonstrating the contradictory evidence that emerged from the data, a more all-around landscape of SEN teachers' work lives was illustrated, the account of the findings was enriched and the plausibility of the study was promoted.

The fourth measure to review the trustworthiness of the research is *an audit trail*, which deals with research dependability (Guba, 1981). An audit trail is a detailed presentation of the inquiry process to validate the data. The procedures detailing how the data were gathered, recorded, analysed and interpreted are depicted and the documents, such as interview audio files and raw transcripts, are kept so that readers can gain an exhaustive understanding of the methods and their effectiveness (Creswell, 2014; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1982; Shenton, 2004). In the previous sections on data collection and analysis procedures, for example, the connection between the research questions and the data collection method, the operational details of data gathering, the accuracy of transcriptions, the coding strategies and the thematisation of the data were truthfully explained and portrayed. Thus, the overall validity of this qualitative inquiry was enhanced.

Lastly, the trustworthiness of this qualitative inquiry is facilitated by *thick description*. A thick description, on one hand, improves the confirmability of the findings. It ensures that the research findings faithfully represent the research participants' input, rather than the imagination of the researcher. On the other hand, such a description allows readers to immerse themselves in the settings under investigation so that shared experiences can be created and discussed (Creswell, 2014; Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). In Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, the participating teachers' voices are veraciously conveyed and evidenced by the provision of extensive excerpts. Similarities and differences in perspectives about a certain theme between the teachers are exhibited through the rich and nuanced description in these chapters. In such a manner, confirmability was added to this research.

4.6   Ethical Considerations

The data gathered through this study were collected by means of semi-structured conversational interviews in which the teachers were encouraged to fully and openly express their views, opinions and feelings. Through the interviews, I was able to access the teachers' mental worlds, that is, some very personal experiences. According to Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller (2002) and Patton (2015), such human interactions during interviews imply the complexities of looking into interviewees' private lives, evoking their feelings and thoughts and revealing their experiences in public. In other words, ethical issues in interviews arise because not only do the human interactions during the interview influence interviewees but also the knowledge acquired during the interview affects our ways of thinking pertaining to humans' lived worlds (Kvale, 2007). Since this inquiry explored

in depth the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers in Finnish inclusive IVET schools, sensitive information of a highly personal nature was gathered during the interviews. Moreover, the publication of this research as a promise fulfilment to the teachers to make their work realities visible can probably reorient or bring something new to the public discussion and influence policy-making and teacher education communities. Therefore, ethical considerations needed to be seriously considered throughout the inquiry.

4.6.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent refers to informing the research participants of the purpose of the inquiry, why they were chosen, how their information will be collected and used and what risks and benefits their participation might entail (Kvale, 2007; Newby, 2010). It is more than a signature on a written form; instead, the participants must be certain about why, what, when and how they are involved in a research project, based on which their voluntary participation can be confirmed.

There was a five-level informed consent obtained in this research. Firstly, in the preliminary phase of research participant recruitment, as mentioned previously, potential participants were reached via phone calls or emails by the Faculty of Eeducation and Psychology (University of Jyväskylä) and the Vocational Teacher Education School (JAMK University of Applied Sciences) to inquire whether they were interested in participating in a research project concerning their work lives and professional learning. At this stage, the research purpose and data collection method were briefly introduced so that those who asked could get a general picture of the research and decide if they wanted to take part. Once they expressed their preliminary willingness to participate, they gave their first consent to allow me to approach them personally with more detailed information concerning the research project.

According to the purpose of the research, by the end of the research participant recruitment process, 11 teachers were selected for the interviews. I contacted the 11 teachers personally by email, formally introducing myself as a PhD student at the University of Jyväskylä exploring SEN teachers' work lives and professional learning; I also attached the information sheet (Appendix 1) to provide a clearer description of my research. More specifically, each information sheet covered the research details, such as why this inquiry was necessary, how the participants were chosen, what kinds of questions would be asked in the interviews, what risks and benefits participation might entail, how the research findings would be presented and in what ways they could exercise their individual autonomy throughout the inquiry. The information sheet was edited in a concise and transparent form using straightforward, understandable and plain language. After reading through the information sheet, the 11 teachers again confirmed their willingness to participate. This was the second level of informed consent during which the teachers were well-informed about what participation entailed and were reassured that declining would not affect them in any way.

The third level of informed consent was that the teachers' voluntary participation was formally documented on a written form. Once I received the second

confirmation of willingness to participate from each teacher, I asked for her contact address in order to deliver the consent form (Appendix 2) and the interview guidelines (Appendix 3) by post prior to the interview(s). The interview guidelines consisted of all the interview questions phrased both in English and Finnish to ensure that the teachers could gain a better understanding of what would be asked in the interview(s) and have enough time, in advance of the interview(s), to ponder over their answers. At this stage, the participating teachers were already adequately informed on the nature of the research, which was confirmed by their signing the consent forms before the interview(s).

The fourth level of informed consent was acquired prior to the commencement of each interview. When I met the teacher via Skype or in person, again, I briefly introduced myself and the research and then encouraged the teacher to ask any questions she had in mind and reassured her of both the freedom to withdraw her consent and to terminate her participation in the research at any time, as well as the confidentiality of the data use. Although the voluntary participation of each teacher was already confirmed in a written agreement at the previous level, the consent information was still given orally in advance of my collecting the teacher's background information and asking the questions so that the teacher was reminded of the relevant ethical issues of this study and aware of her rights.

After the interviews, the collected data were transcribed verbatim. Before analysing the data, I sent the transcripts, together with the interview audio files, to the participating teachers to check the accuracy of the transcriptions. As the research purpose was to truthfully disclose what SEN teachers faced in their work lives and professional learning in today's Finnish inclusive IVET context, it was important to ensure that the transcribed text was loyal to the teachers' oral accounts. Accordingly, as the final level of informed consent, the teachers were given the opportunity to re-examine their statements, reconfirm their opinions, reclarify their thoughts and, once more, grant their consent for the data analysis.

4.6.2   Confidentiality

Another major ethical consideration in this inquiry is confidentiality. Confidentiality entails agreement with research participants about how the personal data may be dealt with to prevent the participants from being identifiable (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). As stated in the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016/679 (European Commission, 2016), personal data means "any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person". In other words, personal opinions, attitudes, values, perspectives and any information in relation to an individual's private or professional lives are included and considered personal data. As indicated previously, through the interviews, I was given access to the teachers' inner worlds, that is, some very personal experiences. With trust, the teachers openly disclosed to me what was in their minds regarding various aspects of their work lives and professional learning, which inevitably made either themselves or their workplaces visible in the transcripts. Thus, to respect and protect the teachers' privacy, in this research the confidentiality was secured in a

twofold manner: anonymisation and data storage security. These two procedures of maintaining confidentiality ensured that the teachers could safely share their experiences without the fear of being further examined personally in any way after the findings were published.

Anonymisation

Anonymisation refers to the removal of direct and strong indirect identifiers from the data (Finnish Social Science Data Archive, 2018). During the process of transcription, the data files were first named with codes to protect the participants' anonymity. In the phase of reporting the findings, whether as part of this dissertation or for conference presentations, the teachers' names and workplaces were all removed and represented by aliases to prevent the teachers and the institutions from being recognised. The pseudonyms used were chosen randomly and did not bear any specific meanings associated with the teachers.

Data Storage Security

Confidentiality also involves ensuring restricted access to the data. The data collected were not only maintained digitally in the computer and the cloud with encrypted passwords but also physically stored in a locked filing cabinet to avoid access by any unauthorised parties. The personal information of the teachers and the transcripts were available only to me and another two professionals who helped check the accuracy of the transcriptions and verify the quality of the data analysis.

5   CAREER CHOICES OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS TEACHERS

This chapter focuses on the SEN teacher career choice. A variety of aspects related to choosing a career in the teaching profession, securing an occupation as a SEN teacher, and deciding to work in inclusive vocational schools are explored. This chapter presents the findings in response to research question 1: "Why do people choose to work as SEN teachers in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?"

In the beginning of my interview guidelines, two general questions were formulated to investigate the teachers' reasons for and journeys of becoming SEN teachers in inclusive vocational schools. To further capture the subjective meaning of the career choice to each SEN teacher, in the research interviews, I tried to narrow down this general question into three more specific inquiries:

1. Why did you want to be a teacher?
2. Why did you want to be a SEN teacher?
3. Why did you want to be a SEN teacher in an inclusive vocational school?

The following three sections, 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3, will therefore illustrate the variations in the possible paths for the research participants to becoming SEN teachers in inclusive IVET.

5.1   Reasons to Become a Teacher

The reasons for becoming a teacher varied, but a common motive, that is, the *personal factor*, amongst the interviewees was the interest in working with young people, as one teacher put it: "I like to work with young people" (Laura). This notion was echoed by another teacher, Jonna, who had worked as a SEN teacher for 10 years, and her personal family experience influenced her career choice. The family atmosphere instilled in Jonna an aspiration for a future career in which she could be with youngsters. Although she did not plan at first to work with

older children, she reconsidered her career choice because of the preservice SEN teacher programme:

> I have always … stay with children, so I have … there have been a lot of children in my family, and … so it's natural for me, so … I don't know I just teacher … at first, I started kindergarten teacher ... because I wanted to work with … the small kids. […] When I applied special education teacher … I still hope that I want to work with … with younger people … younger children. … But … going education … I … decide I want to work with … with teenagers. (Jonna)

Furthermore, a strong sense of social responsibility as another *personal factor* was also one of the reasons that drove the interviewees to pursue a career pathway working with young people. For example, Katri previously worked in the art industry at the beginning of her career, but she craved to be an educational practitioner because of her "strong social conscience" and seeing herself as a 'transmitter of knowledge':

> I have a very strong … very strongly developed social conscience … as a person … so that … that's why I think I like to be a teacher, that's my … my ambition, and … and I like students … I felt I have something to give in … in many ways for students and young people. (Katri)

However, the path to becoming a teacher for some was undeniably and inevitably affected by the national economic depression in 1990s, that is, the *contextual factor*. In Katri's case, transferability of skills and employability seemed to be the determinant factors for her to recarve and reorientate her approach to utilising her artistic expertise:

> I … my first profession is … an [artist] … I used to work as [an artist] in Finland, but in early 90s, all … we had a big financial problem in Finland. And all [manufacturing] factory … went to China or Taiwan, or … or wherever, and … and I … I have to decide whether to move abroad … I had to decide or find something else, and … after that, I started … started teaching arts and craft … and that's how it started. …Also, I used … as I said, I graduated to be as a … as a horse-riding [couch], so I had been teaching a sports … like horse-riding for many years before, so … so … getting qualification in … in teaching was quite natural, I like to teach … I like doing it … I like it … [That's why] I have to think … how to develop my profession … in what direction, and teaching was the very natural way. (Katri)

Understanding what motivated people to choose the teaching profession is essential to the knowledge of teachers' career choice. In this research, a shared interest in young people could be found among the interviewees in their career choice process. Figure 3 outlines the teachers' reasons for choosing the teaching profession as a career.
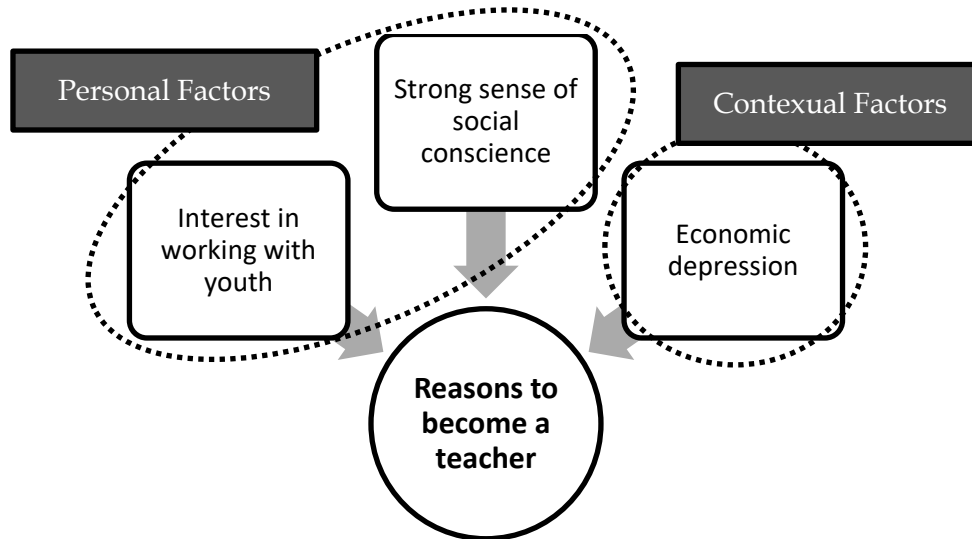
FIGURE 3   Reasons to become a teacher

5.2   Reasons to Become a SEN Teacher

Compared to other teaching professions, the SEN teaching profession is usually considered more demanding and challenging because of the great diversity of students. That is why, after asking their reasons for becoming a teacher, I was eager to know the 11 Finnish teachers' reasons for choosing to become SEN teachers to further my understanding of their career choices.

5.2.1   Personal Factors

A number of reasons for choosing the SEN teaching profession were identified through the interviews. Even though the story of becoming a SEN teacher differed from one teacher to another, none of the interviewees embarked on this career path without involving any personal interest in this field. For example, both Laura and Katri, whose educational backgrounds were information technology (IT) and arts, respectively, were interested in SNE simply because they realised that being a SEN teacher was a much better fit for their altruistic personality. In other words, they had a great passion for helping students who have difficulties:

> I [have] been interested in special education, and … and as I said, there is a need for SEN teacher in our college … so this is the main reason. … I volunteer [for this] and it's my own interests. … maybe it's in my … nature to help students with problems somehow. (Laura)

Especially in Katri's case, after working as a vocational teacher for years, her decision to acquire a SEN teacher qualification was driven by her strong motivation to help students with learning problems in a more professional way. Especially as many of her colleagues tended to 'give up' on those particular students:

> I used to be a teacher in … in vocational education, I … I thought … many students have problems with their studies, and … that's why I got interested because … I have to think what to do to get them finish their studies … how to help them … I really want to help those students … many teachers thought that those students don't need any help, and they can just go and find something else, but I didn't agree, so … so I wanted to have the education and knowledge in education to help those students, I feel it's very important for every … every one of us to have a training and a good life. (Katri)

In addition to a tendency in benevolence, interest in the field of learning difficulties was also one of the determinants that affected the teachers' decisions to become SEN teachers. In the field of SNE, Linda mentioned that she chose the SEN teaching profession out of her curiosity about what prevents students from learning well. Throughout both her personal life and teaching career, the experiences of dealing with those who had difficulties in learning inevitably created within her an inner hunger to better understand this special phenomenon. Therefore, studying SNE to become a SEN teacher seemed like the most logical way to quench her thirst for knowledge on this specific field:

> I have always been interested about how pupils or how … how … could they learn, and what are those things that … that makes that … she can't learn something. (Linda)

The fundamental nature of SNE's focus on individuality also echoes the teachers' personal values. That is why Sofia, after nearly 20 years working in a noneducational industry and two years in a teaching career as a vocational subject teacher, was resolute and determined to reorientate her career towards a path of becoming a SEN teacher:

> This work is kind of the 'human work'; that's the way I see it. I work with people, I don't work with the … the issues so much, you know what I mean? Like the subject, it's more like … um … it's more like a teaching them how to … how to deal with their own lives as well, not just the home economics … what I teach … it's kind of like … 'kokonaisvaltaisempaa'[more comprehensive] … 'the whole picture of life' kind of. (Sofia)

The wide diversity of students with SEN requires greater patience and poses various challenges for the SEN teachers. However, interestingly, this is exactly why SEN teaching fascinates Anna, the eldest teacher among the research participants who had been working as a SEN teacher for more than a decade. She said that she enjoys the challenges of work, and that she always learns something whilst teaching. Anna truly values and respects the diversity of students with SEN. As a result, how to assist each student in an individualised way is, to her, not only a challenge but also a joyful and rewarding learning process:

> I have to find the way [to teach], and I hope to [help them] find the pleasure [of] how to learn … when they learn something, I hope they enjoy it … it's a challenge for me … and that's what I like … but sometimes I learn when I teach something. (Anna)

5.2.2 Work-Related Factors

Given that, in SNE practice, teachers must provide more individualised (and sometimes more intensive) support in response to students' diverse needs, this

foreseeably creates a closer pedagogical and emotional bond between teachers and students. As Suvi described, it is good, as a SEN teacher, to have more time for each student so that she can "teach them well enough [because] there is a smaller group [of students]". The smaller the size of the study group of students, the more time a teacher can dedicate to each student, and the closer the teacher-student relationship can become. This closer teacher-student relationship is one of the rewarding aspects of the SEN teaching profession, and it encourages these SEN teachers to remain in the profession (see further discussion in Chapter 8). This explains why Jonna, after her one-and-half-year career as a class teacher, decided to shift her professional path from basic education to SNE because she would like to "work more closely [with students] than class teachers".

5.2.3   Contextual Factor

Intriguingly, nearly half of the teachers expressed during the interviews that they became SEN teachers "by chance", even though there were also intrinsic factors which motivated them to pursue their SEN teaching career. For instance, Hilla and Anna both changed their work from other professions to SEN teaching by unexpectedly getting a job that required them to work with students with SEN:

> [Being a SEN teacher] was … by chance. … I got a job in a project first … And then, I got somehow permanent job … and everything was … also … special education things … and that's why I became [a SEN teacher] by chance. I didn't choose [to be a SEN teacher] myself, but … like this I became very interested. (Hilla)

> If I … honest … it was an accident, it just happened … I was asked to be a special teacher [in] one school … so I took the job, and after that, I've always been a special [educational needs] teacher. (Anna)

Also, as Sofia said, "the practice came first, and then the education". At first, the teachers did not have the corresponding SEN expertise when they were assigned SEN teaching tasks. However, because of the work requirements and their personal interests in SEN, they kept improving their professional knowledge and skills either by learning while working or through various in-service teacher training programmes.

In contrast with the aforementioned teachers who received the opportunities their life gave them, Suvi carved out her SEN teaching career by creating her own opportunity. According to her understanding, the demand for qualified SEN teachers was greater than the supply, which implies higher employability in the future through studying to be a SEN teacher. In the end, she did get a job quite quickly with her SEN teacher qualification:

> I felt like there would be also better … work … like … there would be more available work, better chances to get work for those kind of [SEN] teachers … So I went to education, and I quite quickly got my job [afterwards]. (Suvi)

Summary: To conclude, at least three major reasons have emerged from the data, as illustrated in Figure 4, that explain why the interviewees chose to be SEN

teachers: (1) personal factors, including an altruistic personality, curiosity about learning difficulties, and resonance with SNE values; (2) the characteristics of SEN teachers' work, which means a closer teacher-student relationship; and (3) contextual factors, which means fortuity and higher employability.
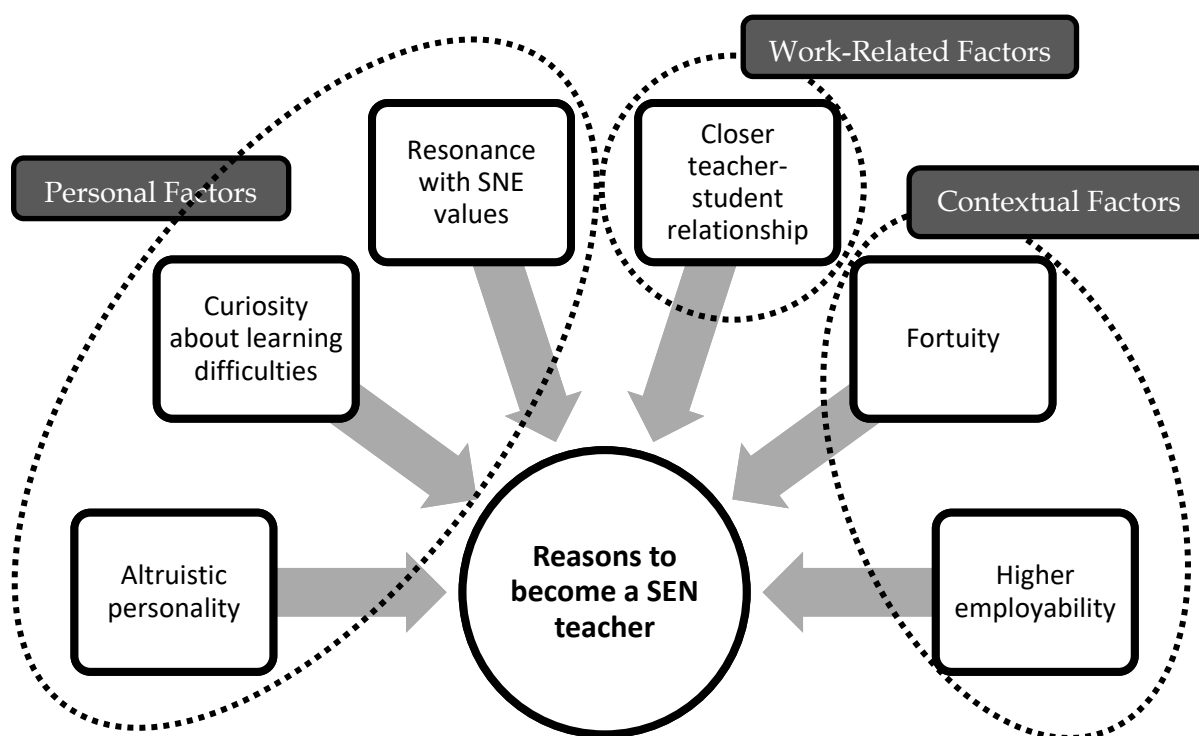
FIGURE 4   Reasons to become a SEN teacher

5.3   Reasons to Work in Inclusive Vocational Schools

In this study, over half of the interviewees have vocational professional backgrounds, such as hospitality management, IT, arts, and so on. This can partly explain why IVET was the arena they ended up dedicating their expertise and passion to. Still, instead of working in special vocational schools that have VET programmes, why did these teachers choose to pursue their teaching careers within inclusive vocational schools? Although in the interviews, the teachers did not fully convey their ideas pertaining to the different workplace nature between inclusive vocational and special vocational schools, some specific patterns were found to underpin their reasons for working in inclusive educational settings.

Take Niina as an example. Before she worked in the inclusive vocational school, she was a SEN teacher in a comprehensive school (*peruskoulu*). During the period she worked with lower-secondary-level students with SEN, many of her students chose VET to continue their upper-secondary studies. This phenomenon caught Niina's attention; she was very curious as to whether she had given those students the right advice about choosing IVET and how well they managed their

later studies in IVET. In Niina's view, employment plays a significant role in young people's lives. Hence, how IVET educates and trains students with SEN to better transition from school to the labour market was also an interesting area for her to explore:

> I sent very often my pupils to vocation education, and I wanted to know more about vocational education. … I wanted to know … know how they (students with SEN) manage? Had I succeeded my … I thought I want to know more about vocational education. […] It's very important to the young people in lives that they be employed, and also the employment and … also the employment is part of 'good life', and that's why vocational education was very interesting, and also the most … most … of special needs pupils they went to vocational education because … not the high school, because perhaps they had some academic difficulties, and they didn't want to have both academic studies, they went to … the most of the special need students they went to vocational education. (Niina)

In addition to personal curiosity about IVET, the challenging nature of working in IVET is another reason the teachers chose inclusive vocational schools as their workplaces:

> I choose to be a SEN teacher in VET because it's interesting, challenging and well-paid. (Tuulia)

The challenges of SEN teachers' work in IVET, according to Anna, results from the complexity of IVET. The SEN teaching profession within the IVET context is much more than tackling students' learning problems, which makes it quite different from the work of SEN teachers in comprehensive schools:

> The jobs [in VET] are so different, I have to know more about the jobs [than] that I did before, because I … my first … the earlier job [in comprehensive school] was more than … to teach children how to learn to read, or how to learn to write, and I have also speech teaching. (Anna)

Even though "the teaching [principle] itself is not so different from primary school", SEN teaching work in IVET brought a lot of new challenges to Anna. For example, as a comprehensive/general/academic (*laaja-alainen*) SEN teacher working in an inclusive vocational school, she taught various general subjects, such as chemistry, physics, mathematics, and languages. However, she did not always feel confident that she could teach all the subjects so well. Furthermore, each student with SEN in her group had his or her own learning style. Figuring out how to (re)organise learning materials or a lesson through which students with SEN could better acquire the knowledge and skills of a certain subject also became a challenge in Anna's work:

> I have to learn [the materials] myself before I can teach … that's my challenge. […] [Besides,] I have to find the way how the … how … special students … how they can learn. […] When they learn something, I hope they enjoy it. … That's why I like [about working as a SEN teacher in VET]. (Anna)

Nevertheless, encouragingly, the process of preparing herself for a lesson brought to Anna not merely the challenges but also the joy of work. That is why

she would like to shift her teaching career from comprehensive school to inclusive vocational school.

Lastly, it is interesting to point out that 'contextual factors' also accounted for the teachers' choices to work in inclusive vocational schools as they embarked on SEN teaching careers. Roughly half of the teachers, including Jonna, Hilla, Linda, Katri, and Anna, mentioned that they worked in inclusive vocational schools "by chance". As Anna said, "It was an accident; it just happened." In a sense, working as a SEN teacher in an inclusive vocational school was probably never drawn up in their career plans. Similarly, Hilla got her SEN teaching position in an inclusive school simply because she was recruited to work for a project that subsequently led her to this career for life:

> I got a job in a project first … at first. And then, I got somehow permanent job [in an inclusive vocational school] … I didn't choose it myself. (Hilla)

Additionally, Jonna worked as a SEN teacher in inclusive vocational schools simply because those SEN teaching positions were all she could get then when she was pursing her career:

> This is really small city, and I want to stay here, so there were not many … not many choices, it was one special class with handicapped children or mental [challenged] children, and … yeah, that's why [I worked in an inclusive vocational school]. (Jonna)

As for Katri, her reason for working in an inclusive vocational school was exactly the same as why she decided to become a teacher. Due to the economic depression, she made a decision to reorientate her career from private industry to a public educational setting. She secured a teaching position in an inclusive vocational school and began her career in IVET (see 5.1).

Summary: This section revealed three underlying reasons for the teachers' choosing to work in inclusive educational settings: (1) personal factors, indicating personal curiosity about IVET settings; (2) work-related actors, referring to the challenging and complex nature of the work in IVET; and (3) contextual factors, that is, fortuity and economic reality. Figure 5 illustrates these three reasons emerging from the data.
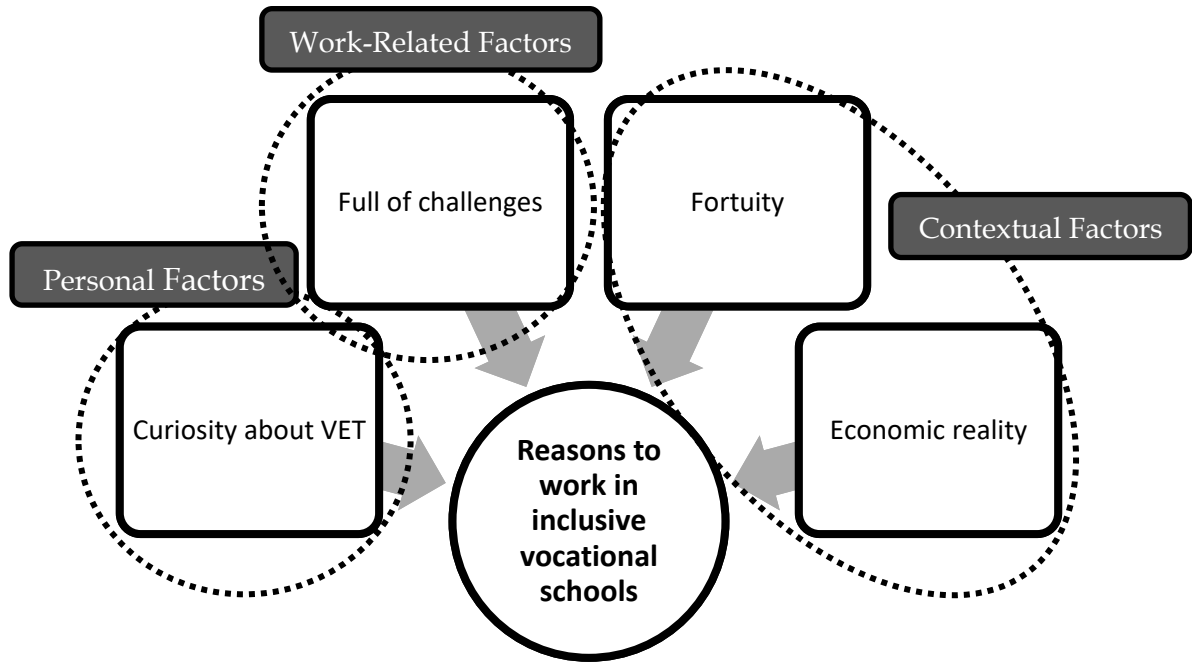
FIGURE 5   Reasons to work in inclusive vocational schools

6   WORK LIVES OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS TEACHERS

In this chapter, I attempt to portray the current situation of SEN teachers' work lives in response to research question 2: "How do SEN teachers perceive their work in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?" The findings are presented in the following three sections: 6.1 "SEN Teachers' Work", 6.2 "SEN Teachers' Ups and Downs", and 6.3 "Mind the Gap: Preservice Teacher Education and Work Reality". Regarding SEN teachers' work, the essential characteristics of the SEN teaching profession are set out in the first section, which is followed by the section on SEN teachers' ups and downs, that is, the emotional aspect of SEN teachers' work. The last section examines the challenges that teachers face at work, how the SEN teaching profession is evolving, and how the SEN teachers view the gap between preservice teacher education and the reality of their work.

6.1   SEN Teachers' Work

Although the SEN teaching profession may be considered nowadays as the same or as 'simple' as before on the surface, the changing tasks and evolving roles of SEN teachers in Finnish inclusive vocational schools beneath the surface are evident. In this study, further exploration was carried out on how the SEN teaching profession nowadays is perceived and experienced by teachers. During the interviews, various questions were asked to profile today's SEN teachers' work from different angles. In the subsections that follow, I present the principal findings of the current investigation into the characteristics of SEN teachers' work and the corresponding competences required for this profession.

6.1.1 Characteristics of SEN Teachers' Work

In the interviews, I asked the teachers to describe their work and roles as SEN teachers in inclusive vocational schools and to think about the differences between SEN teachers and other helping professionals, such as study advisors (*opinto-ohjaajat*) and curators (*kuraattorit*). The most significant theme emerging from the data was the multilayered aspect of the SEN teaching profession. This multilayered nature of SEN teachers' work was expressed through the teachers' ambivalence towards their work and manifests in various dimensions of their daily practices.

Worthwhile yet burdensome

On the whole, the teachers, for example, Hilla, Päivi, Sofia, and Anna, consider SEN teaching work to be "interesting" and "fun". Päivi and Anna also find it "inspiring", "motivating", and "rewarding". In Anna's view, this work challenges her to keep learning and brings her satisfaction when students' make progress. Moreover, to Sofia, Linda, and Katri, the SEN teaching profession is very "human", "meaningful", and "important". It is much more than just a teaching job, but it is a very "human" profession:

> It makes me feel good … when you think that you are doing your job well. […] The work … work is … very rewarding when I … I can see that … well, like one student said to me before we started his mathematics, he said to me that … let's sit down and talk some nice things, don't care about the mathematics … and after few weeks, he said to me, 'Anna, please , shout your mouth, I try to do this my own.' … and that … that I mean this that … very rewarding because he finds out he can do the calculating and he can … he wants to do themselves … himself. […] It is […] motivating. […] Maybe I like it so much, I like to find … maybe it challenges me. […] I am 58 now, so maybe it keeps my brain in a better condition, because I have to use my brain … maybe that's motivation. (Anna)

> It's very 'human', like I said before, that you are actually working with the … with 'human', and not just with the … the 'subject' … more like … and it's … I think it's very meaningful and very important work. (Sofia)

Although the teachers appreciate the positive aspects that the SEN teaching profession has brought to their lives, they voiced no doubts about the onerous complexity of this professional path. First, as presented above, SEN teaching work is not simply about teaching something but also about handling matters of each living person. That is why, in Suvi's view, to work as a SEN teacher, you have to involve yourself in various aspects of the students' lives. This implies that a "holistic" knowledge of the student is required, which makes the SEN teaching profession not as simple as merely teaching:

> It's … you have to take … like it's very holistic kind of thing … you have to … know a lot of about the students' lives, like … like what's happening in their home and where they come from or what … where they are going to. (Suvi)

Furthermore, the teachers agreed upon the 'unpredictability' of the work as well. To some degree, in the case of Suvi, no single day is the same. Planning in advance is necessary and important, but she has to be ready for any 'unexpectedness' that may force her to improvise for any situation at that moment. In a great sense, change appears to be the only thing that does not change in the SEN teachers' daily practice. Nevertheless, Suvi mentioned that, among the hustle and bustle, there is still some "structure" embedded in the everyday work schedule. For example, every morning, she makes it a routine to firstly speak to each student and then outline the learning tasks for that day so that students can prepare themselves emotionally and intellectually for what is coming during the school day:

> Every day is very different, so this is what I like about this job that … I don't need to do the same thing over and over again … I … I have to like 'live in that situation' and … and … change my styles and ways according to the students. […] even though it's very … like every day is different, but still … in a way every day is the same because we have quite a lot of structure … in our teaching because … every morning we have … start of the morning, and we listen how's everyone's day have been, and they tell about they … earlier they … they have been doing in the evening, and then what day it is, what's the weather like, etc. […] and … what are we going to do today … like what lessons we have … do we go somewhere or what do we do. […] And then we follow that structure … same in the morning. So in a way, even though it's every day is different, but then also every day is very structured. (Suvi)

Given that a holistic knowledge of the students is required and that unpredictability is common in the SEN teachers' daily practice, it is not difficult to imagine how arduous and exacting the SEN teaching profession can be. Päivi, Sofia, Tuulia, Laura, and Anna all agreed that the SEN teachers' work is "challenging" and "demanding". In Sofia's case, the challenges are due to the constant unstable moods of the students. In other words, she needs to be ready for their occasional behavioural and emotional changes. To Anna, the hard toil results from having to rapidly and markedly shift her attention from one student or subject to another often so that she can deal with the students' inter- and intra-individual diversity, which undoubtedly leads to mental exhaustion:

> It's very challenging. […] It's because the students have medications, and … they might to have ups and downs, like the move is changing all the time. (Sofia)

> It's […] demanding, sometimes quite hard. […] I think that you have to change your mind quite quickly because that at the same lesson there can be somebody doing mathematics, somebody doing English, and somebody doing like chemistry … and you have to support all the students. […] When you turn to another side, you have to change your thinking from mathematics to … for instance, English … and that's quite … challenging … haastava[challenging] […] you have to change your thoughts very quickly. […] and it's quite tiring sometimes. […] Sometimes I have a small group … that I have one subject to teach, and sometimes I have … many students and they all learn … I have to teach different subjects ... sometimes I have one student, sometimes I have five students … sometimes I have four students, and they have … they all learn English, but they are in different language [levels] in English … and … that's demanding, challenging, and fun. (Anna)

To properly tackle the challenges and difficulties at work, as mentioned above, certain personality traits are definitely desirable. In Päivi's view, to work in this

field, being "patient" is a must. It is like being as persistent as a farmer who sows seeds without reaping the harvest immediately. The SEN teaching profession requires a long-term engagement to follow the progress of students over time. In a sense, being "patient" implies being "humane". As a farmer is forbearing about the harvest of crops that need to be taken care of and given time to grow, so the SEN teacher is patient about the development of her students who need to be listened to and understood. This is why Tuulia pointed out that she cannot fulfil her teaching role until she listens to the students and can empathise with their thoughts and feelings. In addition, according to Hilla, flexibility is a desirable personality quality. As I pointed out earlier, change appears to be the only thing that remains 'unchanging' in the SEN teachers' daily practice. Hence, to deal with the considerable variety necessary in SEN teaching work, being "flexible" about all kinds of unexpectedness is absolutely necessary. All in all, it seems that personality plays an important role in balancing the worthwhile and burdensome nature of the SEN teaching profession, as confirmed by Anna:

> I like this work because it suits to my personality. (Anna)

Figure 6 illustrates the ambivalence experienced in SEN teachers' work and how it is balanced by the desirable personality traits.
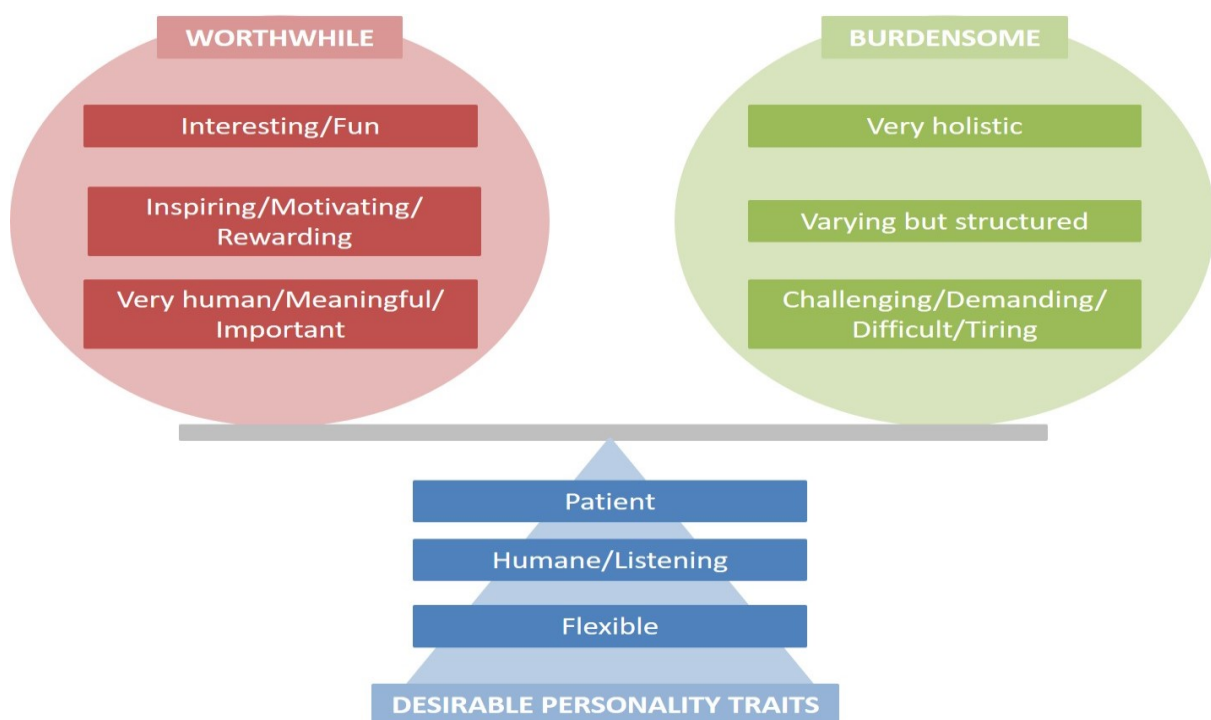
FIGURE 6   Ambivalence of SEN teachers' work

SEN Teachers as Professional SNE Experts

Unquestionably, SEN teachers are experts in the field of SNE. According to Katri, the goal of her work is to make students' study possible. This idea seems very

simple, but the practices behind it are complicated. For example, to achieve this goal, first, as Linda shared, SEN teachers need to make some diagnoses to identify students' special needs. The diagnoses are not medical but pedagogical. The diagnoses are mostly made via school-wide tests that evaluate students' learning abilities in reading, writing, and mathematics:

> The role [of SEN teacher] is to be students' ... to do the students' … studying possible, to make it possible, in … in different ways that … maybe the normal teachers doesn't come to think. (Katri)

> In our school, in my campus, they have … mathematical disorders, they couldn't … they couldn't survive in this mathematics in practical nurse studies, and some of them … students have reading problems and writing problems, and some are … life management problems, everything is going to badly in their lives, so … I do this reading and writing tests … mathematical tests to these students. (Linda)

After identifying students' special needs, designing the teaching/learning plans is the next step of SEN teachers' work to make students' study possible. In Suvi's view, this step is essential yet demanding, as she has to organise the teaching in an individualised way to meet each student's personal needs:

> There is not so many of this kind of teaching places, so there is not a lot teaching materials. […] I would need to … like think individually how do I adjust this to my … this student, and how do I do it with that student, so … I can't really use ready-made materials. (Suvi)

This kind of teaching/learning design, based on what Niina, Hilla, and Anna commented, actually covers three levels. At the individual level, SEN teachers have to draw up an individualised educational plan called HOJKS (*Henkilökohtainen Opetuksen Järjestämistä Koskeva Suunnitelma*) for each student with SEN that consists of information about, for example, students' strengths, short-term and long-term learning goals, and required resources. In this way, a 'study blueprint' can be drafted, followed, examined, and actualised by teachers and students. At the group level, SEN teachers need to develop a SNE curriculum for the group of students as a whole in the school. At the institutional level, SEN teachers are responsible for organising and managing the whole SNE system in the school to ensure that every student in need gets adequate support and is not left behind:

> [SEN teachers are] writing up […] HOJKS[Henkilökohtainen Opetuksen Järjestämistä Koskeva Suunnitelma] […] the plan where you write the needs of the special […] plan of special needs. […] we make the plan for every period. And then I update the plan as many times as needed. (Hilla)

> [SEN teachers are] developing new models, new things. […] [and also] making plans … those are curriculums, special need curriculums. (Niina)

> [The role of SEN teacher in VET is] developing […] the learning system, how the so-called 'special students', are they in the group or are they … do they come … in a smaller groups. (Anna)

Once SEN teachers have the overview of the students' special needs and design corresponding teaching/learning plans, they put them into practice through instruction, which the teachers consider one of the most important and major tasks of the SEN teaching profession. According to Suvi, teaching can be a cooperative task among teachers or can be performed by a single SEN teacher alone. Anna also mentioned that teaching methods and contents do not always remain the same; instead, they vary based on the number of students, the subject, and the students' ability levels:

> It's not so much like co-teaching, it's more like individual teaching. (Suvi)

> Sometimes I have a small group … that I have one subject to teach, and sometimes I have … many students and they all learn … I have to teach different subjects … sometimes I have one student, sometimes I have five students … sometimes I have four students, and they have … they all learn English, but they are in different language [levels] in English. (Anna)

More specifically, the teaching involves three learning areas. First, according to Linda, Laura, and Katri, SEN teachers aim to help students with their learning problems. For example, in Laura's school, she assists students in tackling their difficulties in mathematics. In addition to students with SEN, Katri also works with those who are left behind for different reasons to help them complete their studies:

> In our college it's that way that they are … all the students are at the same class or same groups, but we have … this mathematics groups that we have organised for those who have problems in mathematics. […] they only take this mathematics studies … as small group. […] During the school time … other … other students have also mathematics, but they go … they have … with another teacher. (Laura)

> It's learning problems to deal with, learning problems with students. […] I … have a group for students that have … their studies … behind, so … for students that have some studies that they have not done for reason or another … so I have a group after school. (Katri)

The second area of SEN teaching involves the students' other challenges apart from the purely academic. While recalling her SEN teaching experiences, Katri noticed that nowadays in her work, more of the problems she has to solve involve students' personal daily living challenges rather than purely their learning difficulties. She expressed great concern that, due to leaving their homes at such a young age, today's students greatly lack self-sufficient "life skills", such as time management or finance management. This is likely to seriously jeopardise the students' quality of study and inevitably pose other challenges to their lives. Therefore, Katri regards teaching life skills as critically integral to her SEN teaching work:

> Nowadays … the … the learning problem is getting more and more smaller part in my work, the life-leading skills, how you get up in the morning, how you … live your life so that you can manage your study, you sleep enough, you don't have any social problems, so how to solve them … the student financial problem, we have … in Finland, growing problem with … with the weak loan money lending for young people …

> that's sort of problems have all things ... and so employment is one of them, have become in a big role, I call it ... the life skills, that's what I teach most these days. So ... how ... how the students can ... can live their lives ... everyday lives ... in a way that the studying is possible. In ... in vocational education the students are quite young when they come here, they move away from home ... to live on their own, and they have all the freedom from the parents' watching eyes ... and this is ... leading to many problems. [...] I have those ... I have lessons ... I teach those life skills matters. (Katri)

The third area of SEN teachers' teaching involves vocational competences. As the main purpose of VET is to equip students with professional competences so they can better transition from school to the labour market, Katri pointed out that SEN teachers have to clearly bear in mind that their work, to some extent, serves the transitional purpose of assuring students' employability. As a result, in Katri's work, she also spends a great amount of time teaching knowledge and skills concerning employment, such as how to abide by the rules of a company and behave oneself in the workplace:

> The second ... biggest work for me is ... is to ... help students to ... get through the vocational education, like when they go to the companies ... learning by doing ... so that they know how to behave there, how to cope with company rules, and so on. [...] my work is quite a lot doing with ... behavioural thing ... behavioural problems. [...] SEN teacher [...] will helping the students in ... in many ways ... have to remember that the student is studying for a profession, you can't forget it. (Katri)

SEN Teachers as Comprehensive Caregivers

In addition to making students' study possible, in the minds of many teachers, for example, Niina, Jonna, Hilla, Suvi, and Anna, SEN teachers also play a significantly comprehensive role in supporting and assisting students. Such a role defines SEN teachers as more than instructors in the field of SNE and seems to have more profound and long-term influences on students because it involves many aspects of the students' lives. By listening and talking to students, SEN teachers can understand their needs and provide them with the necessary help:

> Listening, talking, supporting, in many many things. [...] It's something I do every day [...] [with] students. (Jonna)

> [My work as a SEN teacher in VET] is [helping other students]. [...] There are many different ways to do it ... and as a teacher of integrated students, the scale is very large, and it's according to this ... to the students what you have to done ... to do ... and ... main point is to take care of the students as a whole, and then ... try to make clear what she or he needs, and according to that, do something, and there are many ways to do it. (Hilla)

As commonly known, the major aim of VET is to equip students with vocational competences so they can better transition from school to the labour market. Therefore, in this sense, based on what Niina shared, SEN teachers' primary job is to improve students' employability. This does not involve simply making a transition plan before students finish their studies but also helping them find internship workplaces so that they can acquire practical vocational competences in the field:

> One job is also supporting students' employment when the studies are ending, little before ending. (Niina)

Coupled with the supporting students' employment, SEN teachers also need to help students reach out for other resources to deal with their personal problems. For example, in Hilla's case, whenever she discovers students' situations are beyond her ability to handle, she guides them to other available resources for more professional assistance. According to Jonna's experiences, her job is not simply showing students the ways to other experts. Instead, sometimes she has to give the students' moral support by, for example, attending a doctor's appointment with them:

> If the need of that kind of help is very large, heavy, so I guide [students] to those others[professionals]. (Hilla)

> Today one student had a doctor, and she wanted me to come with her, so we went there. (Jonna)

Both assisting students in a positive transition from school to the labour market and helping them reach out to other resources to tackle their problems imply that SEN teachers have an unshirkable responsibility to take care of their students' well-being. In other words, SEN teachers, according to Jonna, need to stand up for students' legal right to study and receive necessary SNE services:

> SEN teacher has to … talk about and handle many areas of students' rights. (Jonna)

With the responsibility to support and help students, according to Sofia, SEN teachers are never really off duty. The responsibility of taking care of students remains, even after official working hours. When she meets students outside school who need help, she never hesitates to give a hand. In her view, the SEN teaching profession is not just a nine-to-five job at school. Rather, it is work that crosses the boundaries of the expected working time and space:

> When I see them in town, I am always helping them, like in a shop. […] in a grocery shop, they come and tell me their progress. […] so it's not really ending, even though I am not work … working with them all the time. (Sofia)

However, as comprehensive caregivers, SEN teachers also play a vital role in embracing each student's individuality, that is, as Jonna said, by "meeting these students as they are". To Jonna, the focus of the SEN teaching profession should not be on teaching curriculum subjects and doing other paperwork but instead on students. SEN teachers should care about their students' feelings before trying to solve their other problems. This idea was shared by Hilla as well. In the interviews, she kept emphasising that SEN teachers need to take care of their students "as a whole". Students are living beings who have personal feelings and thoughts. Hence, SEN teachers should not interact with every student in a standardised way but should embrace each student's individuality so that the student's needs can be catered for:

> The most important thing is you really meet these students as they are, talk with them how they are, and how they feel, and after that comes studying and problems with studying. […] because you can't study if you have … have a bad feelings. […] When you are in the class … it's more important … what do you teach, so subjects are more important roles. But in special needs teaching, students are the most important roles. (Jonna)

> [My work as a SEN teacher in VET is] taking care of student as a whole. […] There are many different ways to do it. […] main point is to take care of the students as a whole. (Hilla)

The outcomes of embracing students' individualities are that students' confidence can be raised and a safe learning environment can be created. Based on Sofia's observation, students with SEN seem rather insecure about themselves. As a result, by "being there for them", SEN teachers provide a warm and pleasant study atmosphere for students to be themselves and to progress at their own pace. This view was echoed by Anna, who was also aware of the significance of raising students' self-esteem and developing a favourable learning environment for students:

> Special needs students are very … insecure about themselves, they need a lot of support, and … self-esteem is very low, so you need to kind of … 'be there' for them. (Sofia)

> We make the students learn, that's the main thing … to teach subjects … what they need in their profession, but we have … it's not the only thing. […] a special teacher's job is also to give the … support to the students and make them feel that they are good in something and … support their feelings and be the place that they can express feelings and speak freely what their problems. (Anna)

As professional SNE experts, SEN teachers teach students all the knowledge and skills required for their personal lives and future employment. As comprehensive caregivers, SEN teachers take care of various aspects of students' lives in many ways and embrace their individualities. As a result, SEN teachers have relatively close teacher-student relationships with students with SEN. According to Päivi, Suvi, and Sofia, SEN teachers' work with students is intensive, well rounded, and long-lasting. It requires constant attention from teachers, and involves multiple dimensions of the students' lives, lasting even after the students had finished their studies. Being well instructed and fully embraced gives students with SEN the impression that the SEN teacher is not merely a 'teacher' but someone very significant in their lives whom they can count on and seek help from. Nevertheless, Linda commented that the SEN teachers should not take on all the responsibility for the students' lives. To educate students to become responsible lifelong learners who know how to search resources and solve problems, SEN teachers should work "with" students so that students' autonomy can be fostered to help them take responsibility for their own lives:

> It's more intensive, it's like … opinto-ohjaaja, kuraattori, they only meet the students maybe once a week, and teachers with them all the time … like I said, if you see them in a shop, they … they will come to you, it's … so it's more like … more intensive all the time … and it's … I wouldn't say that you become a friend with them because that's not professional, but you are very close with them, and then, even though they graduated, they might contact you and tell you what … what … how they are doing, and …

that kind of things. […] with the students, you still have to think about what you can say to the students … so … so you can be friends, but not completely friends. (Sofia)

I think that I am 'with worker' […] I call I work with my students, I can't do […] I can't … do things on behalf of them, but I can only go with them, and give some advice how to … how to solve problems. (Linda)

Figure 7 presents in detail the roles and tasks that SEN teachers carry out as professional SNE experts and comprehensive caregivers.
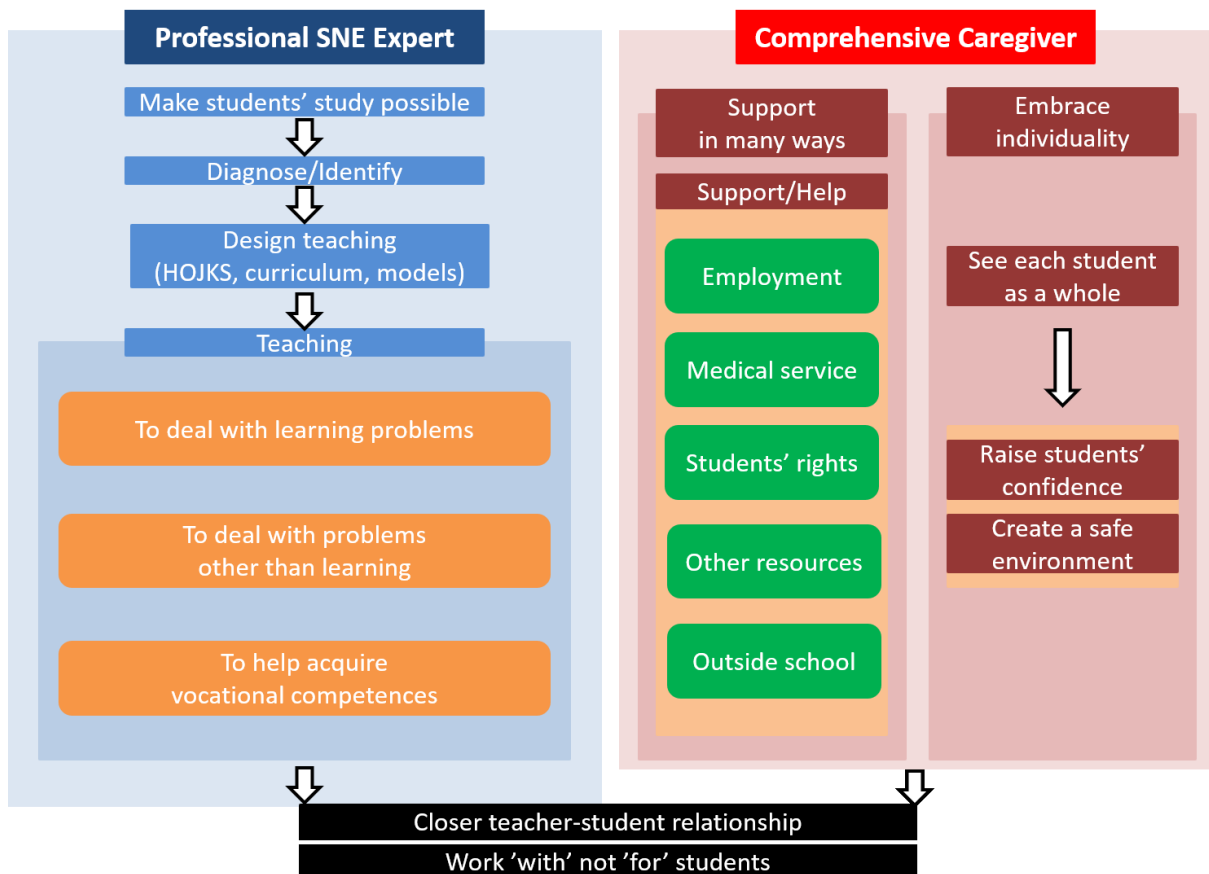
FIGURE 7   SEN teachers' tasks as professional SNE experts and comprehensive caregivers

Extensive Network

Although SEN teachers' work deals with students' diverse problems, it is never a job that SEN teachers can do alone. It involves a network of people and resources that, as Sofia mentioned, "the net" around SEN teachers' work is "quite big". More specifically, in Niina's words, "multiprofessional teamwork" is the key and backbone to making SNE services work. That is, from Anna's point of view, SEN teachers actually serve as members of a larger professional network. In addition, according to Hilla, the primary goal of this multiprofessional cooperation is to seek solutions together that satisfy students' individual needs:

[My role as a SEN teacher in VET is] to be a member of different kind of professional network. (Anna)

"Those cooperation [for] students' need. (Hilla)

Hilla also pointed out that, in this multiprofessional teamwork, SEN teachers are without a doubt considered "specialists" in SNE and collaborate in various ways with other experts. For example, compared to other helping professionals, according to Niina and Jonna, SEN teachers apparently have a better understanding of the students' diversity and more adequate knowledge about learning difficulties. As mentioned earlier, this kind of good understanding and profound knowledge of students is a result of a closer teacher-student relationship as well as relevant preservice training:

Special need teacher [knows] more about differences. (Niina)

SEN teacher has to … [deal with] learning disabilities and difficulties. (Jonna)

Since SEN teachers have a more holistic perspective of students with SEN when it comes to managing resources and reaching people involved, as Suvi mentioned, they unavoidably function as "coordinators". Based on Linda's and Suvi's experiences, SEN teachers not only collect relevant information so that necessary approaches can be adopted to assist students, but also make sure everyone they work with is synchronised regarding the students' information:

[My work as a SEN teacher in VET is to] collect … knowledge about […] where are they coming from the schools … and … then I collect this knowledge that we how and do special education plan if they need. (Linda)

[SEN teacher in VET is] connection making … and working with many different people. […] the hardest part is the … because we have a lot of changes, and … and lot of … like every student has their own timetable kind of thing, so the hardest thing is the … making everyone knows what's happening for this person, and this one is going there … and … that one has a meeting that time and … that kind of information is most … most stressful I think. (Suvi)

With better understanding and more well-rounded knowledge of students than other helping professionals, SEN teachers play a slightly different role in assisting and supporting students within the multiprofessional framework. However, according to Tuulia and Hilla, they and other experts do share some goals and duties:

Päämäärä sama[the goal is the same]. (Tuulia)

I do partly those same things as those … other helping professionals. (Hilla)

As I presented in the beginning of this section, the primary goal of such teamwork is to foster students' well-being. Since SEN teachers spend more time with students than other professionals, their duties, to some extent, inevitably overlap what others do. For instance, sometimes SEN teachers give conselling advice to students because the student counsellors do not have enough time for each student and do not know the students as well as the SEN teachers:

> Like in our place now, I have to do the student guidance also because … I know the students, […] they have so many things … like the student guidance[counsellor] wouldn't have time to … like it is easier for me to do it than … for someone who wouldn't know my student so well, so it's better if I do that as well. (Suvi)

Having explored the SEN teachers' roles in multiprofessional teamwork, I will now move on to reveal more practical details concerning SEN teachers' extensive networks. In addition to SEN teachers, two groups were identified from the data as being closely involved in the SEN teaching profession in inclusive vocational schools: internal workmates and external partners. Internal workmates refers to school leaders, teachers other than SEN teachers, and staff working in different sectors within the same school. External partners indicates students' parents, other professionals (e.g. nurses, doctors, etc.), and other concerned organisations/institutions. Regarding internal workmates, Niina mentioned that working with other colleagues is the everyday reality in today's SEN teaching practices because inclusion is the official policy on education in Finland. This implies that, as a specialist in SNE, SEN teachers provide their professional competences to their fellow workers through all sorts of coordinating and consulting to help them deal with matters concerning students with SEN. Anna shared a common view. She pointed out that her profession is to "make a team work" with many different teachers at school. The range which the SEN teachers' work covers is so vast that she has to learn to get along with everyone:

> It's nowadays … it's much more that coordinating and consulting because that … in very many schools that inclusion is the system, that's why special needs teachers can't be in every classroom. There are normal teacher in every classroom, and every subject, and there are only some special needs teachers who are consulting, coordinating, support. (Niina)

Two professional relationships that SEN teachers have with internal workmates were further identified as supporting/consulting and cooperating. With reference to supporting/consulting, many of the teachers, such as Jonna and Anna, indicated explicitly in the interviews that part of their work is to support and help other teachers handle students' problems on a daily basis. In many cases, SEN teachers' professional advice is needed and valued so that regular teachers can have a better understanding of students' problems and know how to manage those thorny matters properly:

> Listening, talking, supporting, in may many things […] it's something I do every day […] [with] my workmates. […] I think [the role of SEN teacher in VET is to] support working mates, help them to understand these problems. (Jonna)

> I have … consultation to the teachers, they ask if … what to do with somebody. […] [My role in VET is] consultation with teachers. (Anna)

The ways SEN teachers support internal workmates manifests in three major forms: educating, co-teaching, and bridging. First, according to Niina, SEN teachers provide helpful guidelines to other teachers about how to recognise students with SEN and educate teachers in how to do this in practice. This educational

function of SEN teachers can also be served by offering useful information about SNE from their professional views to those in charge so that people in managerial positions can make the "right decisions":

> [SEN teachers are] doing common guidelines also for teachers how to recognize special needs students, or something like that. […] and also educating mainstream teachers because they have those basic teacher education, but they have to know more about recognize special needs students. […] We are [also] […] talking with management[managers] because they are making decisions, but all the managers don't know so much things about special education, that's' why the special need teacher is very important that if the manager doesn't know, that he or she gets that information about the things, that he can make the right decisions. (Niina)

The second way SEN teachers support colleagues is through co-teaching. Although co-teaching is not a common practice in Finnish inclusive vocational schools, partly due to, as Sofia and Katri commented, budget issues and other teachers' attitudes, it is valued and adopted in some SEN teachers' workplaces.

> Very very seldom, I have only done [co-teaching] once, so … and that's the money issue again. (Sofia)

> As long as the SEN-teacher takes care all of the problems … and … and … the normal teachers can concentrate themselves to teaching … it's the basic idea … but … in here it's not … it's not common to use … some … use that 'double teaching'[co-teaching] that in some vocational school … so college is quite normal that you have a … a … regular teacher and a SEN teacher in … in the class … so it's not … it's not common in here, I don't know why, but … some teachers don't want anybody else mastering their lessons in their … school roles." […] I think that's quite good system I've used it before … but … in here it's not. (Katri)

Based on Linda's and Anna's experiences, their role in co-teaching is to be the "second teacher" in the classroom to help share the teaching tasks with other teachers to satisfy the needs of each students, with or without SEN:

> We have … have done this in same lessons, for example, in mathematics … last week we have … two teachers in same group. (Linda)

> I can be … as a second teacher in classroom and help there. (Anna)

The third way SEN teachers support fellow workers, in Katri's view, is to help them acquire other resources and have a better understanding of students. SEN teachers are specialists in SNE who are more familiar with where to seek professional help and what occupies the students' minds. Therefore, they are like 'bridges' connecting other teachers to possible solutions to students' problems and inner worlds:

> [SEN teacher in VET is] feeling like in between the normal teachers and … and some other workers sometimes. […] [and] between … the normal teacher and … and the students. (Katri)

However, SEN teachers' professional relationships with internal workmates are demonstrated through their cooperation with other sectors or other experts

within the same schools. As mentioned earlier, part of SEN teachers' work is to prepare students for future employment. That is why Suvi negotiates with some sectors in her workplace for students' internships. Unlike Suvi's work with other units in the school for students' on-the-job learning, Anna collaborates with other members in student support groups, such as the study advisor or curator, to ensure that students' problems and needs are handled well. Through their professional views about students' situations, SEN teachers and other internal professionals work together to take care of students' well-being:

> We are having tried to get connection to other sections in our school like that … our … our students could go to practice, for example, in the kitchen to wash dishes, like school different kitchens to wash dishes or … things like that. (Suvi)

> I am part of some kind of network that we are meeting […] oppilashuoltoryhmä[student support group]. […] it's a group that … different professionals are meeting once to … once … two times in a month, and we are talking about where we are going and do we have some problems with some students, or … they have finished their studies or something … or maybe the nurses have to take care of somebody else … it's … we talk about how things are going with students. (Anna)

Even though interacting with internal workmates is an inevitable and necessary daily practice in the SEN teaching profession within the inclusive context, it is not, according to Katri's observation, always appreciated. In some teachers' eyes, SEN teachers are not real professionals because they do not teach any "specific subject" as other vocational teachers do. This is a topic I will cover in more detail in the later sections. In short, at least in Katri's workplace, SEN teachers are considered good at solving challenging problems but not as highly professional in teaching:

> Sometimes I think the SEN teacher in VET don't have the … the … respect from other people … other teachers, they should have […] I mean the respect in … in … in whole … in the … as a profession. […] I think the role is important, and … and … just principal and … of the school and other leading members of … or the workers of the school should … understand the importance of SEN teacher, and … and use all the skills that SEN teachers can … give the school and the students. […] I don't mean that SEN teacher should get any more respect than the other teachers, but … but somehow … SEN teachers … in … in VET, and here in City K, I can speak for myself only … when you are not teaching in vocational education, when you are not teaching any … specific subject, like car mending or electricity … or … o whatever subject it is, it's hard to get a respect as a teacher. (Katri)

As previously stated, to satisfy students' diverse needs, SEN teachers must team up with different internal workmates so that individualised SNE services can be well orchestrated. In addition to fellow workers at schools who are closely involved in SEN teachers' work, external partners are the other major group who underpin and optimise the effectiveness and efficiency of the SEN teaching profession. Among the external partners, students' parents, other professionals (e.g. social workers, physiotherapist), comprehensive schools, and employment offices were specifically mentioned by the teachers during the interviews. Since students with SEN are the prime focus of SEN teachers' work, in Hilla's and Sofia's experiences, students' parents, as students' most intimate caregivers in their

personal lives, are inevitably a group that SEN teachers work with frequently. With professional knowledge and skills regarding how to deal with students' problems, SEN teachers are consulted and asked for help in many ways by students' parents. However, just like students, students' parents have their personal views, feelings, and expectations to be taken into consideration, which make interaction between SEN teachers and students' parents challenging at times:

> [My work is] helping […] parents. (Hilla)

> You have to deal a lot … a lot with the parents, and it's not always easy. (Sofia)

Furthermore, as I pointed out in the very beginning, SEN teachers' work is never a job that teachers can do alone. Hence, as schools' resources are finite, reaching out to other professionals outside the schools is necessary. To take care of the students' personal well-being, as Suvi and Sofia indicated, SEN teachers need to work with different kinds of experts in fields other than education, such as nurses, social workers, doctors, and physiotherapists, so that corresponding services for students with SEN can be coordinated and provided:

> We work with the local […] I work with … nurse closely in my classroom […] and there is also local like social workers, and physiotherapist, and … so it's local like interaction with … different kind of workers. (Suvi)

> You have to deal with doctors, social workers. (Sofia)

It is important to remember that inclusive vocational schools do not exist in a vacuum completely separate from other contexts. In other words, IVET serves as a transitional phase that bridges students' basic education and future employment. Therefore, to better help students transition from basic education to IVET and from IVET to the labour market, in Niina's view, it is important for her to collaborate with the comprehensive schools that send students to her school and with the local employment office before students are about to finish their studies. The reason she cooperates with comprehensive schools is that more information about students can be collected so that proper individualised plans can be elaborated, and the purpose for working with the local employment office is to ensure that necessary societal resources are introduced and tapped to enhance students' employability:

> In my work […] cooperation with basic schools because they have lot of knowledge of the young people when they are coming, and we are … interact with them, we know more about the students, and can plan the support better. […] also cooperation with … employment office or … before their study … they end their studies because the employment is also very … important thing on special needs students. (Niina)

Figure 8 illustrates the concept and practices of multiprofessional teamwork in SEN teachers' work.
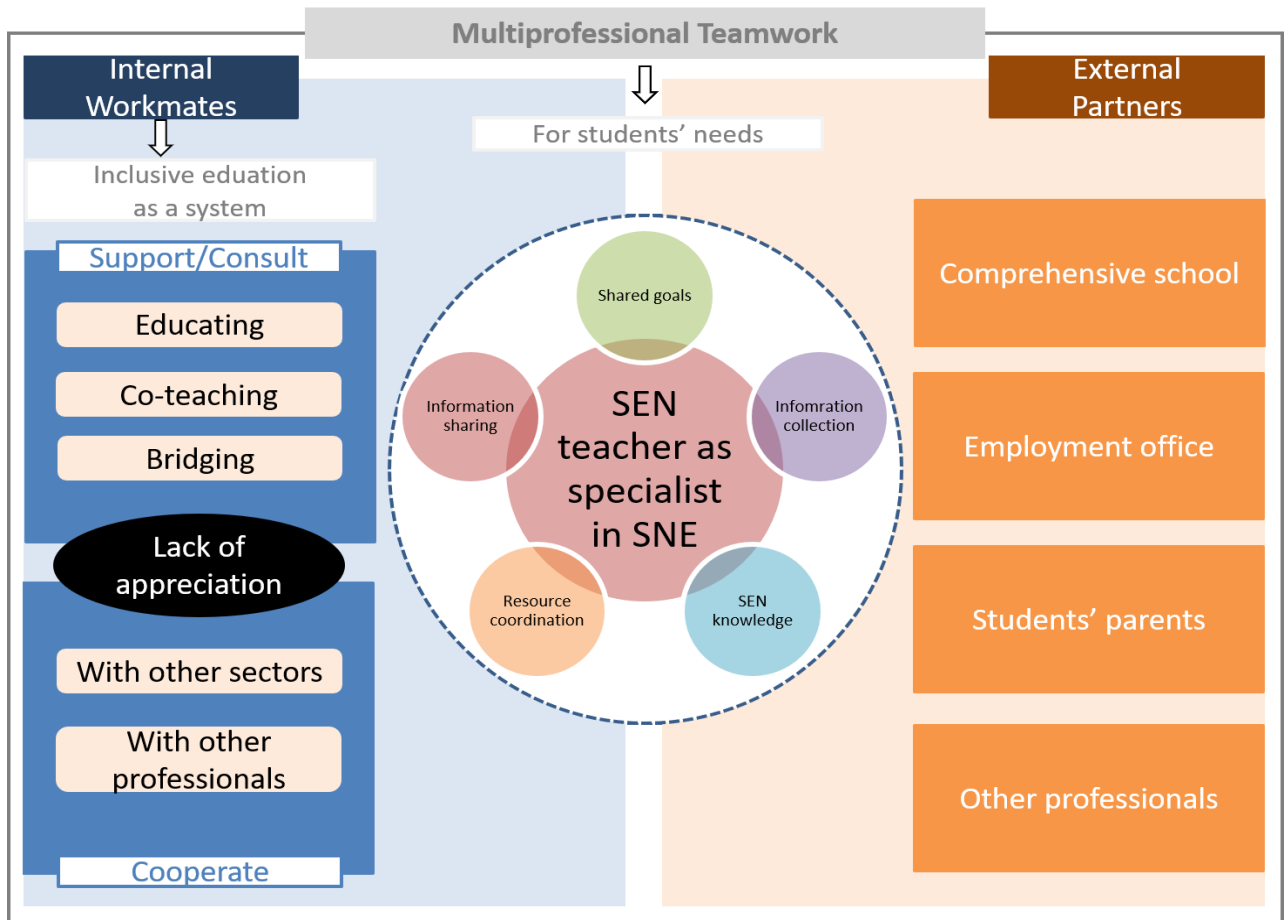
FIGURE 8   SEN teachers' multiprofessional teamwork

Downsides

Although the major characteristics of the SEN teaching profession have been presented, a few negative aspects are definitely worth attention because they deliver certain alarming messages; for example, the profession requires too much to learn for a novice, provides insecure employment, and has inconsistent roles and tasks.

As expressly mentioned in the previous sections, the multilayered aspects of the SEN teaching profession is the very thing that makes this job challenging and demanding. Such a feeling was shared not merely by the experienced teachers but also by the newer ones. At the time of the interviews, Päivi had been in her SEN teaching career for only two years. She was, compared to most of the teachers in this research, very new to the teaching profession in general as well as the SEN teaching profession more specifically. As a result, she had to spend a great deal of time learning in practice everything she had preliminarily acquired from her preservice teacher education to handle the various tasks she faced at work. Such an experience was a deep concern for another teacher, Katri, who had been teaching for about 18 years. Katri believes that, if young teachers cannot

properly channel their stress in their journeys working as SEN teachers, they are likely to experience burnout later:

> It takes a lot of time to learn […] how to do […] in … work. (Päivi)

> Preservice education doesn't tell you that the students are not sitting quietly in the chairs and listening to you … that … that it doesn't tell you … it's … it tells you … the situation in the classroom is really different from the situation in … in … that … you can see in preservice education. […] And … really the young … young teachers are … are amazed that they … they get tired, because they don't have the tool what to do with the difficult young people. (Katri)

Another alarming message concerning the downside of the SEN teaching profession is its employment insecurity. In Sofia's case, she used to be a full-time teacher, but now, due to government budget cuts, she works on a part-time basis, which consequently makes her life less secure. In contrast to being employed full time, she has to use her own personal time to prepare for teaching. In addition, she is not even sure if she will use the teaching materials again due to her insecure employment situation. Even though this downside does not have a direct correlation with the SEN teaching profession, it apparently has affected Sofia greatly:

> I am actually … part-time teacher now, so I only work when there is a need for me, and all the groups are different to me now. […] I have been like part-time teacher for this year, and two years before that I was full-time. […] But because of the cuts now … that the government are making, the schools are … kind of … making the groups bigger and they don't need so many teachers. […] It is much more simple […] because you only work when you are ... when you have lessons, so it's kind of … it's more simple, yes, but then, again, if you are making … material to your lessons, you have to do that on your own time [without pay]. […] if I would get permanent full-time job […] it always gives you more motivation, if you know that you will have the job next year, and you wouldn't have to be afraid that you won't have a job. […] You would know that you would be doing this … this for the long time, and you … and you would maybe spend more time in doing the materials, and … maybe taking part of everything else in … in the school work, because you would know that I am not doing this for nothing, and … because sometimes if you have a course for maybe 20 hours that you have to teach 20 hours, and then it's a new course for you, and you make material, it takes hundred hours to do the material, and then if you know that I am never going to teach this again, then you wouldn't do as much work for the material, because it's not worth it. […] But if you would know that I might be doing this for the next 5 years, then you would have more … more … motivation to be better also. (Sofia)

Another negative aspect of the SEN teaching profession worth mentioning is its inconsistency in terms of roles and tasks. Sadly, at Laura's workplace, her SEN expertise does not seem to deserve the same appreciation as some of other teachers in this research receive. She noticed that the success of SEN teachers' work does not rely on the professional knowledge and skills that the SEN teachers have but on how the workplace views professional competences. If those in charge in the workplace value SNE and the teachers' work, the teacher will have some tasks and play a significant role in improving the quality of SNE. Conversely, if the work is not much appreciated in the workplace, the teacher cannot do as much as planned. Therefore, in Laura's view, the inconsistencies in the SEN teachers' roles and tasks exists across the nation. Regardless of the similarities in quality

and contents of preservice teacher education, what a teacher really is and really does, in fact, varies from one school to another:

> It is depending on where you work, so … and other colleges have their own systems which vary … vary from the others, and they are not so … unified … organised … system. […] it depends on the teacher and the organisation he or she is working, what kind of job it is … or what he or she is doing. […] I think [the role of SEN teacher] … varies between colleges. […] it depends on what college you work, and … the system in that college. […] In my school there are not so … organised system in SEN teaching. […] there has to be a lot to done to do … to get a good system in our school. […] we need a lot more to do with special need students. […] the support system should be much better than it is at the moment. […] it's a small role at the moment. (Laura)

Figure 9 shows an overview of the downsides of SEN teachers' work.
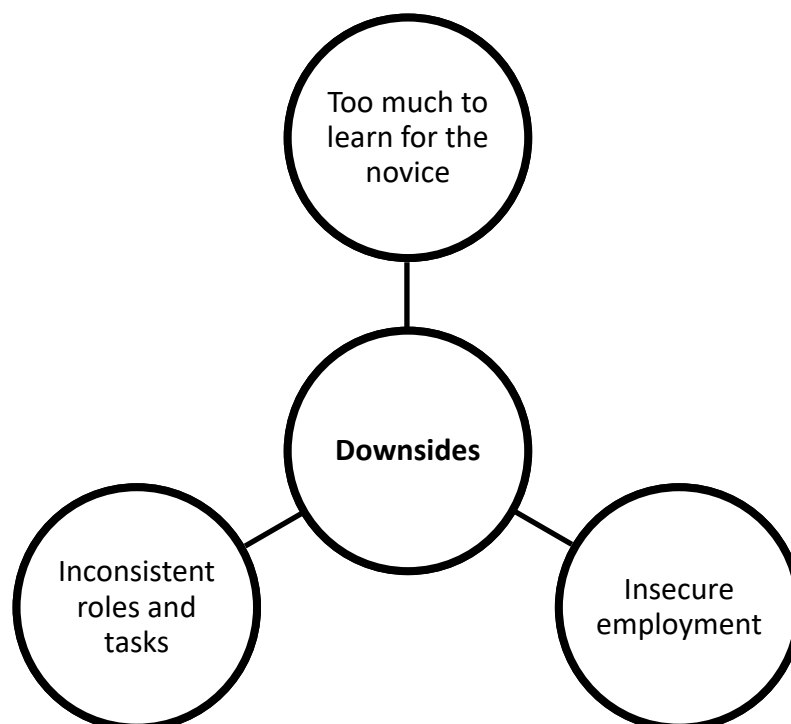
FIGURE 9   Downsides of SEN teachers' work

6.1.2   What Constitutes a Competent SEN Teacher

The complexity of the SEN teaching profession inevitably requires corresponding multidimensional competences. In the interviews, I asked the teachers what the most important professional competence is for working as a SEN teacher in IVET. Three competences were identified in their replies: professional knowledge and skills, desirable personality traits, and good social skills.

Professional Knowledge and Skills

To be a SEN teacher, professional knowledge and skills of SNE were undoubtedly identified by the interviewees as the foremost important competence. The

whole package of knowledge and skills required for the SEN teaching profession appears to involve various spheres. In Linda's view, for example, a sufficient understanding of theories and practices of learning, learning difficulties, learning methods, and pedagogy is critically important:

> I think during my experience that the knowledge of this how pupil learn and what of … what do you … what means this … what are those barriers … in the learning process … I think that this most important to know what is the learning process and what are the barriers in each … and how can we … give away these barriers … so … what we are learning? We are leaning about some … some vocational things, or some … academical skills or … that means nothing but learning process knowledge is very important. (Linda)

However, for Katri, professional knowledge and skills cover more than merely learning and teaching within school; instead, they have much to do with different life skills that are necessary for the students' lives as a whole. More specifically, since IVET plays a vital role in improving employability, in addition to other vocational or general subjects, SEN teachers should also have the professional knowledge and skills to teach work-related competences, such as applying for jobs and workplace etiquette. In this sense, some basic understanding of work lives in other fields than education seems essential for SEN teachers:

> The SEN-teacher in the vocational education needs to see also the needs … that … the companies … the working life […] needs to know what skills the work life … wants all the students have … but sometimes the SEN students need to train those skills more. […] Like talking to people, sometimes it's not easy for a SEN student to express themselves … but if you want to get a job, you have to know what to say about yourself, that's just one example. […] And they … they can cope in life, they can have a good life, they can … if they have their graduation, they can make most of it, they have the skills, they don't have to … they know how to get a job, how to make a CV, how to talk to people, how to shake hands with people. […] That's I think the most important. (Katri)

Desirable Personality Traits

Parallel with professional knowledge and skills, desirable personality traits are also integral to making SEN teachers competent. According to Jonna, three personality traits are crucial: calmness, flexibility, and sociability. In her definition, calmness implies that teachers should not easily lose their temper because SEN teaching work is deemed very demanding and challenging. Flexibility is needed because the contents and progress of SEN teaching work vary with not only students' situations but also other teachers' expectations and requirements. As SEN teachers are constantly and continuously interacting with students, internal workmates, and external professionals in their work, sociability matters greatly as well so that tasks can be accomplished collaboratively.

> I think you have to be peaceful[calm], and flexible, and social. […] you have to work with many many people. […] Other teachers, and … and other professionals, and many kinds of students. […] So you have to have good social skills. […] As you behave peacefully, you don't … you don't get angry of little thing. […] [As for flexibility,] it's important in two ways. For example, when students have different problems, so they have also different days. Someday you can … you can make a lot of work, but someday

> if students have a bad day, so you can't … do tasks as much. […] And flexibility is also important when you … you have to cooperate a lot with other teachers. (Jonna)

Moreover, Laura pointed out two other desirable personality traits: honesty and equality. She believes that not every school in Finland has true equality for each student with SEN. Some schools have very supportive systems, but others do not. Therefore, as an educational practitioner, equality values should be emphasised and embraced by SEN teachers:

> Characters … well, maybe those what I said earlier, honesty and … and equality, I think those are important. […] In ammattikoulu[vocational school] […] it is so different in colleges, some colleges may have … may have the systems quite good, but other colleges don't have any kind of systems to support the special … special needs students, so it is very different between the colleges. (Laura)

Good Social Skills

Good social skills were also mentioned many times in the interviews and are highly valued by the teachers as a decisive competence required for the SEN teaching profession. For Niina and Suvi, social skills are the foundation/prerequisite of SEN teachers' work. After all, without establishing a proper teacher-student relationship through good social skills, no effective learning can be sparked. Also, good social skills are manifested through a teacher's ability to value each student's individuality. This implies that teachers must have the ability to embrace and respect the way students are, postpone judgement, and allow students to develop at their own pace. In addition to students, the same respect should be given to colleagues. The SEN teaching profession encompasses all manner of cooperation with internal workmates. Therefore, good social skills, such as expressing genuine appreciation for other teachers' contributions, were definitely recommended:

> Perhaps the most important is that skills of social interaction, because that's the basic thing, after that, you can build other … other things. But if you haven't that social good … good relationship with kids … or young people, you don't manage in your work. And also your colleagues, if you are consulting your colleagues, you have … you must value also her or his skills, and also him as a … people … human … you must appreciate that every human. […] because if you have … you have very bad relationship, you can't teach. In the classroom, you can't teach at all. (Niina)

> I think the … the … what is 'vuorovaikutus'[interaction] […] how you are interacting with the students and with the colleagues. […] like … yeah, kind of like respect you can see shows in that interaction […] but also the thinking more widely that you don't make … assumptions […] you let the students to be what they are, not … making … not trying to make them … something else what they are not kind of thing … so you are respecting them as they are. (Suvi)

However, this is not equal to the notion that SEN teachers are always 'Mr/Miss/Ms Yes/Nice' who try not to offend anybody. Instead, from Katri's point of view, being strict is also one of the social skills that SEN teachers need to acquire to help students learn boundaries and encourage them to challenge themselves:

> I think SEN teacher needs to be very straight[strict] … with the SEN student, in a good way, straight. (Katri)

Sofia echoed this view on good social skills. She recognises the significance of "being there", and she makes sure to give students an impression that she will be there for them whenever they need help or someone to listen to them. The need to convey such a message to students might be because students with SEN have lower self-esteem and tend to feel insecure, which makes them, in a sense, more dependent on SEN teachers intellectually and emotionally. In the students' minds, SEN teachers are the ones whom they can seek assistance from and share thoughts and feelings with. SEN teachers' presence means a lot to students with SEN not only in their learning but also in their personal lives. It is no wonder, then, that Katri regards the skills of raising students' confidence as very important in SEN teachers' work:

> Maybe it's the social skills, how you interact with people, that's the most important. So … listening skills, like I said before, and then just … living in the moment, that's the most important, I think. […] Because special needs students are very … insecure about themselves, they need a lot of support, and … self-esteem is very low, so you need to kind of … 'be there' for them, and they need your time and your listen … you listen to them, and you kind of … you need to help them all the time … with all kinds of things, not just the school work, but with their own lives, and their relationships and … everything with … whatever is there … diagnosis, and whatever is […] in their lives, you have to kind of help them with that. (Sofia)

> SEN teacher is a teacher that … lifts up the … the SEN students' confidence … for themselves … that … that's one point … that I see very important. (Katri)

Synergy of SNE Competences

Although professional knowledge and skills, desirable personality traits, and good social skills, as three key elements constituting a competent SEN teacher, were presented separately in the previous sections, they are inseparable and need to be considered as an integral competence because nearly every task in the SEN teaching profession requires the synergy of these three sets of competences. Hilla mentioned that the most important competence is being able to understand students' diversity and explain it to other teachers. It would appear that only 'professional knowledge and skills' and 'social skills' are needed, but in fact, a desirable personality trait, such as flexibility, is also necessary. More specifically, if a SEN teacher wants to know a student in a holistic way, many aspects are involved. First, the teacher needs to have a profound knowledge of learning, learning difficulties, learning methods, the student's strengths and weaknesses, and his or her individual ways of learning or doing. Such knowledge is acquired not simply through textbooks or research articles but also through the teacher's personal contact with the student out of genuine concern. This genuine concern cannot be expressed without good social skills, such as empathy and listening, and a flexible personality that embraces diversity. While on the subject of communicating with other teachers about the student's situation, again, social skills, such as communication and appreciation, and a social and calm personality are required so that a certain consensus and collaboration can be reached:

I think that it's to understand dissimilarity[diversity]. […] to understand dissimilarity and try to explain it to other teachers or whoever it is. […] Dissimilarity … like … like people are different, and … the students that need special education, for example, they are somehow different from others, and so that … difference I try to … I want to understand it and try to explain why this student is like that, and what … he or she is needed. […] we are different, and we have to accept it, and not to try make one similar. (Hilla)

Just as Katri shared, the most important competence for the SEN teaching profession is the ability to "see the whole situation", which implies an integral and comprehensive competence. Thus, the knowledge and skills required for teaching some subjects, as well as the professional support provided based on a thorough and all-round comprehension of the student as a person in terms of time and space, is of more significance. Such a holistic competence is a synergy of the interacting, intertwining, and interweaving of the competences of professional knowledge and skills, desirable personality traits, and good social skills:

It's to see the … how situation of the student … it's … I don't think the most important competence is to … how to teach … reading or writing or math or languages, it's to … it's to focus on that … that … vocational education is … is just a one step to … for the young people, for the student, to get a work … to get the job, and to get the good life, I think … it's … the most important competence of the SEN-teacher in VET is to see the … the whole situation of the young people, not just the … the … the subjects. […] I think the SEN-teacher needs to see, as you said, the whole … whole thing. (Katri)

Summary: Overall, the findings presented in this section suggest that three professional competences are crucial to the SEN teaching profession: professional knowledge and skills, desirable personality traits, and good social skills. These three important competences are inseparable and should be seen as one comprehensive competence that should be demonstrated in SEN teachers' work according to the context. Figure 10 illustrates the competences required for the SEN teaching profession.

SEN Teaching Profession Competence
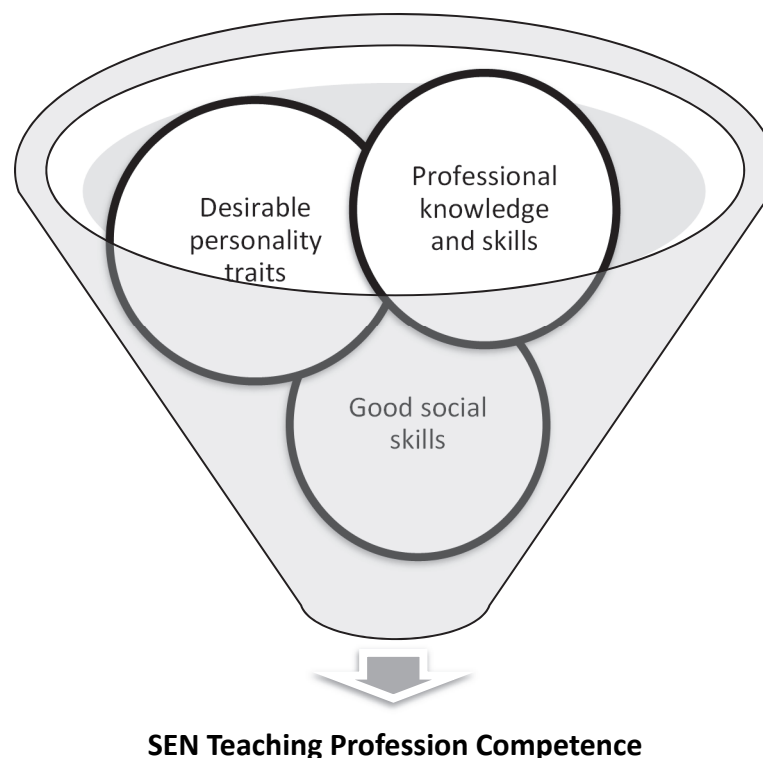
FIGURE 10   Competences required for the SEN teaching profession

6.1.3   What Makes an Incompetent SEN Teacher

After asking the teachers what the most important SEN competences are, I also inquired about what situations they would consider make a SEN teacher 'incompetent'. Quite similarly, the idea of an 'incompetent SEN teacher' can be based on the interviews and examined in terms of the three aspects that were mentioned earlier: professional knowledge, skills, and ethics; personality traits; and social skills.

Unprofessional Knowledge, Skills, and Ethics

Again, fundamentally, without adequate professional knowledge and skills, a SEN teacher was seen as incompetent. For example, in Hilla and Suvi's view, since teaching general or vocational subjects is part of the SEN teachers' work in inclusive vocational schools, either corresponding pedagogical competences in certain fields should be acquired or, at least, related experiences need to be gained so that some vocational or general knowledge and skills can be properly taught to students with SEN:

> At least when teacher … SEN-teacher doesn't have the knowledge of the field … or is … unqualified in the field. […] You can't help the student in professional subjects, so you are then inefficient, unqualified. (Hilla)

> Not necessary profession, but not any kind of experience … so I would have the experience like … or doing something that I would know that really world, then, yes, maybe, I would be … a right teacher perhaps. (Suvi)

Furthermore, according to Niina, incompetent SEN teachers are those who depreciate the pedagogical knowledge and skills they have learned and who overemphasise students' individual 'deficiencies' from a medical angle. Beyond question, it is important to understand students' limited and inadequate abilities, but what matters more is valuing each student's individuality and embracing their skills and strengths:

> Because we have pedagogical skills and knowledge, we have to trust them, not so much the diagnosis and those medical diagnosis, it's part of the work, but not concentrating only on them. […] The whole student, every skills and strengths, and we can see them the whole person. I think if you are having only small part of that student, it's so inefficient. (Niina)

However, professional knowledge and skills, in Anna's opinion, are not merely what teachers acquire in preservice education but also what they continually develop during their SEN teaching career. That is, as long as a SEN teacher is content with his or her old ways of teaching, as long as the main purpose of his or her teaching is nothing more than getting students to pass exams, or as long he/she is unwilling to update his or her expertise in line with students' diverse needs, in Anna's definition, such a teacher is categorised as an incompetent educational practitioner:

> Maybe a person who don't want to teach. […] The main thing is just to pass the test […], not to get any understanding or any leaning to happen. […] If the … teacher don't try to find or figure out different ways, and … always do the same method with the same … different kind of people, I think that … that it is not so good thing … but maybe it's … in a way, inefficient. (Anna)

Unlike in 6.1.2 "What Makes a Competent SEN Teacher", in addition to professional knowledge and skills, professional ethics of the SEN teaching profession were explicitly pointed out when the teachers talked about their personal criteria of ' incompetent SEN teachers'. For example, Katri thinks that SEN teachers should never give up on their students. If the professional knowledge and skills are insufficient for dealing with students' difficulties, teachers should keep learning and developing their SEN expertise instead of ceasing to try to find possible solutions to solve students' problems. In a word, a SEN teacher who backs down from helping students is an incompetent teacher:

> I think in … in circumstances where … if … if we give up with some students, that's … inefficient for a SEN teacher. […] You don't have to know everything, you don't have to have every methods, you can find our more and more, and you can … as a teacher, you can learn more methods … how to work with students, I don't think that's inefficiency. (Katri)

Undesirable Personality Traits

There were a few undesirable personality traits the teachers mentioned in the interviews that made a teacher incompetent. First, a "self-centred" SEN teacher was viewed as incompetent. The idea of self-centredness manifests in two ways: the relationship with students and the relationship with other colleagues or the school as a whole. When it comes to the relationship with students, according to Päivi, Sofia, and Anna, SEN teachers should "see the students" rather than merely focusing on giving good instruction. By way of explanation, the SEN teaching profession is not 'teacher expertise-centred' but 'student needs-centred'. How students feel and think count much more than what teachers themselves plan to teach.

> Incompetent teachers are self-centred and looking someone to look up her or him … it's more like … personality … thing … not professional competence. (Päivi)

> You have the qualification, but still you don't really see the students. (Sofia)

> Some teachers just do that, they have good ideas, they teach well but they don't take care of that … students understand what he or she is doing. (Anna)

Speaking about the relationship with other colleagues or the school as a whole, Niina said that SEN teachers should not just focus on their group of students and ignore other workmates or the furtherance of the whole inclusive system of the school. In Niina's view, socialising with and providing professional advice to other teachers is also part of SEN teachers' work. In a broader sense, through such interaction some common sense of SNE can be shared so that a better SNE system will more likely be developed:

> I think if … if he or she is concentrating or focus only in his or her own group, only special group, not consult, meet colleague. […] [and] not … what's that … developing the special education system. I think he must have or she must have larger view of special education, and also developing the whole school system, not only my group, these are my students. (Niina)

The second undesirable personal trait brought up by the teachers was "impatience", which also implied "less flexibility". Tackling different students' diverse difficulties is one of the major tasks SEN teachers undertake every day. Therefore, to a certain degree, SEN teachers are expected to be more flexible and patient about students' diversity. This indicates, according to Päivi and Laura, that it would be difficult for a SEN teacher to truly understand students' needs if he/she were quick-tempered and not calm. Such a personality trait inevitably would not only cloud a SEN teacher's professional judgement regarding students' situations but also become a barrier to making sure that students really succeed in learning:

> You have to be personality […] and … long-term […] peaceful […] if you have a … if you are peaceful, you … it's easier to … to hear what the students need […] not show temperate[temper]. (Päivi)

> If she or he … don't have understanding toward different kind of people, and has to be tolerant to watch different kind of students, I think that's important … you can't expect the same things from every student, but you have to see the student as a person. […] I think so, especially when you … you teach special students who have special needs. (Laura)

The third undesirable personality trait for the SEN teaching profession that concerned the teachers was 'soullessness', or 'no passion for teaching'. As Jonna said "the work doesn't come from your heart" for an incompetent SEN teacher. As Suvi shared from her own teaching experiences, a teacher can be fully qualified and adequately fulfil his or her daily duties, but without the passion for teaching, he/she will be like a teaching robot that merely transmits knowledge and not a real educator who truly cares about the development of students:

> If you are not motivated anymore like … you don't care … if you just go to work, and … and … and do the teaching but not think how the student would understand, then it's not very good teaching. […] Like I have one experience of that […] I have the same power point for different groups … maybe 6 or 5 groups studying same things so, so I knew already was coming next and remember everything, and then I started to listen to myself, and realized that … that my mouth was still talking […] I was thinking how should I end this because my mouth was still talking, so then it's not very good teaching, I should think about what I teach, how do they understand me? […] That's really like … awful experience. (Suvi)

Poor Social Skills

In addition to lacking professional knowledge, skills, and ethics, and desirable personality traits, Suvi and Sofia both think that inadequate social interaction skills are another aspect of an incompetent SEN teacher. In their view, social skills are beneficial not just to teaching but also to bolstering students' confidence. As presented in the last section, Suvi is aware of losing her teaching passion. She has realised that proper social interaction with students during teaching is very important. Such interaction involves, for example, eye contact and listening. To Sofia, social skills are integral to raising students' self-esteem. From the poor example she provided, it is not difficult to understand how much the power of language used by SEN teachers could influence the lives and minds of students with SEN:

> Teachers should really have the … they should really care that do the student understand, not just teach. […] That you have to … like be in interaction with the student all the time. (Suvi)

> [In my workplace, there is a teacher.] I don't think she should be dealing with the students, because she is not helping … helping them … to feel better, because she is yielding at them […] The students said that they don't understand her at all, because the way she speaks and she is always very angry. (Sofia)

Examination Based on Context

Despite the fact that SEN teachers' incompetence results from insufficient professional knowledge, skills, and ethics, undesirable personality traits, and inadequate social interaction skills that mostly focus on the SEN teacher him/herself,

Linda and Anna gave a very different perspective on this matter when I interviewed them. They see the incompetence of SEN teachers as a relative idea that needs to be examined according to the context. On the one hand, when a SEN teacher does not have enough support from internal workmates, getting work done properly is challenging. In this sense, in the eyes of others at the workplace, this teacher might be considered incompetent. On the other hand, it is not rational to ask a teacher to accept all blame for students' failures and label him or her as incompetent. In addition, SEN teachers sometimes make some small changes in students' lives that are not easily measured. Therefore, when examining whether a SEN teacher is incompetent, his or her professional competence, desirable personality traits, and adequate social skills, contextual factors, such as school atmosphere and the diversity of students, also need to be taken into consideration:

> I think that … depends on teacher his or her own skills, but also about this … atmosphere in this school, if the other personnel or teachers and leaders are not ... are not … appreciate this work, or … if the … school is not … respect special needs … or if personnel can't see these special needs at all, still … it would be impossible to be a special education teacher there. (Linda)

> It's not always the teachers' problem that the students don't learn. […] How you measure if a teacher is good or not, it's quite difficult. […] Somebody is very poor students … and have a bad attitude, and bad self-image, and you … you can change her … the student's attitude, you change […] I think that's a good job … because you can make some difference in that student. (Anna)

Summary: Echoing the findings presented in the previous section, professional knowledge, skills, and ethics, desirable personality traits, and adequate social interaction skills also play significant roles in examining whether a SEN teacher is incompetent. Nevertheless, when considering this matter, some contextual factors should not be excluded. In other words, the incompetence of a SEN teacher is not defined simply based on the teacher him/herself. It needs to be explored from a more holistic angle in terms of school administration and diverse student development. Figure 11 shows the different aspects adopted to define the incompetence of SEN teachers.

Context

Undesirable personality traits

Unprofessional knowledge, skills, ethics

Poor social interaction skills

SEN Teachers' Incompetence
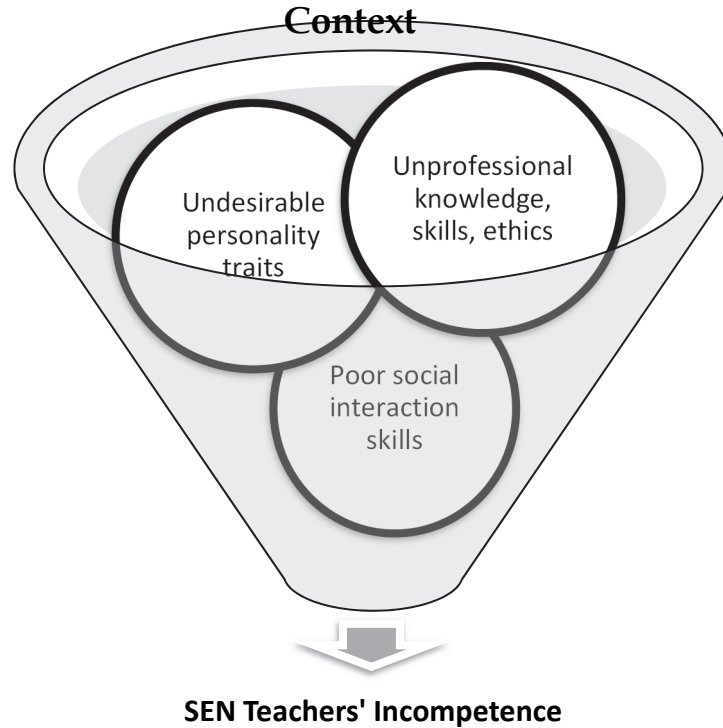
FIGURE 11   Aspects of examining SEN teachers' incompetence

6.2   SEN Teachers' Ups and Downs

To better understand the nature of SEN teachers' work, in the interviews, I asked the teachers to share their experiences of work-related happiness, frustration, and stress and how they kept motivated and enthusiastic in their work despite the frustrations and stresses. Therefore, the following parts of this section will describe in greater detail the ups and downs in SEN teachers' work lives.

6.2.1   Happiness

The SEN teaching profession tends to be considered very demanding and challenging. However, there are always some moments that 'recharge' SEN teachers. When the teachers were recalling and sharing their work experiences in response to the interview question "What is the most wonderful experience you have ever had as a SEN teacher in VET?", their entire faces spontaneously beamed with happiness and appreciation of their work. Maybe it was not easy for each teacher to name one specific incident during the interviews, but it appeared that their work was well paved with various little memorable pleasures:

> There is not big thing, there is many small things that you see that somebody figures out that 'ok, it was not so bad, it was not so difficult.' And … I enjoy the small things … because I see them quite often … so I can't say what is … what is the one big thing. (Anna)

Among those wonderful memories, most of them are directly relevant to students, the major group of people SEN teachers engage with on a daily basis, and some of them were about students' parents. The data analysis identified three student-related experiences that the teachers found memorable: students successfully/eventually managing their studies, students happily living their lives, and students sincerely showing their gratitude to the teachers.

Students Successfully/Eventually Managing Their Studies
It is not difficult to understand that students with SEN encounter more challenges in managing their studies. For example, learning difficulties or social problems can slow down students' progress in VET programmes or even hinder them from fulfilling the criteria of graduation. Hence, helping students cope with various kinds of difficulties throughout their study journey brings a certain sense of achievement to the teachers:

> I think the best or most wonderful experiences have been when … when student who had a lot of social problems and … so she couldn't study in the class at all, but we get her graduated. So that was really … that was really great moment. (Jonna)

> I think it's … when I get some student to study more and try harder … if … if, [for] example, he has … or she has some issues in studying, don't want to study or so, and I get him to motivate … to have more motivation toward studies, so that's maybe. (Laura)

Apart from Jonna and Laura, some teachers talked about more specific incidents in their teaching careers. Niina mentioned one student in her class who she thought would have a difficult time in the IVET programme but successfully completed his study in the end. Although Niina did not give further details about how she assisted the student, she was apparently filled with true happiness at seeing her student 'survive' remarkably well in the vocational school:

> I had very challenging boy, and I was very afraid and unsure how he is managing in vocational education. That was the best experience that he managed quite well […] That was very … one of the very good experience. (Niina)

Another teacher, Sofia, also shared how one of the most wonderful memories in her teaching career was helping a student who had a knife phobia overcome the fear:

> I got a girl to use knife, even though she is much afraid of using knife, and she can't even touch the knife, then … I was just talking to her, and she kind of relaxed, and then she was … cutting an onion. (Sofia)

She burst out laughing right after replying to the interview question because she probably realised that, to many, how funny this example of "cutting an onion" could be. Nevertheless, in the interview, I could not help but sense her great joy about making some fundamental change in her student's life.

Since learning difficulty is one of the major issues SEN teachers tackle in schools, two teachers, Linda and Anna, shared experiences of handling students'

learning problems, especially in the field of mathematics. Linda once met a student who suffered so greatly from the experience of trying to learn mathematics that she also had to deal with the student's emotional reactions, which were tangled with past unpleasant memories. With Linda's very supportive attitude and well-organised individualised instruction, this student plucked up the "courage" to study mathematics again and succeeded in her study, which, according to Linda, turned out to be "the best highlight" in Linda's teaching career. Anna has also experienced this attitudinal change in students regarding learning mathematics. In her case, after a few weeks of conversation with a student who used to consider learning mathematics 'a mission impossible', Anna noticed an intrinsic change in the student's attitude towards learning this challenging subject. Even though Anna seemed to be not much needed by the student anymore in the matter of mathematics, she felt quite satisfied with the result she successfully achieved:

> Some years ago, I have … I had an adult student who has big problems with mathematics, and I taught her mathematics and this medicine counting […] Usually people have also bad emotional experiences with this, and also this woman has had … bad … bad memories about … learning mathematics and … for example, she cried a lot during our session […]she said that … she … she … she have … had … been many years to go to practical nurse school, but she hadn't had any … courage … rohkeus [Translation: bravery] … no courage to come because she has been so afraid of this mathematical […] she had heard that we have … find system to teach this mathematical problems, and so she have courage … come … she go to our school, and … and … get this […] test well, so … this have … have … perhaps the best highlight in my … career in this school. (Linda)

> The one thing was that what I already told you that the … boy that said … thought mathematics was impossible for him, and … he wanted to talk, and after a few weeks, he said to me that … that … I should be quite that he can do the mathematics … and … that … that means that the change was happened inside him. (Anna)

Students Happliy Living Their Lives

In addition to students' successfully/eventually managing their studies, the teachers said they are brought much happiness whenever they find that their students contentedly lead their lives. This may not have much to do with the teachers' teaching or assistance itself, but knowing students are enjoying each moment of their lives really pleases the teachers. Sofia said, "It's always nice when students are happy." This view was echoed by Suvi, who admitted that she used to have the stereotype that people with disabilities cannot have lives without feeling miserable. However, after witnessing the reality of her students' lives, which are full of simple pleasures, she no longer feels sorry about their disabilities but is happy for them:

> Oh, yes, the most wonderful experience was when I actually started to work as a SEN-teacher. […] I went to work at one of my students' flat, like they lived there at school at that time, and he had woke up, and he was hovering the floor there, and singing, so some of music on the background, he was so happy … that I felt like … like when I realized that … also my students can have really happy life. […] Earlier I probably … I felt sorry for them that they are … they are disabled, but after that, I didn't feel sorry anymore because I felt that … that they have very happy life. (Suvi)

Furthermore, from the VET perspective, having a 'happy' life also implies employment. At least in Niina's view, "it's very important to the young people if […] they be employed, […] and also the employment is part of 'good' life, and that's why […] most of special needs pupils they went to vocational education." Therefore, it also gladdened the teachers whenever they helped students better transition from schools to the labour market with all kinds of support organised and provided through IVET:

> The best experience is when the student comes in, and they have special needs, or he or she has special needs, and we make the planning for the studies, and … and everything goes as planned […] I … I love to see when … when the life … although the difficulties, when the life goes on, and they … they seem to get … a good life with a profession that … and … and … workplace, a job. (Katri)

Students Sincerely Showing Their Gratitude to the Teachers

The third facet the teachers mentioned regarding wonderful experiences in their SEN teaching careers was students sincerely showing their gratitude to them. Although not all the teachers explicitly mentioned this aspect, it is self-evident that the positive feedback given by the students helps the teachers find their work rewarding. Students' gratitude can be expressed verbally or by gift giving, either of which means a great deal to the teachers and creates sweet memories in their teaching careers:

> It's a spring celebration with my first group where I am a teacher … I was … go to group for 2 years, and they can get me with their values, gift, and celebration words. (Päivi)

> It's always nice when students […] tell you that […] they like you, and you are a good teacher … those are the good experiences. (Sofia)

Students' Parents Expressing Heartfelt Appreciation

The appreciation of students' parents was also viewed as one of the most wonderful experiences in the teachers' work lives. This was probably not something the teachers sought in the beginning when they decided to become SEN teachers, but for example, in Hilla's case, the unexpected thanks given by a student's mother was indeed a memorable moment that made her day:

> Unexpected thanks [given from the student's mother], so … you think you haven't done anything, you haven't been able to help the student, and you hear that … it is been … you have been for great help […] She came to talk to me, and then she was so happy and full of expectations, and this has happened several times according to her mother. (Hilla)

Students: "You Saved My Life!" Teacher: "Those Things I Did Were Small Things."

Regardless of those abovementioned wonderful experiences the teachers had in their work, they, inspiringly and respectfully, perceived their contributions towards students and the students' parents in a very humble way. In their eyes, what they did was just their bounden duty. Sometimes they even were not so sure if they could really do anything helpful, but they had the willing heart to

listen and offer necessary assistance. Maybe the teachers could not clearly remember what kind of help they once gave, but students and their parents will never forget the positive influences the teachers have brought to their lives:

> One study counsellor called me, and I answered, and he … she told that, asked that 'Do you remember the boy name?' like that, yes, I remember, I remember because we had also very big problems, and problem-solving all the time, and that … study counsellor told that this son is telling that you have saved his life, and that also big, because those things what I [did] with him was small things, talking and helping, and … and also very big difficulties, but … but he felt that it was big thing in his life. (Niina)

Summary: In this section, the teachers' wonderful experiences at work were exemplified with their interactions with students and students' parents. Although to students and students' parents, the teachers seemingly have done them great favours, in the eyes of the teachers, they have just offered their 'two mites' to help students succeed. Figure 12 shows the factors contributing to the teachers' happiness.
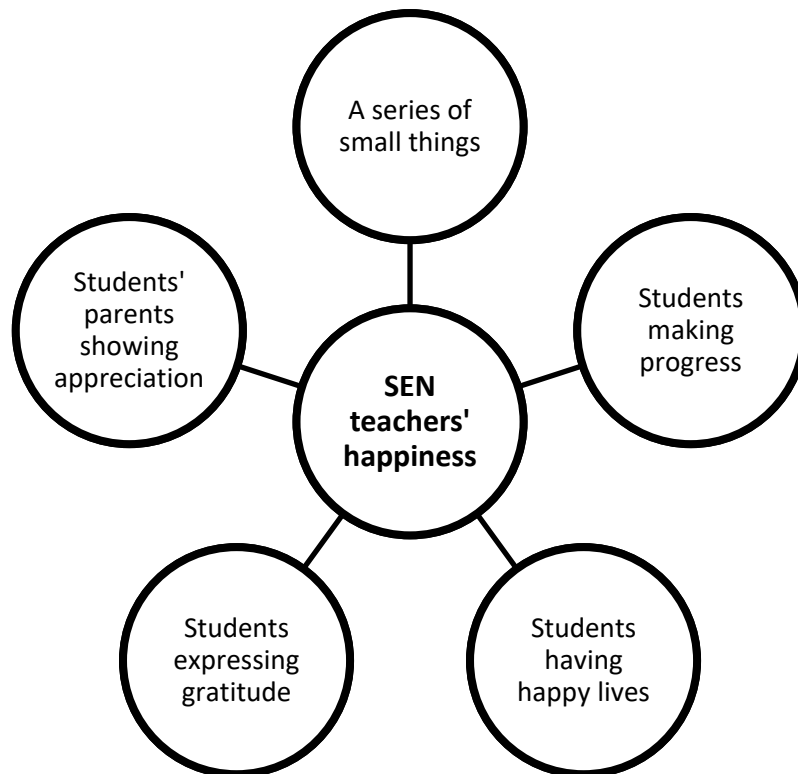
FIGURE 12   Factors contributing to SEN teachers' happiness

6.2.2   Frustration

As the main factor contributing to SEN teachers' happiness at work, students also play significant roles in making the teachers feel down. Students' lack of motivation to change appeared to greatly frustrate the teachers. According to Jonna's

experiences, she finds it very difficult to help someone with, for example, substance abuse problems, overcome their addiction if he/she has no strong motivation to change:

> Supporting alcohol and drug abusing students […] you don't know … does it help at all, if … if student doesn't want … he or she still wants use this … so everything depends on their motivation, you can have many many professionals around the table, but if students by him or she person doesn't want to stop, so it doesn't matter what do you say or what do you do, that's why most frustrating also. (Jonna)

The lack of motivation to change also manifests in students not appreciating the resources prepared for them, which the teachers find very discouraging. In Anna's case, she is quite bothered by students' irresponsible behaviours of not showing up to the scheduled learning sessions. In her view, when students do not adhere to the timetable agreed upon between them and the teachers so that they can successfully finish their study, they are not only dishonest with themselves but also seriously jeopardise the study rights of others who are in great need of special support. With limited and costly SEN resources, Anna bears a realistic hope of providing her professional services more effectively to students who really have the motivation to get help:

> The most frustrating thing is that when there is a somebody, a student, that … is going to graduate, and we give this person a curriculum that he make … you can come on Monday from 8 to 12, and we can finish this one, or you can come on other day for this lesson, and this student don't show up … because sleep too late or … I didn't fancy to come to study … that makes … frustration very high … because when we take … we give a lesson, somebody else can't come to that lesson … and … and that shows that they don't have any […] respect or … I mean that they don't have any … they don't take responsibilities of their own studies … and how they can … graduate to a … professional worker, if you don't take any responsibility of your own behaviour? (Anna)

In addition to the aforementioned problems, such as students' substance abuse or the lack of appreciation for SEN resources, the lack of study motivation sometimes has a direct relation to the nature of students' diagnosed neurobiological deficits. For example, Sofia mentioned that being unable to sufficiently deal with students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) makes her seethe with frustration. It is empirically proven that ASD is characterised by persistent difficulties in social communication. The challenges regarding proper social communication that Sofia experienced in interacting with a student with ASD greatly impeded her teaching progress. However, in the end, she learned to recognise her own limits and accept the reality that only very slow progress can be achieved in teaching this student. Laura has also experienced similar poor teacher-student social connections that negatively affect students' learning. She has felt frustrated when she could not better solve students' problems due to not having a good rapport with them:

> I have met one student, who was not willing to talk to me at all, and he didn't even want to look at me, so he was like this … always, so that's very challenging and very difficult situation, because you can't really teach a student or get him to do anything unless he is willing … so that's difficult … It was … it was Autismi. […] You have to

> kind of … think about yourself too, because that's something you can't change, you just have to accept it. (Sofia)

> If you don't get connection to some student, you … there are problems and you can't solve them … I mean between you and the student, and the teaching and the studying don't … go … go on … and … the student doesn't get the … grades and so on, the studies don't go on. (Laura)

Unlike in section 6.2.1 when teachers shared that parents' appreciation brings them happiness, students' parents are not among the reasons for the teachers' job dissatisfaction. Instead, it seems that internal workmates largely attribute to the teachers' feeling discouraged at their work. In the interviews, colleagues' negative attitudes towards students with SEN were frequently mentioned. From some teachers' perspectives, this attitude was even more frustrating than students' problems:

> If you try to help some student, and try to speak to a teacher, try to get him to understand the special needs, and nothing helps, it's frustrating. (Hilla)

> When … when my college … when the other teachers are … are not … they don't have belief in some students … they give up, and I … I have to … I have … I have to hold up the students, and then I have to hold up my colleagues … Yeah … that is very very frustrating. (Katri)

Based on Niina's observation, even though only "a quite small number of teachers" had a negative attitude towards students with SEN, the differences in expectations of students between "normal teachers" and SEN teachers are formed as result of divergent ideologies of teaching and learning. Outwardly, some teachers value 'equality' and have no objection against it, but inwardly they conclude students' failure in study to be a result of their 'laziness' rather than difficulties they cannot yet cope with well. Niina stated that, though she has been communicating with her workmates about various views on students' learning, she has realised that this kind of 'negative attitude' inevitably has created barriers to the development of inclusive education in her school:

> Perhaps because of the education and experience, they can't see more points of view. I think if you are … you are asking from the normal teacher, do they emphasize that 'equality', they tell you 'yes, yes, of course.' But in the … some certain case, perhaps they can't see that … that point of view […] Perhaps that … that … most … most of the teachers they … they do very good work, and they are good teachers, but they … perhaps they don't see some things that we … about … our education and experience, but we see, and we try to explain them. (Niina)

The negative attitude taken by other teachers is also embodied in their uncooperative tendency at work. Sofia mentioned that an "unfriendly" teacher at her workplace made her work and the entire team, especially when it came to collaboration, very difficult and stressful. In Sofia's view, coopering with other teachers is the very nature of the SEN teaching profession, and it should occur on a regular basis. Therefore, a teacher without team spirit could seriously jeopardise the team dynamic and students' study rights:

> I put down 'working with unfriendly teachers' … so that's the most stressful, because you have to … to cooperate with other teachers all the time […] The same teacher I was telling you […] picking on other teachers and students, so … she made the work very difficult. (Sofia)

Among the internal workmates, those in charge appear to account for the teachers' frustration as well. Päivi and Linda feel quite frustrated when they are not supported and appreciated by their supervisors. At Päivi's workplace, the supervisor's changeable manner in decision-making have led Päivi work to struggle with, for example, scheduling students' study activities. In addition, insufficient autonomy due to the lack of appreciation shown by her supervisor for her profession have made Päivi experience considerable difficulties at work. This 'lack of appreciation', in Linda's view, probably results from that the supervisor not having proper understanding or sound knowledge of SNE. Although teachers in Finland are commonly known for having high professional autonomy, the teachers in this research, at least, have suffered greatly because their work and expertise are not positively valued by those in managerial positions in their schools:

> I think it's … [supervisor] … that lack of appreciations. […] So he or she doesn't … value your work as a SEN-teacher. […] For example, if I … have a plan … some week or someday, my boss come and say me, no, no, you … you can't do this, this, or … you have to go there, or there, and do something else what I already manage for this group. […] My boss is a … don't understand how important it's … give a … a good plan for special group. (Päivi)

> All these moments when my leaders can't understand special education needs in our school … all these situations … when leaders made … by my mind bad … decisions. (Linda)

In addition to students and colleagues, the work itself took the blame for unpleasant moments in SEN teachers' work. Maybe it could have been foreseeable before embarking on this career path, but to some extent, the reality of 'what you reap is not exactly what you sow' has still disheartened the teachers. Unexpected incidents or students' special needs can slow down a work in progress or, even worse, mean that the teachers' efforts eventually are all in vain. Suvi mentioned that sometimes it not only takes a great deal of time for her to repeatedly explain certain ideas to students with SEN but also requires great patience to wait and see if any harvest can be gathered later, which inevitably increases the likelihood of her experiencing 'psychic suffering'. In addition, too much paperwork is, in Tuulia's case, another factor that causes SEN teachers' frustration, which drains much of her time and energy at work:

> I guess it's like when you come … put a lot of effort to … some project or something, and it doesn't go through … then … but on the other hand, like all the projects have gone through, it just have taken … little bit longer time … yeah … and sometimes like when I have … a student … who I need to explain many many many time same thing … over and over again … it's … it's not the most frustrating, it's a little bit frustrating … that happens like every day. (Suvi)

> Liikaa täytettäviä kaavakkeita. [Translation: too many fill-in forms.] (Tuulia)

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Summary: To conclude, three factors, as presented in Figure 13, lead to teachers' frustration at work: students, internal workmates, and the work itself. More specifically, the teachers suffer from students' lack of motivation, colleagues' negative attitudes, supervisors' lack of appreciation, uncertain work outcomes, and heavy workloads.
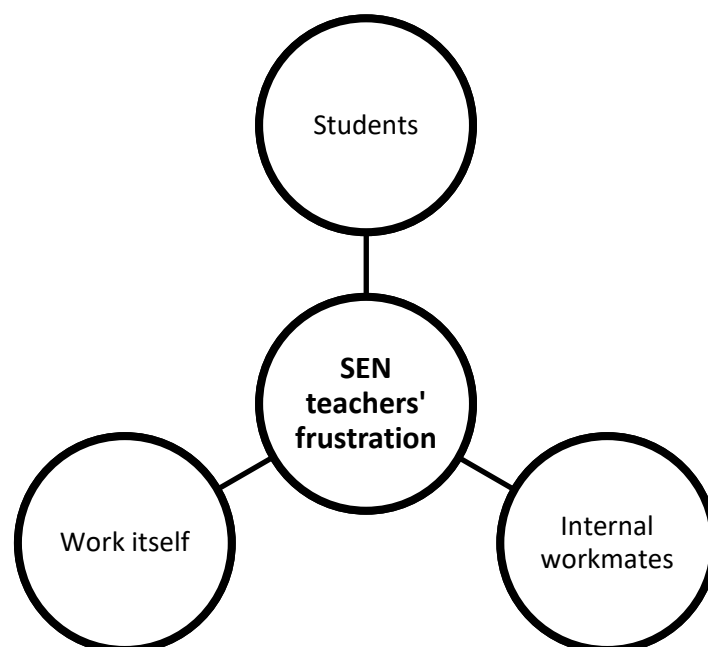
FIGURE 13   Factors contributing to SEN teachers' frustration

6.2.3   Stress

Interestingly, although students are one of the main factors that cause the ups and downs for the teachers, they were not explicitly mentioned in relation to teacher stress. Instead, there are four reasons behind the teachers' stress at work: the challenging and demanding nature of SEN teachers' work, confusing SNE policies, the negative attitudes of internal workmates, and the self-reflective teacher him/herself.

Challenging and Demanding Nature of SEN Teachers' Work

Most of the teachers in the interviews mentioned that their stress mostly results from, as Tuulia described it, being very "kiire[busy]" all the time due to limited time and resources. This toil facing the teachers has much to do with the challenging and demanding nature of the SEN teaching profession. More specifically, the diversified nature of the work, such as handling students with varied needs, consumes much of the teachers' time and energy, even though it brings them a great deal of pressure. No matter what the teachers do, their work is inevitably intertwined with fulfilling students' individual needs. In Hilla's case, she finds it very demanding to properly help each student in need because there are no

enough SEN teachers. Even though she tries her best to deal with everyone's problems, she feels that the work is beyond her capability:

> I think that it is the lack of time and resources. […] There are very many students with special needs, and so you can't do so much with one student because you don't have time, and because of the resources … there are too few teachers … SEN-teachers. (Hilla)

As for Laura, the stress comes from the challenge of differentiating her teaching for students with SEN vs students without SEN simultaneously in the inclusive classroom. Anna faces the same complex issue even though she does not have to interact with students without SEN. In her workplace, she experiences mental exhaustion because she has to shift frequently and promptly from one student/problem/subject to another. Also, Anna feels a bit frustrated by the lack of teaching hours to help those in need of special support. The following are more-detailed descriptions about stress related to students' diverse needs from of the two aforementioned teachers:

> Well, maybe in our college, it's … that … special need studiers are in the same class as regular … regular students, so you have to try to … support every … student, and you have to know how to … how can I say … you have to … still have time to these special students, and same time at the regular class and their needs, so it's quite … time-taking and stressful. (Laura)

> In my job, I think it's that … sometimes it's quite busy case, and … in the same lesson, you can have so many different kinds of students, study different subjects. […] If you have four students that have different subjects, you have to be quickly to change your own thoughts, from mathematics to language, and even if there are two people reading English, they can be a different English. […] You go from a student to a student for about two hours, without the break, and you are always changing the subjects, it's quite hard. […] after 2 hours you are quite tired. […] And the other is that … when the period is going on a while, they find in the classroom that somebody is not … getting alone that they need extra help. […] [but] we have a permanent hours, not … I can't do over hours … overwork. […] I have to figure out that how many hours I can take. […] You have to take more students, but there is a limit, you can't take all in. (Anna)

Another diversified characteristic of the SEN teaching profession is embodied in its networking with various individuals. For example, Niina, coordinator for the whole region, is responsible for coordinating the assistance and placement of all students with SEN in this area. Meanwhile, she also needs to work with different institutions, organisations, and professionals to make things work. The stress of interacting with different persons at work is also shared by Suvi. She pointed out that, for example, forwarding information to every colleague concerned or following up on the tasks of other workmates is somewhat wearing. She sometimes finds it quite troublesome and energy-consuming to keep everybody on the same page:

> I had little more [responsibility] […] I was coordinating the whole … whole […] colleges, vocational special needs education. […] My responsible is quite big, and that's why perhaps that it was stressful. […] Also, very many different cooperation partners in basic school, in … employment office, companies, and also in our … in all school, study counsellors, and … and welfare officers, and … and so on. I think that makes that quite hard the work. (Niina)

> You are working with many people, so you have to … the information have to go to everyone, and you have to make sure that everyone knows what they are doing. (Suvi)

Given that SEN teachers' work involves a variety of students, internal workmates, and external professionals/organisations/institutions, it is understandable that part of teachers' pressures inevitably results from the great diversity of challenges at work. According to Jonna, working as a SEN teacher implies that "you work with difficulties all the time. […] in your work, you have difficulties, some kind of difficulties, deeper or lower." The difficulties can be experienced in many ways. Niina, for example, had a period of time when she felt totally burned out. She considerably sacrificed her personal life for the very heavy workload and was extremely fatigued by commuting between different places to provide her professional services:

> Last winter I had two and I have had more two during those years … going from one point to another … every day you have to remember where you are, and carry the computer and books and everything […] and only … coming to and fro … and doing extra work at home, making hours and planning hours, and so … no … nothing real life. (Niina)

The heavy workload was also encountered by Suvi and Linda. In the interviews, I asked the teachers to measure their stress level from 1 to 10, with 1 meaning no stress at all and 10 meaning extreme stress. Suvi and Linda gave 8 and 10, respectively. In Suvi's work, she has many other projects going on along with her SEN teaching work, and periodically, Linda needs to tackle various thorny problems at the same time, which makes both of them feel worn out:

> Um … I think 8. […] I've been in many different project and stuff, it's not just the teacher though … it's quite stressful with lot of things. (Suvi)

> When … when you have much work in the same time, or big problems, or … some … hard situation between teachers and students, or when they are mixing very many things into the situations. (Linda)

Based on what Laura and Anna shared, such a heavy workload can be seasonal. In their workplaces, there are a few months or a specific transition times during each semester that they find more stressful because they have more work to do:

> My teaching hours got to these a few months period almost … there are too much, so it was quite stressful. (Laura)

> And I have to find it out the things that make pressure … there is always when the … period changes. (Anna)

Finally, the challenging and demanding nature of the SEN teaching profession is experienced by the teachers, not surprisingly, in the form of paperwork. As mentioned earlier, SEN teachers' work concerns various factors and persons in terms of time and space, and one of the traditional approaches to managing resources, tracing tasks, and evaluating SNE services is, according to Sofia, through "all kinds of paperwork". To Sofia, teaching students with SEN is not stressful, but

tons of paperwork always brings much pressure. In Suvi's view, although some paperwork is important and necessary, it is still bothersome to be unable to finish it within a very limited time:

> It's usually the 'paperwork', that's the stressful part, teaching is not … usually … sometimes you might … come across with a student that's very difficult, but then when time passes on, it gets easier, but I don't think it's stressful. (Sofia)

> It is important paperwork … I don't know where I would cut it out from the other hand … there is just not enough time for that. (Suvi)

Confusing Educational Policies

In addition to those relatively controllable factors in the workplace that stress out the teachers, such as paperwork and challenging students, some uncontrollable factors in terms of educational policies at the national and institutional levels appear to be the source of the SEN teachers' stress. In Linda's case, she does not experience much stress from her work but from her dealing with an uncertain career future due to government budget cuts in education. That is why, when asked Linda to measure her stress level from 1 to 10 (1= no pressure, 10 = extremely stressful), she said 10:

> The work for itself hasn't been stressive … this special education work … I think that … work stress has been 1 or 2, normal stress, but this confusing situation has had made so much stress for … for our … teachers or … I think this situation is 10 stressing. (Linda)

Katri also pointed out that she is not much stressed by handling students' problems but by something else, particularly the mismanagement of SNE funding. Although Katri did not give any further details about what happens at her workplace, she mentioned that the money applied for providing SNE services is not always exclusively used in the way it should. The school she works for utilises the money for other purposes, which not only limits the resources she could use but also increases her work stress:

> I think it's … it's … it's not the students, it's everything else, it's the … the paperwork … yeah … and … it's the funding … as I said, there are schools that don't use all the … the government money for special education […] you have been certain amount of money, and you have to think what to do with that, and you know there would be more but … but … the college is using it for something else that I think I find that very stressing. (Katri)

Negative Attitudes of Internal Workmates

In addition to the challenging and demanding nature of the SEN teaching profession and the confusing educational policies that cause the teachers great stress, internal workmates' negative attitudes contribute to another source of stress for the SEN teachers. This is because, according to Niina, it takes much effort and a great amount of time to change one's negative attitude towards students with SEN at an inclusive vocational school. As a colleague, Niina's work is much appreciated by her workmates. However, as those who receive Niina's professional

assistance, students with SEN are unfortunately not valued by some staff in the school:

> Other teachers' attitude changing is quite hard and slow. […] Attitudes to me is ok, they appreciate very much my work, but I think that's hard the attitude to students and young people. (Niina)

Based on Niina's observation, regular teachers' negative attitudes probably result from their divergent professional backgrounds. Many vocational teachers in Finnish vocational schools used to work in other industries and then changed their careers to the teaching profession. In their points of view, those students who fail in study are just "lazy". Instead of reflecting on their teaching methods or trying to understand students' difficulties, those teachers tend to blame the students' slow progress on their poor study performance:

> [The teachers] are coming [from] perhaps some companies, new teachers and … they are having teacher education … in the beginning perhaps they are working already, and they are having teacher education and … and they are talking about young students, who are 'lazy' or don't want to do things. […] It's so slow that attitude changing. (Niina)

These teachers' oversimplification of the reasons behind students' poor study performance might be attributed to their lack of sufficient education and their lack of experience being the 'underdogs' or being parents of these students. Without proper education, these teachers do not develop the necessary reflection skills to see students' problems from different angles; without certain lived experiences, they also cannot establish enough empathy for those who desperately struggle with their studies. Therefore, in Niina's view, pre-/in-service teacher education is crucial, which ensures that every teacher has a basic understanding of the students' learning difficulties and their psychological/physical development challenges:

> I think because they haven't that … some of them, they haven't that teacher education yet, they haven't reflected things like that. And perhaps they have manage their own life very well, they have succeeded in their education and studies, they … they don't think that there are some people who can't. […] If they haven't had any experience of working with young people, and if they have don't own children, they think that growing-up children or young people, that isn't their job, they are only teaching the subject […] and very often they think that growing … growing up is like a … that, that's always going higher, but […] sometimes you are growing backwards once step, forward two steps, perhaps 5 steps forward again, again one step backward. (Niina)

Self-Reflective Teacher Him/Herself

All in all, whether the stress comes from the workplace or from educational policies within and outside the school, the teachers care about what they do and take their work seriously. Their reflective attitude drives the teachers to get their work done and improve what they do. They care so much about students, the inclusive atmosphere in schools, and the relevant policies concerning students' rights that they inevitably experience great stress on their shoulders:

Evaluating own actions [makes me feel stressful]. […] it means … every … almost every day I think … I think that … doing … the works … right or not … I think … do they learn anything. (Päivi)

Summary: In this section, the sources of teachers' stress were presented. Mostly, the stimuli that cause stress at SEN teachers' work are the challenging and demanding nature of the teaching profession, the confusing educational policies, the negative attitudes of internal workmates, and the self-reflective teacher him/herself. Figure 14 shows the four major stressors at work mentioned by the teachers.
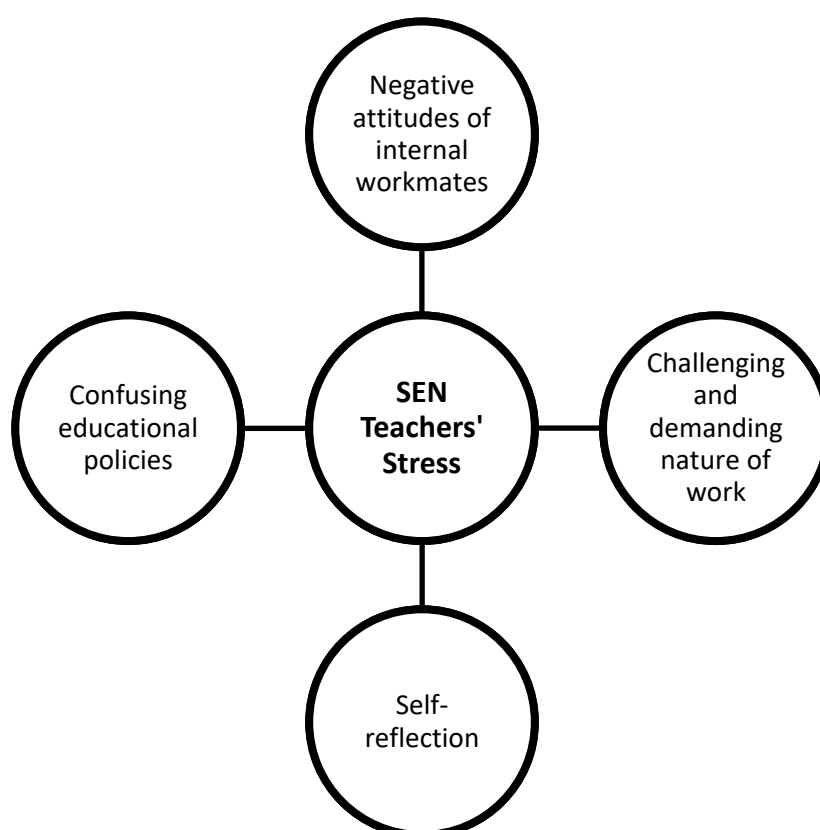
FIGURE 14   Factors contributing to SEN teachers' stress

6.2.4   Resilience

As presented in the previous sections, SEN teachers experience various frustrations and stress at work. Therefore, how to be resilient and maintain the passion is a critically important lesson that SEN teachers have to learn. In the interviews, the teachers shared what helps them bounce back, move on, and keep working as passionate SEN teachers. After further analysis, five major factors were identified that contribute to the teachers' resilience: students, students' parents, internal workmates, the work itself, and SNE administration.

Students

In section 6.2.1 "Most Wonderful Experiences", the teachers mentioned that there are some student-related moments in their teaching careers that bring them great joy, such as students making progress or students enjoying their learning. In other words, those pleasant experiences are the key factors contributing to the teachers' resilience. Jonna and Suvi pointed out that they are more motivated to do their work when students learn something or enjoy the learning. Even when students just take a small step forward, the teachers find their work worthwhile and want to remain on this career path. Students making progress is seen as a sign that their efforts are being paid back:

> I think that … the situation when I see that students can go on with little support, and … of course, it gives more motivation when I can help my work mates also. (Jonna)

> The students' joy … that they look like they are enjoying what we are doing. (Suvi)

Students' Parents

Students' parents also play significant roles in maintaining the teachers' work enthusiasm. For example, Anna received feedback from a student's mother who expressed immense gratitude for Anna's help getting her child to finish the school. In Anna's view, what she did was nothing special, but the appreciation given by the student's mother still, in a great sense, meant positive recognition for her work:

> I have get one mother told me once. […] She came to hug me and said that without me his son will never graduate … and that was very nice feedback. And … what I did this … only that I told his son that you have to do your job here, you don't go anywhere, you have to do it … but maybe that was something that he … I can't … I made … I could make him to do the work … and that was very nice. (Anna)

Internal Workmates

The SEN teaching profession requires a great deal of coordination and cooperation, which implies that the relationship between SEN teachers and their colleagues matters greatly to SEN teachers' work. During the interviews, the teachers mentioned three kinds of colleague-related relationships: the relationship with other SEN teachers, the relationship with supervisors, and the relationship with other teachers. In all three kinds of relationships, a supportive attitude and trust from workmates, whether they are in managerial positions or not, means much to the SEN teachers. The SEN teachers also want to be more recognised professionally by others in their workplaces, which brings them not only confidence but also autonomy. Moreover, a good teamwork atmosphere, one in which their voices are listened to and their ideas are valued, serves as an important motivator to encourage teachers to move forward:

> And also that was … was very good that those teamwork with special need teachers, it was easier and it was talking about them, it was very good, and was one big factor of motivation of my work also. (Niina)

You are trusted, you … can do … you know your profession, it's very important. (Hilla)

Esimiehen tuki ja kannustavat työkaverit [manager's support and supportive colleagues] (Tuulia)

The Work Itself

In addition to students, students' parents, and internal workmates, the manifold nature of the SEN teaching profession is one of the determinants that contributes to increasing the teachers' resilience and maintaining their passion. The diversity of the SEN teaching profession manifests in many ways, for example, different people to contact, different tasks to handle, or different projects to participate in. In Suvi's school, there are various kinds of ongoing projects that she can take part in. This experience brings some extra pleasure to Suvi's work life and simultaneously strengthens her resilience:

The new types of working with different people and different … like … and also like we are having international project now … with different countries, so … and all kinds of projects, and … and stuff like that … I enjoy them. (Suvi)

Although, in terms of work schedule, SEN teachers' work does have its routines, tasks within the existing daily timetable vary. Through challenging fun, the uncertainty at work interestingly benefits the teachers' psychological states and helps maintain their teaching passion:

It's not … every day is different. […] Teaching hours and … like … the day is the same every day, [but] you get different kind of things in your job. (Suvi)

More intrinsically, the diverse nature of the SEN teaching profession brings new ideas, new experiences, and even new joys to the teachers. In Linda's view, 'difficulties encountered at work' is synonymous with 'opportunities for improvement and learning'. The challenges she has at work, in a sense, do not merely make her learn something "meaningful" but also quench her thirst for knowledge and professional development. Linda considers her SEN teaching career as a journey of exploration, through which she finds her 'secrets' for resilience:

Meaningful … meaningful things … and … new things, and … also difficulties, so I can see as possibilities … everything new, I think that I want to do my work every year … different way … I can progress my working way and my thinking. […] This kind of things that … gives me curiosity […] this searching and finding are meaningful for me. (Linda)

SNE Administration

More autonomy at work was the first thing the teachers mentioned in terms of SNE administration that would be beneficial to their ability to bounce back, move on, and keep working as passionate SEN teachers. Although Finnish teachers are internationally well known for their high autonomy, the teachers in the interviews still struggle for more freedom to do their work. To Niina, greater autonomy would mean more authority to further and better develop and organise SNE

services at her workplace. She considers herself very qualified to bring positive changes to the SNE system, but she feels shackled and ineffective in her ability to do something because of her lower power position. Therefore, she said, she would feel more motivated if she were granted more managerial autonomy:

> More responsibilities, and also right make some decisions about the special needs area, because I think that if we have knowledge, it's easier if you can make also those some decisions, also of course bigger position managers make bigger … bigger, and you negotiate, but some smaller … more responsibility or … and right to do decisions in your own area. I think that's the main thing. […] Because I want to develop also organization […] [I want to have the authority to] change to develop work and also special education in our school. (Niina)

Hilla and Päivi also shared the same idea of seeking more autonomy to do their work. In Hilla's case, the degree of autonomy seems to vary greatly depending on what kind of supervisors she faces. This 'leadership uncertainty', to some extent, affects her work performance and enthusiasm. She would like to be more trusted so she can better apply her expertise to her work. The same longing was echoed by Päivi. She agrees that more autonomy could be quite helpful in maintaining her work passion. She wants to have more trust from managerial staff so she can work more independently:

> I already said it: autonomy. […] And it was weaker … some time ago but … and because our nearest boss was … wasn't so good, because of this new … new school … it's been wonderful to work during this … Spring … after … this Spring term … you have autonomy now, but I don't know what's coming. […] You are trusted, you … can do … you know your profession, it's very important. (Hilla)

> [I get more motivated at work] when I can […] plan how do my work. […] I would like to be more autonomy. (Päivi)

In addition to more autonomy, an SNE administration that uses funding properly and helps teachers manage their time more efficiently plays a significant role in boosting and maintaining teachers' passion. Time management appears to be a lesson that every SEN teacher has to learn due to the heavy workload and limited resources. That is why Laura believes that, if she could squeeze maybe "more time", she could work more passionately. From her point of view, the problem of 'bustling around' at work results from an inconsistent work schedule on a weekly basis. Laura states she has high autonomy to decide what and how to teach; however, she has no control over the working hours assigned to her. A fluctuating timetable has a negative influence on her work because she is not able to plan or organise things in a more structured way. Hence, she really hopes to have a more consistent work timetable from the beginning of the year to the end, which could make her more motivated to work:

> When I get to … prepare my … that how I teach, quite autonomically … and what to teach to students, so in that way I have this autonomy. […] The courses I take … I teach, and when to teach, and so on, comes from our leaders. […] We have different timetable in every week, so it … so that's quite kind of stressful too. […] This timetable should be more solid for the whole year. (Laura)

As Katri shared in the previous section, improper use of funding is one stressor at her work, and it is also a factor that influences her work enthusiasm. She seems to strongly disagree on how the school uses the money for other purposes than SNE teaching. In other words, the frustration caused by witnessing such injustice inevitably undermines her passion:

> The factors that … the … the government money [was used more properly] for SEN- … special education students. (Katri)

Last but not least, although this might involve a higher external administrative level, Sofia pointed out that it would help greatly to boost/maintain her enthusiasm if she could get a permanent work contract. A permanent contract implies, in Sofia's view, a more secure life, and she could more reasonably invest more time in preparing herself for teaching. Otherwise, she finds it somehow pointless to prepare teaching materials that will only be used once. She feels less motivated knowing what she does is merely of short-term value:

> Well, if I would get permanent full-time job … that's the only thing … it always gives you more motivation, if you know that you will have the job next year, and you wouldn't have to be afraid that you won't have a job. […] It motivates you. […] The 'permanent full-time job' would do both, because then you would know that you would be doing this … this for the long time, and you … and you would maybe spend more time in doing the materials, and … maybe taking part of everything else in … in the school work, because you would know that I am not doing this for nothing. (Sofia)

Even though a more secure teaching position is obviously of great help in boosting/maintaining teachers' work enthusiasm, it appears to be very unlikely (or "nearly impossible") for SEN teachers working in vocational schools to get permanent contracts nowadays due to budget cuts in education. In Sofia's city, with her vocational teacher background, she could not get any other opportunities but one. Compared to comprehensive education, vocational schools are suffering more from financial depression in Finland, which gives Sofia fewer chances to exert her professional competences in a more secure position. Undoubtedly, such a context inescapably depleted Sofia's passion for working as a SEN teacher:

> It's very difficult […] to get a permanent contract. […] Because of the cuts, first of all, and then there is … in [my city] anywhere … anyway there is … there isn't that many jobs available. […] You can get … like one-year contract, quite nicely, but permanent jobs is nearly impossible. […] I am a vocational teacher, and … if I would be qualified to work in peruskoulu [basic school], then there is a lot of jobs available, but in vocational, there isn't. […] The government is saying that, for example, in [my city] you can't have so many places or students to come, they are cutting the … hospitality … hospitalities or … half the education. […] They are cutting those places … and that's my profession that I could be teaching. (Sofia)

Summary: In this section, five influential factors were identified that contribute to teachers' resilience: students, students' parents, internal workmates, the work itself, and SNE administration. Some factors, such as students, internal workmates, SEN teaching work, and SNE administration, also lead to teachers' frustration and stress. In other words, to strengthen teachers' abilities to bounce back,

move on, and keep working passionately, these issues need to be resolved. Figure 15 shows the five key catalysts that benefit the teachers' resilience.
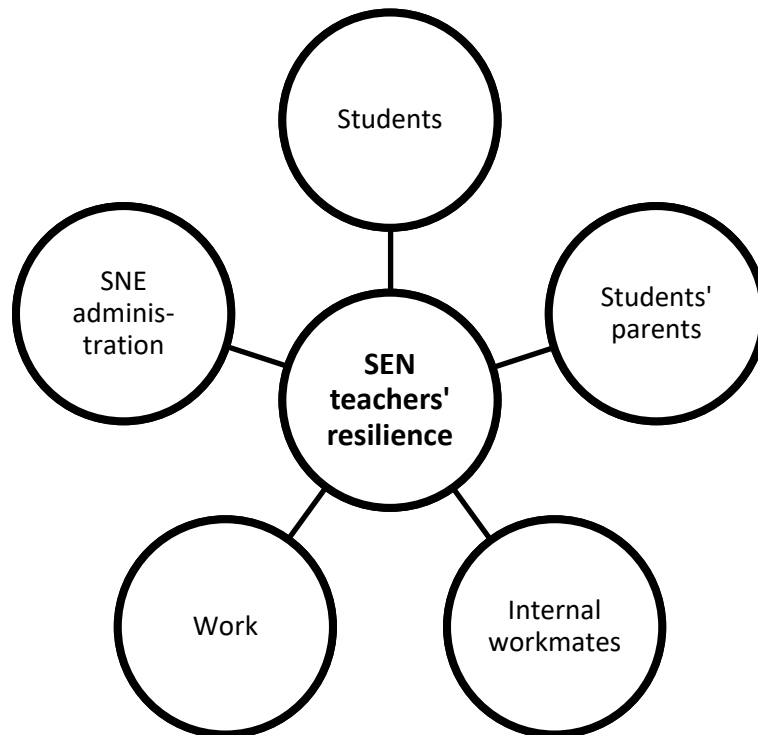
FIGURE 15   Factors contributing to SEN teachers' resilience

6.3   Mind the Gap: Work Reality and Preservice Teacher Education

In section 6.2, I presented the frustrations and stress that the teachers face at work. Those negative emotional reactions to this teaching profession are actually provoked by the difficulties teachers encounter on a daily basis. Furthermore, what the teachers find difficult/challenging at work have a significant correlation with the changing nature of the SEN teaching profession, which implies a 'gap' between what the teachers learned from their preservice teacher education programmes and what they really experience in their work realities. In the following sections, I will give more detailed illustrations about the difficulties of SEN teachers' work, the evolving nature of the SEN teaching profession, and the gap between preservice teacher education and the work reality.

6.3.1   Difficulties

There are four difficulties that teachers face at work: insufficient professional knowledge and skills, limited resources, poor attitudes of internal workmates, and unprofessional leadership.

Insufficient SNE Expertise

The SEN teaching profession nowadays is very multifaceted, which implies that various knowledge and skills are required to work in this field. Jonna has faced this difficulty and recognises that it is rather challenging and demanding to be a SEN teacher because she has to know different things and even play different roles at work. For example, when dealing with a student who has a bad relationship with his or her own parent, she has to play the role of the 'gentle mother' and be there to listen. Sometimes she also must equip herself with basic medical knowledge so that she knows how to direct students to the right places to get medical help:

> You need so many skills, so you have to be teacher in many subjects, you have to be psychologist, mother, priest, nurse … you have to be everything. […] When you stay here with those young people, and they have so many different problems, and they ask you so many things, so that's why you […] have to have so many … roles … Sometimes they need … that you hear them, and … sometimes they want … advices, and … sometimes they want you with them to go somewhere, [for example to doctor or to school nurse] or […] nurse … because sometimes they tell that they have … some kind of problems, or headache, or … or pain somewhere in their bodies. … Um … if they … some of them don't have good relationship with their own mother, so … they can't talk with their mother … with their mother, so … they talk [to] me like they talk to their mother. (Jonna)

The feeling of lacking required professional competences has also been experienced by Suvi. She mentioned that, when she started to work with disabled students, the professional knowledge and skills she acquired from her preservice education did not really make her competent to deal with everything at work. She also said she finds it difficult to promptly update her expertise to help new students whenever a new academic year begins:

> When I started … to work with disabled students, I didn't have enough knowledge about different kind … kind of communication styles and … stuff like that. ….. And … not enough knowledge of everything. […] Every … like … autumn time is easier than year before but also difficult because we are having new students and we have to learn new ways to work with them. (Suvi)

In addition to SNE expertise, difficulties result from unfamiliarity with ICT and with the content of some subjects. In Anna's case, as the eldest participating teacher in this research, although she is still very passionate about teaching and learning, it appears to be quite challenging for her to become familiar with new learning platforms and those academic subjects she finds entirely foreign. She said that, without a good understanding of a certain field of study, she is not able to design the learning materials well and properly provide individualised instruction to students:

> If I know the … contence[content] … if I know the what is inside, ok, mathematics, I can … drop of the things that … I think that person don't need, make it simple then I have time […] because we have some lessons in the net, they can do … the courses in the net, and that is something that I haven't learned myself yet, so it's im … most impossible for me to teach them … I have to figure it out myself, and then … even I know what is inside, I have very much difficulties to put the … the … the rest of the stuff

away, and take the only thing that that person needs, so that he can pass the test, because I don't know chemistry, I don't know physics so well. […] There are so many different kind of contents that I … it's … quite difficult to handle all, if you learn one, ok, it's good, and you can go on, but there are always coming new things for me. (Anna)

Limited Resources

A lack of resources is the second difficulty teachers deal with at work, with one of the scarce resources being time. In the interviews, some teachers explicitly expressed their concern about the lack of time to get their work done. Although it is understandable in every walk of life that there are always many things to get done within a limited time, in the SEN teaching profession, such a limitation is influential. For example, Laura shared that she cannot really help some students without spending time to establish a close rapport with them. In Anna's case, limited time also means that she is unable to properly prepare herself for teaching and to assist those in desperate need of special support:

> If there are students with … you don't get good connection, so you can't support them, and … and … their studies don't go on. […] I am too busy, maybe, and don't have enough time, so I don't get to … properly spend time with that student or … to take … to … well, when … yes … lack of time. (Laura)

> For me, it's been … time limits … teaching contence[content] … because … I have so many branches I have been working. … […][Also,] the time limits means that we only have … 28 hours per … subject in a one period, and … if the … the person has very difficult … learning difficulties, we have to slow … very … go on slowly, and I don't have … so much time, and he needs a few lessons. (Anna)

Similar to Anna, Suvi has experienced difficulty in preparing her teaching. Because individualised instruction is fairly essential to assisting students with SEN and there usually are not enough ready-made individualised materials to fulfil each student's special needs (indicating limited resources), Suvi has to invest a lot of time in designing the learning materials herself. This work reality inevitably causes great time pressure. However, the responsibility to inform every team member of the updates places Suvi under considerable time pressure as well. She finds it very time-consuming to reach everyone and forward the information. In other words, limited time and limited individualised learning materials are the difficulties she constantly needs to tackle at work:

> There is not ready-made material … that you have to work on material a lot. […] I have to make everyone know and ask their opinion like … like the … because we are working in a team … the teamwork can be sometimes … hard … that it would be so much easy sometimes if you would be alone and making decisions all by yourself. (Suvi)

Poor Attitudes from Internal Workmates

More frustratingly, as Hilla said, "the lack of understanding of special needs [and] negative attitudes" of other teachers are major difficulties that SEN teachers face. Although Linda shares this view with Hilla, she considers these difficulties as opportunities to make some changes. When she first started her SEN teaching career, the atmosphere of the workplace was not positive towards students with

SEN or her expertise. Therefore, she had to put in a great deal of effort into "brainwashing" her internal workmates to embrace the diversity of students. She attributes such negative attitudes and inadequate understanding of diversity to the high autonomy of the teaching profession in Finland. Some teachers, in her opinion, simply do not want to change their ways of teaching to meet students' special needs, and unfortunately, to a certain degree, they have the right to not do so:

> When I came 2005 in my school … there is … so little knowledge about special needs or things to do with them or … possibility to help or support these students. […] One year ago that … I have to change this exception, and … and … I have … made … minds-making […] I have made 'brainwashing' for our teachers. I have discussed a lot with them about these problems and what does it means for pupils like to have, for example, writing or reading problems, or … or other things, and … and I have changed their minds to … more positive way. […] Teacher has so large autonomy … autonomy in his class or his lesson or she … her lesson … in very grade in Finland. […] Teacher can do what she or he wants … and some can't accept … special needs or diversity at all, they want to be … they want to think … that everyone has to be similar as others. (Linda)

Katri is also highly dedicated to changing the negative attitudes of other teachers towards students with SEN. However, after her consistent and constant effort, she still finds it exceedingly difficult to get people to think differently. In the interviews, she mentioned that she has to periodically argue with other teachers over certain issues simply because she cannot tolerate that students are treated unequally and inequitably. She never gives up trying to make the workplace more friendly and inclusive, but during the interviews, it was quite obvious to me that she experienced great frustration concerning this matter, and that is why she suggested that, to create a more inclusive studying atmosphere for students, every teacher working in such an inclusive vocational school should have pre-service teacher education that provides sufficient knowledge of SNE. This notion has been proven through her own experiences when she has seen her colleagues' mindsets changed after they have acquired some knowledge of SNE. Hence, she believes that, with proper education, all teachers in general can learn how to better deal with students' diverse needs:

> The most difficulties I have had is in teacher's room with colleagues. […] If you go a teacher's room, all the colleagues think that … some students should … we just should kick him out from the door and forget it … um … I can't be quiet, and that … that leads me to difficulties in times to times … Quite often I am publicly against this. […] Well, I can do my a little bit in times, I think … but … but it's very difficult. […] It's hard to … to change the opinions, it's very very difficult. […] I think that if everybody studying to be a teacher would get some knowledge of special education … all the students in special education, or … or the situations in classrooms nowadays, they … it would be easier for them to understand … special education students … so … the problems with the colleagues would be … would not be so big. […] After some years, the same colleagues have … gone for a special education teacher schooling for themselves, and … and when they come back, they understand, but there has been so many years for the students that … that they … they haven't had the understanding … and that's why I think all teachers should have some knowledge their schooling. (Katri)

Sadly, in Sofia's case, the difficulty of poor attitudes does not come from regular teachers but other SEN teachers. In her school, she has a very difficult colleague who is not a team player, which poses some challenges to her work. The real reason behind the difficulty, she speculated, is probably that she is forced to be more flexible and more compromising simply because she is younger than the rest of the team. The older SEN teachers in her workplace tend to do things in their own (and 'old') ways and are less willing to make changes to better collaborate with Sofia. Ironically, the SEN teaching profession is a profession that requires good teamwork, but the negative attitudes Sofia has experienced from other SEN teachers places her in an emotionally vulnerable position:

> Again, it's … it's that [uncooperative] colleague. […] That's always the biggest kind of the difficulty that comes into my mind. […] because all the colleagues are … 50 or more, they have different ways of seeing things than I do, […] they have always done things the way they have, and … and … and they want to keep it that way, so sometimes the cooperation is … like I have to be flexible. […] But I think that's the same problem in everywhere when there is somebody younger, […] and if he is new in the job that … that she has to be the flexible one. (Sofia)

Unprofessional Leadership

Unprofessional leadership here refers to supervisors who do not have the sufficient knowledge of SNE to make good decisions on issues related to students with SEN or do not fully appreciate SEN teachers' expertise. For example, Niina works in a middle-managerial position handling SNE resources and services. It is her duty to provide necessary information to her supervisor so that he/she can make final decisions. Nevertheless, within the limited time that the supervisor has, Niina is not able to fully present her ideas and sufficiently provide her professional knowledge to help make decisions that fully embrace the diversity in the school. In Päivi's case, as presented in section 6.2.2, her supervisor's changeable manner in decision-making greatly trouble Päivi, especially in terms of planning for her teaching. She finds it difficult to organise her work beforehand because her supervisor always has new ideas as to how to do things differently without respecting Suvi's SEN expertise. Such poor leadership exhibited by her supervisor jeopardises Suvi's professional autonomy as a SEN teacher:

> Perhaps that knowledge of management, how to improve the knowledge of management. […] They are very busy, and they must know about leadership, they must know about business and numbers, and how to … how to explain that … also this area is very important. […] Sometimes it has been to get … get the knowledge to managers and leaders, if you haven't responsible or right to do decisions for yourself. You have to … have that decision, but if you have very minimum time to explain this. (Niina)

> That's same thing that superior about … not planning teaching. (Päivi)

Summary: To conclude this section, the findings show that teachers experience four kinds of difficulties in the workplace: insufficient SNE expertise, limited resources, poor attitudes from internal workmates, and unprofessional leadership. The teachers feel that they are somewhat incompetent at dealing with some student problems or they are not so familiar with the subjects they have to teach.

Regarding limited resources, limited time and limited teaching materials are two major concerns for the teachers, as are the poor attitudes of both regular teachers and other SEN teachers. Finally, supervisors' unprofessional leadership has adverse influences on decision-making regarding SNE and teachers' pedagogical autonomy. Figure 16 briefly illustrates the difficulties that teachers face at work.
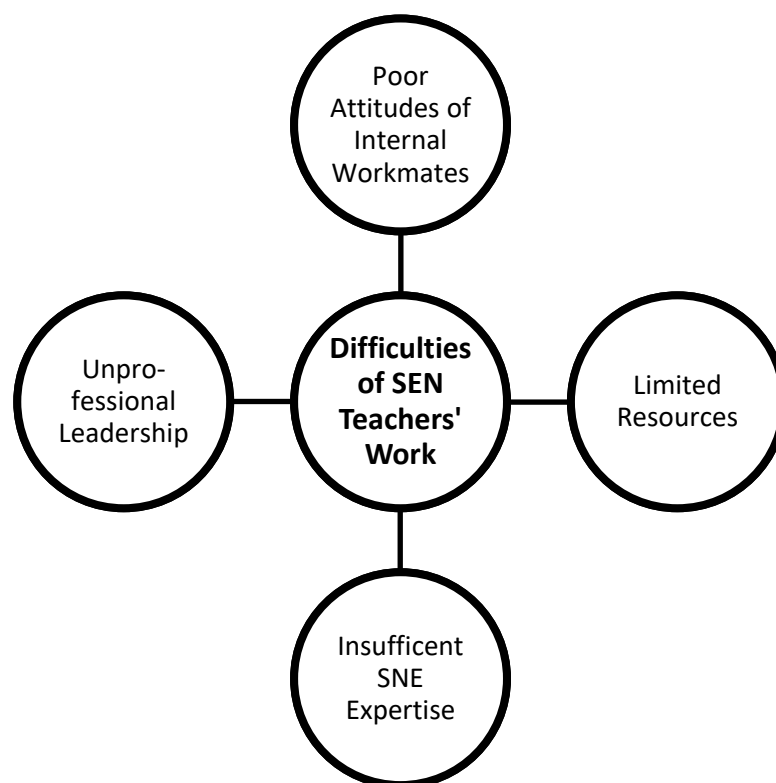
FIGURE 16   Difficulties of SEN teachers' work

6.3.2   An Evolving Profession

In the interviews, I asked the teachers if they were aware of any changes in their work in the past decade. Positively, some teachers believed that their expertise was more appreciated by other colleagues and had become more important in inclusive vocational schools. As mentioned earlier, SEN teachers nowadays deal with not only students' learning difficulties but also their problems other than learning. In Katri's school, there are many students with social maladjustment, which makes her role as a SEN teacher more significant and indispensable in providing special assistance to students with diverse needs and in giving professional advice to colleagues:

> We have … more socially ill-adjusted students … and … they are all coming for SEN-teachers as well. […] I think that's what has made SEN-teacher more … appreciated nowadays in school, because … because they have … more students to teach, they solve more problems, so they are more needed nowadays. (Katri)

Jonna also thinks that SEN teachers have gained increasing value because, in inclusive educational settings, other teachers do not have the corresponding knowledge and skills to help students with various needs in their classes. In Jonna's view, students with SEN today are not the only group to whom SEN teachers offer their services. Instead, in many cases, SEN teachers also play key roles as consultants to other internal workmates to help solve problems that students with SEN face. As for Linda, during the last 10 year, she has observed remarkable progress in her region in the development of SNE. Various large projects have been launched and successfully carried out. Through a series of team efforts, the quality of SNE within the region has achieved long-term improvement, which simultaneously has raised the status of the SEN teaching profession:

> It has become more important, I think so. [...] SEN-teacher is … really important support for other teachers nowadays, not only for students, but also for other teachers. [...] because there are so many different problems and [...] most of other teachers have no knowledge or education of these problems, so they need something … that they can understand … understand our students. (Jonna)

> I think that in [my] city our vocational college, special education role became more obvious. [...] We have five campuses … perhaps I was first in all in these colleges. [...] [Now] we have [more] SEN special education teachers, and in [this whole region] vocational colleges, we have … perhaps 20 or 25 or so … and this role has been more obvious, and [...] our leaders have become … to know that special education is part of normal … normal education … and we have … made very good progress during these years. [...] we have special education team [...] and we have also big projects. [...] we have improved … also whole [regional] vocational education special education. (Linda)

Echoing Katri, Jonna, and Linda, Suvi made some brief comments about the changing nature of the SEN teaching profession. She recognises the reality that SEN teachers are still in great demand even though the number of SEN teachers has already been growing in inclusive vocational schools. In particular, integrating the SNE knowledge and skills into regular teacher education so as to have more teachers with a basic SEN teaching competence, is as important as meeting the demand of qualified SEN teachers:

> I think like there is more SEN-teachers in the VET school nowadays. [...] It's gonna even more important to have that SEN-teachers … because there is a lot of … like the students are going to be integrated in normal classrooms more and more. [...] or … the normal teacher education has to be … has to involve some more like [SEN knowledge and skills]. (Suvi)

However, from a negative perspective, some teachers in the interviews also showed their great concern that the SEN teaching profession has become more challenging due to the changing economic and political landscape in Finland. From Niina's point of view, SEN teaching work has become more challenging due to the system's current inclusive climate and because changes in school and society will surely affect the profession. Both Sofia and Linda shared the same worry regarding the ongoing educational budget cuts across Finland. When Sofia was in one course of her SEN teacher education programme, she was told by the

lecturer that the SEN teachers' work has become more demanding and challenging because the work reality is becoming more complicated. What made this worse was the increasing budget cuts coming in the near future, which worried Sofia greatly. As far as Linda is concerned, the budget cuts brought her unprecedented anxiety and uncertainty about her work and the well-being of students with SEN. She recalled that, in the last decade, the development of IVET and inclusive education have been on track and prospering. However, many things began to slide when the budget cuts were put into action. Linda finds it difficult to imagine how different her work will become as a result of the economic and political changes, and she is also very worried about the unpromising future that students with SEN face, as they tend to be left behind by policymakers during rough times:

> Yes, yes, it has changed […] more challenging because students … the difficulties nowadays were students have those special needs, they are more difficult nowadays. […] Nowadays that inclusion is the system, more challenging students are coming to vocational school, the normal vocational schools. And perhaps that also because the school has changed so much, and also society has changed, and student has changed, the situation or position is more unclear nowadays. (Niina)

> At the teacher … special needs teacher education … teacher … this month where I was studying, she said that the work is getting harder and harder all the time, because you have to deal with so many things nowadays. […] [The budget cut] sounds very worrying but that's the way it's going, and the cuts are going to be even bigger next year. (Sofia)

> I think that last ten years have been … rapid going work … rapid development to better ways from the … for example, when I came 2005 to last year, this has been a very good time in vocational schooling, […] but now, this year, has changed everything. […] Before this … this cuts down, I think things are going better and better, […] and integration and inclusion development has been very good. […] But now […] now this … cuts down … are … are very bad thing. […] And when … when those hard times came, […] they first think this … other pupils and not these special educational … these special pupils. (Linda)

Even though I did not ask the teachers to further elaborate upon the correlation between the changing economic and political context and the transforming SEN teaching profession, many teachers did point out some changes they have experienced at their work. Those changes can be categorised into three aspects: from individual work to more team effort, from SNE-specific expertise to a more comprehensive SEN teaching profession, and from a teaching-focused role to more diverse work.

From Individual Work to More Team Effort

Niina and Laura both agreed that more collaboration is necessary and unavoidable in the SEN teachers' work. The SEN teaching profession used to be rather individual-oriented, which means that it depended greatly on the expertise of the SEN teacher him/herself alone. However, nowadays, more teamwork between SEN teachers and other colleagues and external professionals is required. Furthermore, the collaboration between schools is demanded and promoted:

It has changed, from the individual work to team work. (Niina)

More collaboration work together [between] colleges. (Laura)

From the Requirement of SNE-Specific to More Comprehensive Competences

The nature of the SEN teaching profession has changed from individual work to more team effort. In other words, today, this profession requires more holistic competences to deal with its daily challenges. As Hilla shared, a broader view is a must to work in this field so that SEN teachers can be more flexible in handling different kinds of challenges at work. Katri also mentioned that the SEN teaching profession today is much more than solving students' learning problems. Therefore, "more all-round" competences are needed for SEN teachers:

> I think that this flexibility and … and knowledge … wider things are growing […] you have to know very much, and be flexible. (Hilla)

> It has … developed to be more all-round teacher than before … in the beginning the … the SEN-teacher was teaching … the subjects … with the students with learning problems. […] But … it has developed to be more all-round teaching. (Katri)

From Teaching-Focused to More Diverse Work

SEN teachers nowadays need to acquire more comprehensive SNE competences in response to students' diverse needs. However, students' diverse needs are not the only reason that SEN teachers have a strong need for more holistic SNE expertise. Changing forms of learning and working also account for the evolving nature of the SEN teaching profession. For example, Niina shared that, in IVET, more learning happens in the workplace or on the Internet, which inevitably influences the way teachers guide students with SEN. Teachers have to adjust to the new context of learning so that they can instruct students more effectively and efficiently. However, according to Sofia, more tasks have to be performed on computers. Teachers have to become familiar with up-to-date software or various computer-based work platforms, which simultaneously increases SEN teachers' workload. Lastly, Niina also pointed out that the SEN teaching profession has become more consultation- and guidance-orientated. As experts in each inclusive vocational school deal with students' diverse needs, SEN teachers today not only offer individualised learning experiences to students with SEN but also give their professional advice to other workmates on how to better tackle their students' difficulties:

> It's changing. […] The studies and methods now perhaps […] more learning in working places nowadays, we have to think new … new guiding things. […] And also those individual courses, you do in Internet or Optima or some kind of … new methods. And it's … usually it's a more difficult for special need students. You must think what are the new things, to survive in this new situation. […] [Also], it has changed […] [from] teaching to consulting and guiding. (Niina)

> All the time there is more and more 'computer-orientated' work … that's what changing. (Sofia)

Given that the SEN teaching profession has been transformed due to the changing learning and teaching landscapes, Laura, Katri, and Suvi shared their expectations, hopes, and suggestions about what needs to be done to keep the SEN teaching profession updated in response to contemporary challenges.

More Unified Roles and Tasks

First, Laura was greatly concerned about the inconsistency of SNE services between schools; some schools are more supportive of students with SEN, while some are not. In her view, every school across the country should provide the same quality of SNE services; otherwise, the rights of those who study in a school with limited support will be jeopardised. In her understanding, such inequality results from each school having its autonomy to define SEN teachers' roles and tasks. Therefore, she believes that it would be beneficial if the SEN teaching profession could be, in a sense, more regulated across the nation so that inequality of education can be avoided:

> I got this impression that it has transformed, and I think it will be developing … and … I think it will be more organized and […] more solid between different colleges. […] There is a need … need to find out … common … common lines in SEN-teaching in VET … that different colleges would do the same things, […] same thing at the same way. […] Some colleges do it better and give more support to students, and others does not. So that brings students to inequality position. (Laura)

More Recognised as a Real Profession

Second, Katri wishes the SEN teaching profession could be more recognised as a real profession. As a SEN teacher working in an inclusive vocational school, her job is to help students with diverse needs, just as SEN teachers do in special vocational schools specifically for students with SEN. However, her working title and paycheque do not really reflect her expertise. She is merely recognised as a regular teacher with SEN teaching competences, and her extra work for students with SEN do not garner her the additional benefits of those SEN teachers working in special vocational schools. To Laura, this shows that her work is not really acknowledged as a real profession. Hence, she expects that, with the corresponding working title and salary, SEN teachers could be viewed by other teachers and society at large as professionals like teachers in other fields:

> I hope it's going to be a REAL profession … with its own […] like teacher […] own … own … salary, own payment, section as well. […] If you … educate yourself as a SEN-teacher, it doesn't show in your salary in our school. […] If you are a SEN teacher in … in ordinary vocational college […] you're called officially […] just 'teacher', you are not called 'SEN-teacher'. […] It's different … in those vocational colleges that are specialized in … in special education. […] It's … it's to do with the … also the society views our profession that … that … the view would be higher if we have the own name. […] I think this is why … so many teachers don't want to get the education for SEN teaching. (Katri)

More Knowledge and Skills of SNE in Preservice Teacher Education

One more suggestion was that every teacher working in inclusive vocational schools should have some basic competences in SNE. Since inclusion is a clear

policy and approach in Finnish education, it is not enough that, in inclusive educational settings, SEN teachers are the only group of teachers who have the knowledge and skills to handle students with diverse needs. Nowadays, an increasing number of students with SEN are integrated into regular classes, and this implies that regular teachers also need to take responsibility for educating and training those with diverse difficulties. As a result, according to Suvi, some "common sense" about students' various needs and how to deal with them should be introduced more into regular teachers' preservice education so that some problems can be preliminarily handled:

> The students are going to be integrated in normal classrooms more and more, so you have to have a SEN teacher's … degree and … or … the normal teacher education has to be […] like there have to be more information about the special education in the normal teacher education. […] Some of the common sense for SEN teacher have is important for also normal teacher, because in every classroom there is student with special needs. (Suvi)

Summary: Together, these results provide important insights into the evolving nature of the SEN teaching profession. Given the an increasing number of students with SEN study in inclusive vocational schools, the SEN teacher's role has become more important and appreciated. However, the changing economic, political, and societal contexts inevitably have reshaped and transformed SEN teachers' work as well. In the past, SEN teachers' work was very independent, SNE expertise-focused, and more about tackling students' learning problems. Today, the SEN teaching profession requires more teamwork and comprehensive competences and entails more diverse tasks. Therefore, more unification of roles/tasks and official recognition as a real profession are needed, and SNE should be introduced in regular teachers' preservice education. Figure 17 gives a snapshot of the evolution of the SEN teaching profession in terms of context, direction, and expectation.
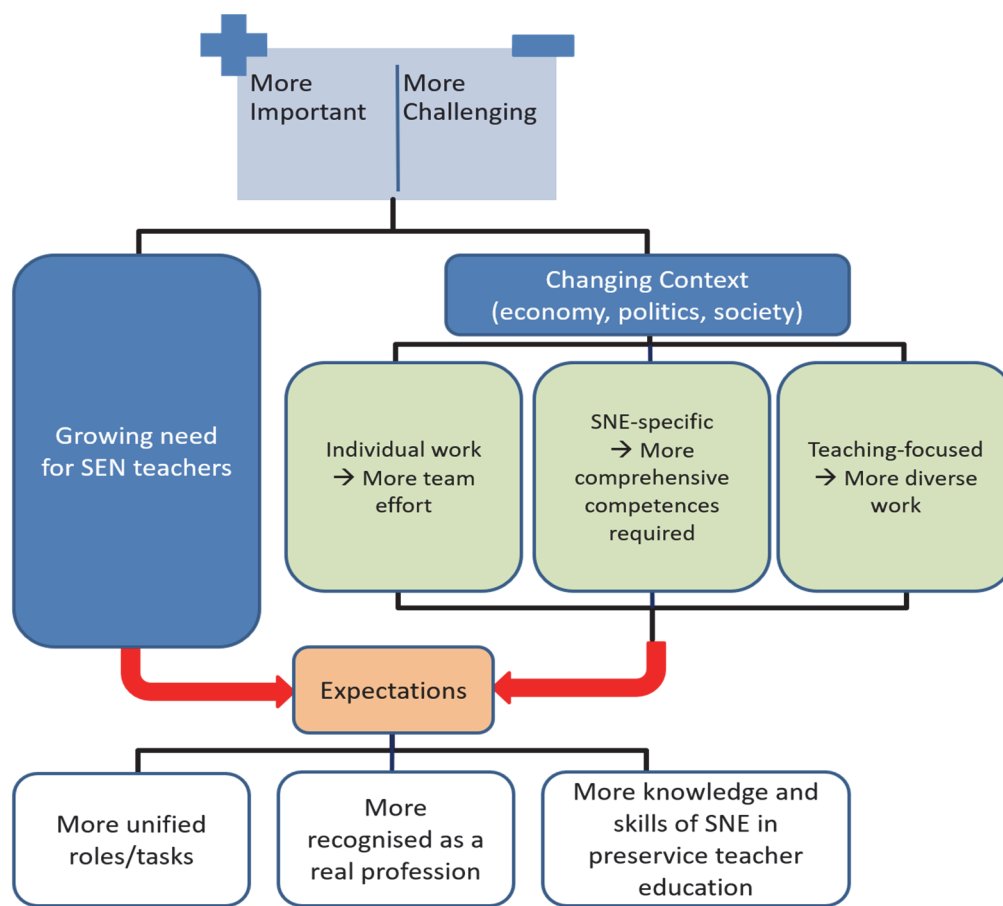
FIGURE 17   Evolving nature of the SEN teaching profession

6.3.3   The Gap between Preservice Education and Work Reality

The changing roles and tasks of SEN teachers inevitably creates a gap between what they learned in preservice teacher education and what they really do or encounter in the workplace. In the interviews, I asked the teachers whether today's preservice teacher education can really meet the practical needs at work. Some teachers, to a certain degree, recognised that the knowledge and skills acquired from contemporary preservice teacher education are helpful to SEN teachers' work. For example, Niina appreciates the practicability of preservice education, but she also mentioned that what really matters in preservice teacher education is not merely learning some *"tricks"* but also developing a professional and reflective attitude that can help a teacher handle all kinds of difficulties through his or her whole SEN teaching career. Laura pointed out that preservice teacher education helps more when you know whom and where you would like to teach in the future. You can choose courses that provide you with what you have to know for a certain group of students or for some special occasions. In this sense, if you want to be a SEN teacher, you can learn relevant SNE knowledge and skills that are required for your future job:

> Yes, I think our teacher education is quite good, and […] not studying only internet or having some written things, but also talking, reflecting, meeting each other. […] Very often the students they feel … in the beginning, the teacher's study that they must have some … tricks. […] But that attitude that they have to learn reflect and think about themselves, there isn't any 'trick book' in every situation, you can do this and you succeed, because you don't know … if you don't succeed, that … that attitude that you have to try, you have … must solve problems, and think, and combine theory and practice. (Niina)

> Yes, I think in some ways, because … the … educational settings are so … variable depending on what grade you are teaching, so the education target to different grades, you … study different things if you want to be a teacher in primary school or in VET or in other school. (Laura)

Although these teachers saw the practical value of preservice teacher education, most admitted that there was indeed a gap between today's preservice teacher education and the work reality. There are three kinds of gaps between the work reality and preservice education, as identified from the interviews: more practicability required vs more research/theory-driven, more ill-prepared teachers vs overly short training, and more tasks other than teaching vs more focus on teaching for learning difficulties.

More Practicability Required vs More Theory-Driven

Not surprisingly, the teachers pointed out that the work reality is more "practical", "diverse", and "complicated" than what is taught in preservice teacher education. Jonna feels she actually learned much more at/from work than from her preservice teacher education programme. To her, the training provided by the university overemphasised research instead of delivering practical knowledge and skills, such as how to tackle substance abuse problems, which could be used to help students with various problems in today's schools:

> I think … work teaches you, of course, a lot. […] There should be something more practical in … in preservice education. […] In the university, the focus is … a lot of in … making research. […] Many of us wanted something more practical studies … for example, how do we manage with children who have … behaving problems, something like that, for example. […] Or how do we manage with … students who have … drug abusing problems? (Jonna)

Furthermore, the gap results from the diversity of educational settings. Although during the preservice teacher training, according to Suvi, some basic information was given about different school contexts, the variation nationally amongst schools is not fully presented. In other words, what you learn from preservice teacher education is rather limited in scope. Mostly, you have to keep learning on the job. After all, real life is a constant and continuous learning process:

> Not everything can be taught … taught in the teacher education. […] Different educational setting are so different that the one teacher education can't teach everything. […] You will learn all the time for real living is learning. (Suvi)

Such diversity appears to emerge not only inter-institutionally but also intra-institutionally. Sofia mentioned that the school system is far more complicated than

what is taught in preservice teacher education, as a school in real life involves various people, incidents, atmospheres, ways of doing or interacting, materials, guidelines, and so on. It takes a great amount of time to really acquire the practical knowledge and skills as a SEN teacher at a certain workplace:

> I wrote 'yes', because I hope so, but in practice I don't think it does … because the school systems are so … complicated … and all the laws, and the opetussuun-nitelma[the National Curriculum] and … all the different habits in schools, and there is so many people in the same soup that I don't know if the education can really give you the keys. […] You just have to learn many things in … in practice and over the years. (Sofia)

Echoing Jonna, Suvi, and Sofia, Anna criticised preservice teacher education as too theoretical. In a sense, she does not understand why having a master's degree is such an important requirement for working as a teacher because it just provides more theories. Even so, it is crucially important to reflect on those theories while working. She also suggested that more diverse institutional observation should be arranged so that student teachers can better realise what kind of workplace they would like to contribute their expertise to and develop their professional career in:

> If I could criticise something is that if you are going to be class … class teacher, why you have to be … master … why you have to do master's degree? […] If they do the master's degree, it should be done properly, so that you have the whole information and they can be compared to other schooling system. […] There are so much theoretical things, and actually when you start to work in the school, there is … how you learn, and in a different school, there is atmosphere, the system, the routine, are so different … that everybody should go to a few different schools before they decide where they want to work. […] When you graduate as a teacher, you have theoretical background, […] but you … you have to start something, so you judge about your knowledge, how you do things. (Anna)

More Ill-Prepared Teachers vs Overly Short Training

The second gap identified from the data is that the teachers felt that the duration of preservice teacher education is not long enough to enable one to be well prepared for those real challenges at work. Within the IVET context, in Linda's opinion, some teachers might be experts in their vocational fields, but as teachers, they are not very competent in pedagogy because the preservice teacher education they received was too short and not good enough to equip them with the sufficient knowledge and skills to be good educational practitioners:

> I think that … vocational teacher education is not good enough, it's too short. […] They are good in their own systems areas … in their own earlier jobs and works, but they are not so good in teaching, because this teacher education in VET system is not good. (Linda)

More Tasks Other Than Teaching vs More Focus on Learning Difficulties

The last identified gap the teachers mentioned is the gap between 'more tasks other than teaching in the work reality' and 'more focus on teaching for learning

difficulties in preservice teacher education'. As mentioned many times in previous sections, the SEN teaching profession nowadays no longer merely deals with students' learning difficulties. Instead, there are many other tasks in the workplace to be tackled. However, according to Katri, preservice teacher education still focuses on the knowledge and skills to handle students with learning problems, which seems a bit outdated. In addition, preservice teacher education is not able to fully exert its positive influence on training prospective qualified teachers if those in the training programmes have no prior teaching experience. She thinks that you can get more help and improvement through teacher education only when you have some basic understanding of the work reality of the SEN teaching profession. Otherwise, according to her observation, especially novice teachers are likely to become burnt out in the beginning when they start this professional career if they get an unrealistic impression of SEN teachers' work from preservice education:

> If you haven't been a teacher in … in VET before you go to the preservice education, I don't think you can have the whole picture what's happening in … in educational settings nowadays. […] I think everybody is … just coming like first-time teaching in … in VET, they are surprised. […] It's not enough that … they just teach the subject and that's it, I think everyone is amaze that they have to … teach so much more … they have to teach the students how to behave or … or how to run their everyday life, how to get up in the morning when you are supposed to be in school. […] Preservice education is not meeting the practical needs. […] And … really the young … young teachers are … are amazed that they … they get tired, because they don't have the tool what to do with the difficult young people. (Katri)

Summary: This section reveals the gap between preservice teacher education and the work reality of the SEN teaching profession. Although preservice teacher training does provide some knowledge and skills necessary for SEN teachers' work, there are three alarming gaps recognised by the teachers that must be filled so that what SEN teachers learn in preservice education can be more practically applied to manage those challenges teachers face at work. These gaps emerged from the divergent and mismatched perspectives between preservice teacher education institutions and inclusive vocational schools in terms of the content and structure. The three gaps between the work reality and preservice education are more practicability required vs more theory-driven, more ill-prepared teachers vs overly short training, and more tasks other than teaching vs more focus on learning difficulties. Figure 18 illustrates the gap between the work reality and preservice teacher education.
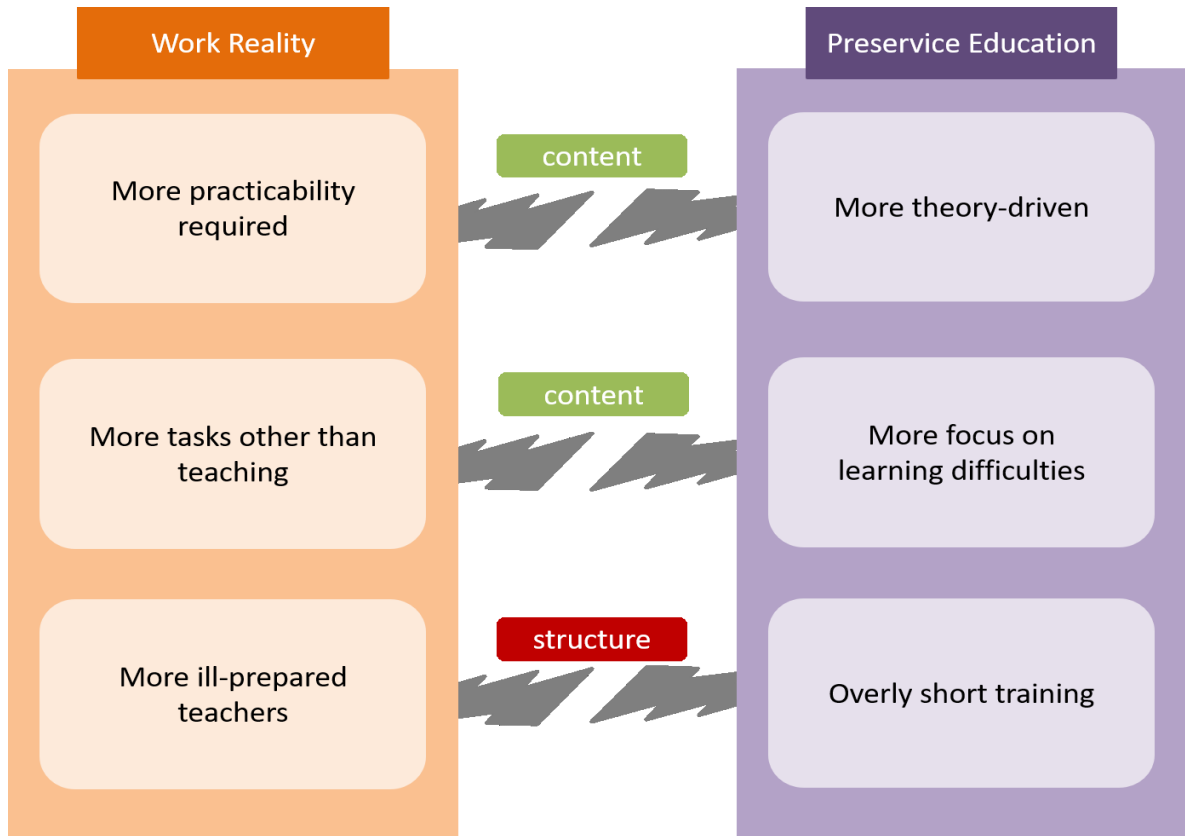
FIGURE 18   Gap between work reality and preservice teacher education

7 REFLECTION ON PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

This chapter consists of four sections in response to research question 3: "How do SEN teachers reflect on their preservice teacher education in preparing them for their work in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?"A more explicit question was addressed during the interviews to help the teachers ponder their experiences: "Do you think preservice education benefited your SEN teaching practices? If not, is there anything that needs to be emphasised more or added in the preservice education stage?" The first section of this chapter provides the illustration of what the teachers found helpful/useful in their preservice education, followed by the synopsis of what the teachers found lacking/insufficient in their preservice training. The third section presents the teachers' suggestions to improve preservice education for inclusive IVET. A summary of this chapter is given at the end.

Before proceeding to present the findings, it is worth mentioning that there are three components comprising preservice SEN teacher education based on the data analysis: coursework, fieldwork, and teacherhood. Coursework here means the study arranged in the classrooms of preservice teacher education institutions. Fieldwork indicates the work performed in the field away from the preservice teacher education institutions by practicing or observing. Teacherhood refers to the whole package of SNE expertise that the teacher candidate acquires and develops throughout the preservice teacher education programme. What most of the teachers shared, especially about what they found helpful/useful in their preservice education, closely corresponded to these three components, which, therefore, will be referred to in the following sections.

7.1 Appreciation

In the research interviews, the participants were asked to reflect on how their present teaching practices benefited from their preservice teacher training programmes. Although the degree of appreciation varied, most of the teachers positively valued what they learned from their preservice training programmes, saying it helps them work more competently in inclusive vocational schools. For example, Niina considers her previous SNE studies to be highly useful for her teaching practices and responded with a positive response to the interview question:

> I think that my education is very … useful to my job. … And I appreciate my special teacher education in university very much. (Niina)

To be more specific, as I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, such appreciation of preservice teacher training programmes is composed of three components: coursework, fieldwork, and teacherhood. The following parts of this section will describe in greater detail how preservice teacher training programmes benefit teachers' teaching practices in the aforementioned three different aspects.

7.1.1 Coursework

In general, preservice teacher programmes have provided the teachers with various fundamental theories and perspectives on the SEN teaching profession. With some practical work experiences, as Anna shared, the theories she learned in the preservice teacher programme have helped her better understand the challenges she deals with in her job. Metaphorically, theory and practice, to Anna, are like two rails of a railway that complement one another during her SEN teaching career:

> When I had special teacher education, it was very good, and I needed it, because … what … what I experience in my work, I have no the theoretical background for it. […] I think that working and … theory, they have to go ways … to go together. (Anna)

Within the theoretical knowledge, three domains emerged from the data that can further embody how preservice teacher programmes benefit the teachers' work: SNE knowledge, SNE attitudes, and pedagogical knowledge and skills. First, in the domain of SNE knowledge, through the preservice teacher training programmes, Niina and Laura acquired professional knowledge of learning and of diverse special needs facing their daily SEN teaching practices:

> I know more about the those … special challenges, and also know more about public things about learning. (Niina)

> It's giving me more information in special education and knowledge about it. (Laura)

Jonna, Päivi, and Katri also shared the same view about how they have benefited from their preservice teacher training programmes; however, they feel that what they have learned focuses more on the area of learning difficulties than on other difficulties/disabilities, which could be, as Katri mentioned and was concerned about, the downside of the programmes:

> My schooling … focused … nothing else but learning problem. … And I understand that … it's not a bad thing, I think it's ok, but … but the problems are so … more … they are so much bigger. […] [Students] do have many other problems that have to be solved first, and after, you can be with the learning problems. (Katri)

In addition to SNE knowledge, SNE attitudes were recognised by the teachers as one of the key domains they learned and benefited from in the preservice teacher programmes. As Niina explicitly pointed out, she acquired the important attitudes required for the SEN teaching profession through her preservice education and finds that these are considered highly valuable in her SEN teaching career. She said the proper attitudes towards diversity not only play a pivotal role in dealing with her students but also have a long-term influence on creating a positive atmosphere for diversity in school:

> I think also very important is those attitudes to see different way that special need challenges. […] That's very important thing because if you are going to some schools, and try to change that attitude, it is very difficult and it's very slow procession. (Niina)

The preservice teacher training programme also gave Niina insight into the significance of social interaction at work. She came to realise that, without a good relationship with her students first, it would be difficult to further provide her professional support. In other words, from her point of view, , to make students' learning more effective, establishing a good rapport with them is a necessary step of teaching:

> Perhaps I know this how important the … social interaction is when you are teaching special need pupils or students, you have to have that bottom, and after that, then you have the positive social interaction, after that you can also teach. If you haven't that, it's very difficult … much more difficult to teach special need students. (Niina)

Without a doubt, the preservice teacher training programmes equipped the teachers with all manner of pedagogical studies essential for their teaching practices. For example, Niina and Laura stated that they gained better knowledge of teaching materials and techniques. Their preservice education enabled them to choose or (re)design proper learning content based on students' individual needs and to provide corresponding instruction:

> I know more about […] perhaps different methods. (Niina)

> It's giving me more information in […] practical tips to teach the students, and it helps me a lot. […] [For example,] what kind of teaching material could help SEN students and technics how to teach. (Laura)

However, more intrinsically, it appears that preservice teacher training pro-
grammes have helped the teachers think beyond the classroom boundaries. Ac-
cording to Suvi's understanding, the SEN teaching profession is a line of work
that requires a broader knowledge than SNE itself, especially when establishing
educational goals for students. Through preservice education, Suvi realised that
this work is literally more than teaching; instead, it involves different aspects of
a student's life. In her view, a competent SEN teacher should have a more com-
prehensive perspective of a student's situation while teaching so that the student
can benefit more in the long run:

> I think I couldn't work [without the preservice education.] … I think this work is very
> demanding, […] if you would be perfect person for this job, you would have like spe-
> cial education degree, and doctor's degree, and psychology you would know, and …
> and nurses … so then everything. […] Especially when you have to put the long-term
> goals for the students, you need this education … if you would just … like pass one
> day and then a next day … it's easier in a way but you have to think of their lives as a
> bigger picture. (Suvi)

7.1.2 Fieldwork

Although the teachers did not elaborate much about their fieldwork experiences
during their preservice education, Niina said, in terms of fieldwork, her preserv-
ice teacher training programme greatly contributed to her SEN teaching profes-
sion through two approaches: an opportunity to visit a diversity of institutions
and mentorship. In training, she got plenty of opportunities to visit and practise
teaching in schools of different models and levels. Those opportunities to see di-
verse educational institutions during the practicum benefited Niina's SNE exper-
tise by broadening her ideas of different teaching contexts:

> We had a lot of training in different kind of schools and different level of schools, and
> I think that was very good. (Niina)

Additionally, quality interaction between mentors and student teachers was spe-
cifically mentioned and highly appreciated by Niina. The mentorship she expe-
rienced through her preservice education benefited not merely the development
of her professional identity but also the concept of being a lifelong learner. While
studying as a student teacher, Niina learned from the experienced teachers how
to be a good teacher even without being able to know everything beforehand. A
constant and continuous eagerness to learn new things, in her view, is the key to
professional development:

> I had very good mentors in school trainings. […] If you are young, and you are going
> to study special education, you are little 'unsure', and you think that you have to know
> all the diagnosis and all the disabilities very […] you have that feeling at I don't know
> enough. […] If some … some experienced special need teacher is mentoring, that you
> don't need to know everything in the beginning, and still you can manage in your
> work well. […] You don't know everything, you can learn more all the time, and you
> can be still a good special need teacher. That [professional identity] could be stronger,
> and that's why that mentoring could be […] that could be very fine. (Niina)

7.1.3   Teacherhood

In terms of teacherhood, every teacher acknowledged the benefit of their preservice education to their SEN teaching profession. As mentioned above, the teachers acquired SNE expertise in various ways. Hilla shared that the whole package of SNE know-how learned through the preservice teacher training programme, to a certain degree, prepared her well to be a qualified and competent SEN teacher working in an inclusive vocational school:

> I have studied special … special studies first, and then … this gave me a professional … […] Qualify … yes, qualification. And all these together, otherwise I couldn't be SEN teacher. […] It's just been good to me, yes. (Hilla)

7.2   Imperfection

Even though all the teachers feel their preservice education has been helpful for their SEN teaching profession, during the interviews, they briefly mentioned some areas of their preservice teacher training programmes that they found lacking/insufficient. Based on their practical teaching experiences, there are three aspects of knowledge they believe they did not learn enough to competently face the challenges in their work: knowledge of psychological problems, knowledge of social/life management problems, and knowledge of severe disabilities.

As mentioned in the previous section, Jonna greatly appreciated what she learned in her preservice education about learning disabilities. She found those courses provided by the preservice teacher training programme very useful for her teaching practices. Nevertheless, when Jonna answered the interview question about whether she thought the preservice education benefited her work, she was one of the only two teachers who said "*no*" at the very start. During her SEN teaching career, she noticed that many students have psychological problems nowadays, and knowledge of psychological problems was the area she did not learn much about during her preservice SEN teacher education:

> Nowadays many young people have, for example, psychological problems, and I have needed more information about them. […] There was something, but it was … very little information. (Jonna)

In addition to psychological problems, social/life management problems were another big issue of concern that was highlighted in the interviews. Along with Jonna, Katri was the other teacher who said "no" in the beginning to whether preservice education benefited her SEN teaching profession. She feels grateful for what she learned from her preservice training about learning disabilities but thinks that the knowledge of social/life management problems was rather insufficiently instructed when she was studying to be a SEN teacher. Though it may sound a bit exaggerated to point out that her studies were nothing but learning

problem, Katri expressed her serious worry over problems students face nowadays other than learning challenges, such as social skills problems, behavioural problems, mental problems, and life management problems. In her view, these major problems need to be properly tackled first and, then, learning challenges can be better managed:

> "In my schooling, I know how to help students with learning problems, […] but they do have many other problems that have to be solved first, and after, you can be with the learning problems. […] Social behavioural problems are … are very big in … in vocation education. […] The barrier we have to go over first, and after, we can deal with the learning problems. […] Actually, the mental health problems are a big deal, but I see that … that … the mental problems are … are the conclusions, they are … they are the [results] of … the other problem. […] If they don't have the skills how to behave … it's … it's not good telling people they can't speak. […] We have to teach … the social skills, the life … how to cope with your life skills to our students, and … and why that we can … minor … we can make smaller … the … the mental problem." (Katri)

The teachers also mentioned that insufficient information about severe disabilities was provided by their preservice SEN teacher training programmes. Some SEN teachers, like Suvi, work with severely disabled students in an inclusive education context, although this is not a common practice in Finland, which includes students with severe disabilities in inclusive vocational schools. Due to the lack of knowledge in the field of severe disabilities, Suvi is forced to learn how to deal with the relevant challenges on her own at work:

> I've been working with severely disabled students … so … there wasn't so much information of that, and that information comes … comes … when you work with the students. (Suvi)

7.3 Suggestion

Despite the teachers' heartfelt appreciation for the various benefits that their preservice education has brought to their teaching practices, the teachers offered some constructive suggestions to improve the depth and width of preservice teacher training programmes. As mentioned previously, the SEN teachers' reflections on their preservice teacher training programmes involved three components: coursework, fieldwork, and teacherhood. Based on these three components, the teachers' suggestions concerning what should be more emphasised in preservice education are presented in the following sections.

7.3.1 Coursework

In terms of coursework, the teachers suggested two domains to improve the quality of preservice education: SNE knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills. First, in the domain of SNE knowledge, the knowledge of psychology, psy-

chological problems, diagnosis of students' strengths, and the national core curriculum are the contents that the teachers feel should be more emphasised in preservice teacher training programmes.

Jonna shared earlier that knowledge of psychological problems was lacking in her preservice studies. That is why, when asked for any suggestions on this matter, she proposed that, due to an increasing number of students with psychological problems in schools, professional training in this field needs to be provided more by preservice teacher training institutions:

> Those psychological problems which I have mentioned … more about them. There was something, but it was … very little information, but more … and how to work with these problems. (Jonna)

This concern was also shared by Anna, who was aware that she does not have sufficient competences to handle students with psychological problems. More essentially, she realises that having a more profound understanding of youth psychological development is important in today's SEN teachers' work. Those psychological problems, from Anna's perspective, are just the 'symptoms' and not the 'cause'. It is necessary to trace the origins of the problems so that corresponding solutions can be found:

> I have put the … 'need more psychologies schooling' … I think that psychology … nowadays there are so difficult … not difficult, different kind of people in the vocational institutes that they have so many problems. […] And more understanding in development and psychology for the young people is maybe one thing I need. […] And maybe it's … it's good understanding of people nature. (Anna)

Along with knowledge of psychology and psychological problems, the teachers suggested that the knowledge of diagnosing students' strengths and knowledge of the national core curriculum should be instructed more in preservice teacher training programmes. Päivi said she was grateful for what she learned about learning difficulties in her preservice education. However, she still feels the need to acquire more SNE expertise in educational diagnosis so that she can clearly identify "how to find a student's strength". As the national curriculum is one of the frames of reference that SEN teachers use to diagnose students' abilities and design individualised educational plans, teachers should be familiar with it as an indispensable "tool" in SNE expertise. In the interview, nevertheless, Sofia commented that teaching the national core curriculum in her preservice teacher training programme was left out and that preservice teacher training institutions should call more attention to it:

> Maybe there should be more of the … do you know 'opetussuunnitelma'? The plan for teaching … whatever courses you have to have in … […] the whole thing, the big thing that the Finnish government makes for the school that this is what you have to teach. […] That's kind of like the … guidebook for all the teachers and students, and that's what I would recommend to have in the teacher education, because we didn't deal with it at all, and it's the main kind of 'tool' you have in your work. […] So that was missing. (Sofia)

Having presented what the teachers' suggestions for improving preservice education in the domain of SNE knowledge, I will now move on to the findings on the domain of pedagogical knowledge and skills that the teachers believe should be more highlighted in their preservice teacher training programmes. Along with the various psychological problems mentioned by Jonna when she reflected on what was lacking in her preservice education, Katri expressed great concern about students' social/life management problems, such as social skills problems, behavioural problems, mental problems, internet addiction problems, substance abuse problems, and so on. Correspondingly, speaking of suggestions to improve her preservice teacher training programme, she considered pedagogical competences of social/life management skills as integral. In Katri's experience, a variety of challenges that students face nowadays in their personal and school lives inevitably add further complications to her work. A preservice education that merely focuses on learning difficulties is no longer enough to help keep pace with the professional requirements of the current school setting:

> My schooling … focused … nothing else but learning problem. […] but [students] do have many other problems that have to be solved first, and after, you can be with the learning problems. […] [How to teach students social or life skills should be more emphasised.] […] [Like] the financial skills, how to cope with your financial things, and also there are … like … these … these problems have been here in Finland for many years with alcohol, and … and drug … drug using. […] I think they … they included in the … the life skills, how to … how to live a healthy life. […] And sleeping problems, we have many young people here that … use the computer all night, not sleeping, they have all the social nets … their social nets, and … and … all … all social things happening for them is in … Internet. […] So … that … sort of skills we have to teach our students. (Katri)

More generally speaking, in response to the increasingly complex work reality of SEN teachers, more practical pedagogical studies, in Suvi's view, are needed in today's preservice teacher training programmes. Suvi addressed this issue because she noticed that the teacher educators in the preservice teacher training institution did not always have practical experiences in the areas they taught. As a result, she did not really benefit from the theoretical lecturing. She thus suggested that teacher educators should have the ability to exemplify the theory they are teaching:

> I think the teachers at [this] university had some experience … like real-life experience as well, and …. […] It would be important that they would have real-life experience. […] But when like … at [another] university when I did my master's degree, it's … I felt like … not many of … they just wanted to talk about theory. […] They can't … if they don't have experience, they just read about it. […] And also like the lectures would be more in-depth and interesting if it could be taking to the real context. (Suvi)

To put it differently, preservice education should use different teaching methods, adopt case studies, and give real-life examples so that student teachers can comprehend the pedagogy theories more practically:

> About the teaching methods, I think … like … a least in the … like the ideas how's different ways to present. […] For example, if they teach about behaviouristic ways to teach, they should use that method to give out an example of the method at the same

time. […] [Also] […] if you have … this kind of student who has this kind of problems, what would be the good teaching methods to teach that kind of students. […] On the other hand, […] some teachers have like only the power point and then they are telling about it … and that's it … so … [it would be good if they can] give a little bit more ideas like … you could do different ways to work. […] there is different ways to achieve same goals in teaching. (Suvi)

7.3.2   Fieldwork

In terms of fieldwork, more field observations were suggested to enhance the practical knowledge of teaching and learning. Although, as Niina shared earlier, many visits to schools of various models and levels are already organised by the preservice teacher training institutions, Suvi feels that it would be much better to have more opportunities to do field observations because this kind of opportunity is less available after work as a teacher begins:

I think especially the … when you are going to see other places, observing … other people's teaching … that is very important, and I think … that could be even more … even though it's quite a lot now, but could be even more like … when you start the profession … then you don't have possibility to go in other people's classroom in the same way and look what's happening there. (Suvi)

Furthermore, as a result of being mentored by experienced in-service teachers, Niina feels this kind of quality interaction between mentors and student teachers should be more emphasised in preservice teacher training programmes. This mentorship, more specifically, has profound and positive influences on the development of student teachers' professional identity. A more confident professional teacher image is built with the mentoring of experienced in-service teachers to dispel the uncertainties that student teachers usually bear before or in the beginning of their teaching career:

Perhaps that … mentoring could be … could be [more emphasised]. […] If some … some experienced special need teacher is mentoring that you don't need to know everything in the beginning and still you can manage in your work well. And also that … professional [identity] work that you have … special need teachers' [identity], it's stronger than you are going to work. (Niina)

Reciprocally, the benefit of mentorship is obtained by not only student teachers but also teacher educators. Through professional dialogue with student teachers while lecturing, teacher educators in the programmes could gain useful insights into the topics they teach:

That interaction would be perhaps useful, and could also that … that experience lectures, because also he or she can think other things and learn some things from those young students. (Niina)

Notwithstanding the significant influence that mentorship brings student teachers, Niina specified that it should be arranged better not from the very beginning of preservice education but later when student teachers already have acquired some basics of the SEN teaching profession:

Perhaps in the end of studies, not perhaps the beginning, [...] but perhaps two plus years you are growing that profession or special need teacher's [identity] that you feel you are. [...] Perhaps they have learned something about special education, they have ... they can ask the right questions, perhaps more questions, in the beginning they can't ask anything. (Niina)

7.3.3 Teacherhood

Given that the challenges SNEstudents with SEN face nowadays are no longer merely about learning, the teachers feel the need to be more educated about the corresponding knowledge for tackling students' problems other than learning difficulties. This is why, in terms of teacherhood, Laura feels that it is necessary to restructure the existing preservice teacher training programmes to incorporate more studies within a fixed short-duration education:

Maybe there should be added many ... many things, but ... it's ... it's short-term education, and ... there is ... students need so ... so many things. [...] SEN students have different kind of needs. One may have problems in reading or writing, one may have difficulties in math, one has problems in social skills and so on. As a teacher I should have more practical ways to teach each student. (Laura)

7.4 Summary

The findings in this chapter indicate that existing preservice teacher training programmes bring many considerable benefits to teachers. In terms of coursework, preservice teacher training programmes substantially contribute to teachers' competences in terms of SNE knowledge, SNE attitudes, and pedagogical knowledge and skills. As for fieldwork, preservice teacher training programmes positively affect the development of SNE expertise by arranging diverse institutions for visits and teaching practices and through well-organised mentorship. In the aspect of teacherhood, preservice teacher training programmes prepare the teachers well for working within the inclusive IVET context. Despite the positive influences brought by preservice teacher training programmes, there are three domains of knowledge that the teachers found insufficiently instructed: knowledge of psychological problems, knowledge of social/life management problems, and knowledge of severe disabilities. To more competently manage the challenges that teachers face at work, some very practical and constructive suggestions were given based on the teachers experiences.

Figure 19 illustrates the overall findings of research question 3: "How do SEN teachers reflect on their preservice teacher education in preparing them for their work in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?" In this figure, the green colour refers to what SEN teachers found helpful/useful in their preservice education, red represents what SEN teachers found lacking/insufficient, and yellow shows what SEN teachers suggested should be more emphasised in their preservice teacher training programmes.
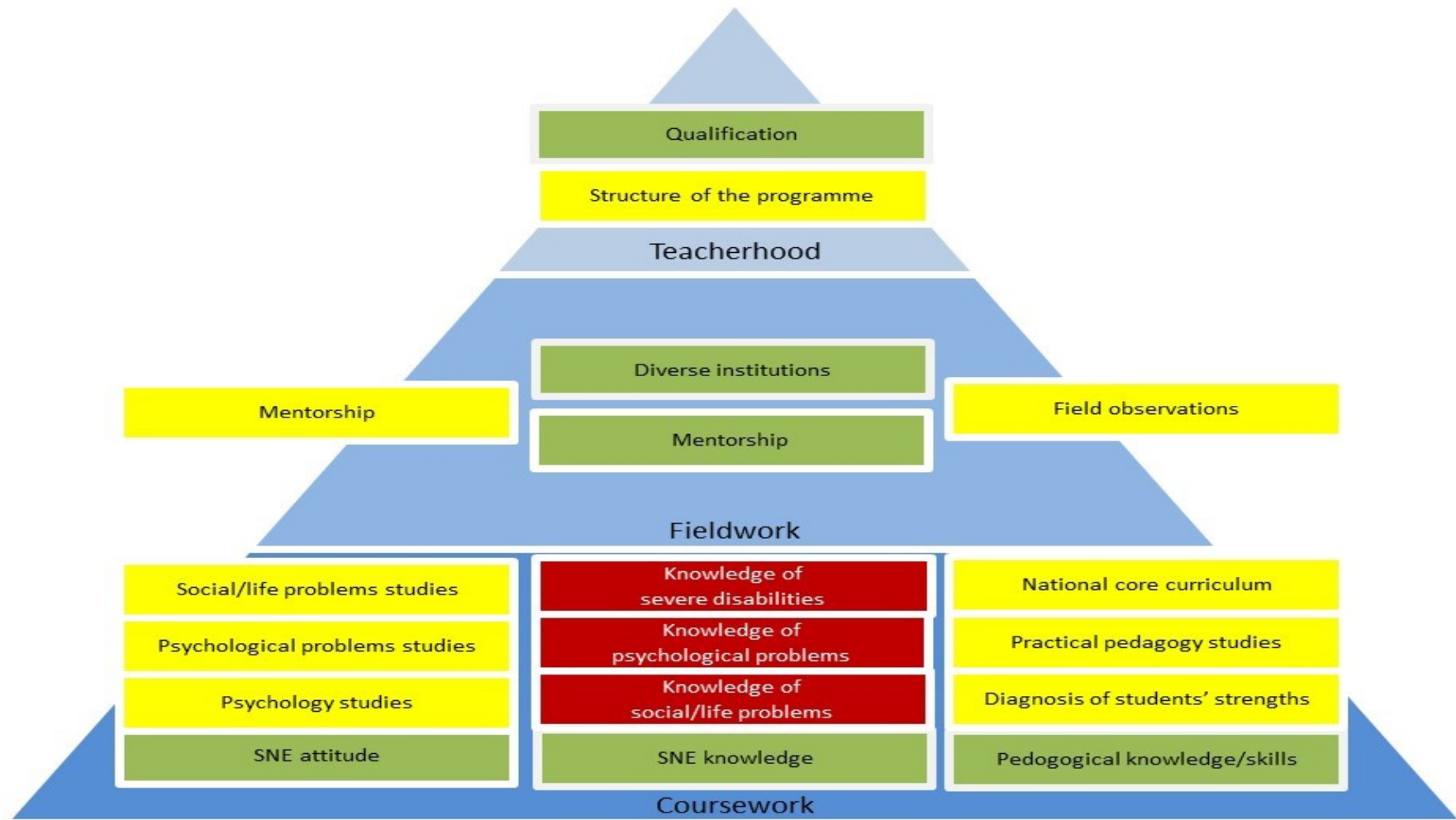
FIGURE 19   SEN teachers' reflections on their preservice teacher education

8   INFORMAL LEARNING OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS TEACHERS

In the previous chapter, I examined the professional knowledge and skills acquired by SEN teachers from their preservice teacher education programmes (i.e., in formal learning settings). However, professional learning can take place in both formal and informal ways. In this chapter, I will present the SEN teachers' experiences of informal learning from their previous vocational careers, current workplaces and personal lives in response to research question 4: "How do SEN teachers develop their expertise through their lived experiences?" Previous vocational careers refer to the work experiences gained by the participants before they began working as SEN teachers. The current workplaces are the inclusive vocational schools where the teachers were working, while their personal lives encompass any negative incidents, marriages and child raising experiences that occurred throughout the entire lives of the interviewees.

8.1   Learning from Previous Vocational Careers

At the very beginning of each interview, I asked a few preliminary questions to collect information on the teacher's professional background, particularly their prior work experiences. Given that prior work experience is usually a prerequisite to qualify as a vocational school teacher in Finland, it was unsurprising that all of the interviewees had gained some work experiences before becoming SEN teachers. It was also notable that eight out of the 11 had even worked in industries other than education, including health care, restaurant business, public services, advertising, IT, and fine arts. According to Linda, her various experiences from her previous vocational careers significantly influenced her present teaching practices:

> I think that … today … I am … I am … everything I have lived throughout … my childhood, my school years, my studies, my earlier … my earlier 50 years, and they all have very … straight influence to my current profession … I am what I have lived throughout. (Linda)

Three major domains of competences were identified from the data that the teachers recognised and greatly valued from their former work experiences: 1) pedagogical competences; 2) interpersonal competences; and 3) contextual competences. *Pedagogical competences* represent the abilities to understand the development of students with SEN, to comprehend and follow relevant SNE issues/topics, and to organise, provide and improve SNE services. *Interpersonal competences* refer to the abilities to interact with students, to empathise with students' special needs, to embrace the diversity of students and to be committed to them. *Contextual competences* include the abilities to sense, understand, examine, evaluate and respond to the students' lives and learning needs from a holistic perspective. The remainder of this section describes in greater detail how these prior work experiences affected the teachers' SNE expertise positively in terms of the three abovementioned aspects.

8.1.1 Pedagogical Competences

Sofia had extensive employment experience working in restaurants, bars and the government. She was able to transfer the coaching skills she acquired during her time as a manager, a position which obligated her to train and supervise staff, to her current SEN teaching career:

> Well, because I have been a supervisor in a few places, it kind of have taught me how to … how to teach people to … to learn the job and do the tasks, so that's … that's pretty much … I think what teaching is also … so that has helped me a lot. (Sofia)

Her coaching skills helped her achieve the proper fundamental understanding of the students and their special needs. Simiarly, Niina explained that her SNE expertise, especially her professional knowledge of various disabilities, had first developed during her experience working in hospitals and handling patients with different special needs:

> I [had] been working in hospitals, as a … not nurse, but quite … and also secretary. […] I think [my previous work experiences influence my SEN teaching profession] very much, because um … I was working in psychiatric hospital, and there are very … different … different kind of people, and also neurological department, they had perhaps some … some people had some same kind of symptoms as in special needs classrooms. (Niina)

8.1.2 Interpersonal Competences

In addition to pedagogical competences, the teachers also highlighted the interpersonal ones when describing how their previous work experiences influcned their work in the SEN teaching profession. For example, Päivi and Suvi both credited their former work experiences for their improved communication skills. Päivi used to be responsible for customer services in a restaurant business, and Suvi had worked in a restaurant and a kindergarten. These jobs entailed dealing with all kinds of people, requiring good emotional intelligence and social skills.

Therefore, as Suvi pointed out, because interacting with people is "the most important thing in teacher's job", the interpersonal competences acquired and developed from previous vocational careers were greatly appreciated and applied practically by the teachers:

> Yes, I have worked long time in restaurant … 5 [years] … in customers service … superior [supervisor] … I have been dealing with a lot of people. (Päivi)

> When I was kindergarten teacher […] I can make people understand me even though we are not speaking the same language. … Like how important is the body language. […] So I learned that there. […] I think all my jobs have involved … interacting with other people, and that I think it's the most important thing in teacher's job. (Suvi)

Interpersonal competences involve not only communication skills but also a good understanding of others and a professional commitment to those whom one serves. Hilla had previously worked as a teacher for both children and adults. In her former teaching career, she met many people, which gave her plenty of opportunities to enrich her understanding of different personalities. Sofia also attributed her enhanced interpersonal competence (i.e., professional commitment to students) to the managerial experience she had acquired in her previous work. Working as a manager required her to take full responsibility for her staff to a great extent, which was exactly the same attitude she learned to adopt towards her students with SEN:

> The more you see people and discuss with other people […] the better I understand them. (Hilla)

> I think what teaching is also [like working as a manager] … so that [managerial position] has helped me a lot […] to be responsible for the staff and the students. (Sofia)

Discussing the same aspect of attitude, Suvi, Jonna and Anna alluded to the notion that their previous work experiences had made them more "patient", "flexible" and "tolerant", teaching themhow to embrace people's diversity and become more adaptable and even more 'laid-back' about the people and situations they dealt with every day in their SEN teaching:

> I think I [become] very patient […] and flexible […] [because] the school I worked it was really small, and I had […] two autistic children in that class also, so you learn to be really patient and flexible that you can handle … that class. (Jonna)

> When I was studying, I was working as a waiter in a restaurant, so I think that gave me patience … and … that how I feel like … I need quite a lot. (Suvi)

> I get more understanding, and have more patience … I don't take … everything so serious anymore. […] I think I have learned it these years … past years … with the children, playing with them, and … in … in the school, and talk with them. (Anna)

8.1.3   Contextual Competences

The third domain of learned competences that the teachers valued from their former vocational careers was contextual competence. As VET is a critical learning process which trains and prepares students with SEN for the labour market, it is helpful for SEN teachers working in inclusive vocational schools to have a general knowledge of various work lives. This is why Niina positively valued her work experiences in fields other than education. In her opinion, working merely in educational settings could narrow one's view of the reality of work life and place teachers at a disadvantage in helping students with SEN transition from school to the labour market:

> I think, my views is large because I have … I am busy also working life … other environment than in school, because our students they are going […] to some other job and school, if you are only going from basic education to high school, university, back to high school or vocational school, you are … you have been working only school, and it's little … little different that working life. (Niina)

Having an adequate understanding of various walks of life enables a teacher to better understand, examine, evaluate and respond to a student's needs and life from a more comprehensive perspective. Such a broader view is due to a wealth of work experiences gained over time. Take Katri and Laura, for example. Before working as SEN teachers, both worked in different fields for years. Their colourful and rich work life histories undoubtedly enabled them to assess students' situations from a wider angle:

> All those … jobs I have done before, I … I've done them because I wanted to have more and more information of lives of young people. […] I wanted to see the problems of those young people from all different kinds of angles. […] I gained … a lot of knowledge about the problems. […] it made me more aware of … of different sections working with young … young people, I … I … can handle the whole situation better, I know the whole picture better I think. (Katri)

> I have been working in many … many different jobs. […] It made me more tolerant and broad-minded. (Laura)

Summary: Taken together, these findings provide important insights into SEN teachers' informal learning in terms of their previous work experiences. Hilla's words serve as an excellent footnote to this section: "Everything that has happened during my life influences somehow … you become like wiser all the time."
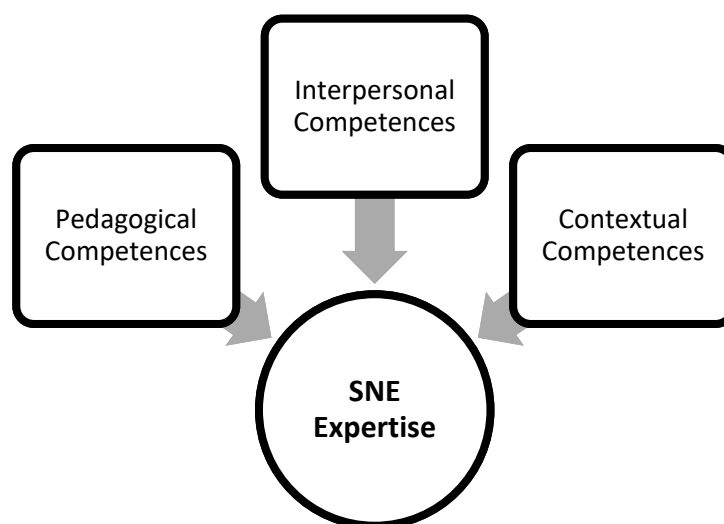
FIGURE 20   Competences of SNE expertise acquired from previous work experiences

8.2   Learning from Current Workplaces

In the interviews, I did not directly ask the teachers what kind of informal learning they have received in their current workplaces. Instead, I explored their informal learning experiences by questioning 1) how they filled the gap between the work requirements and the SNE knowledge, skills and attitudes they acquired; and 2) how their personal values and private lives were affected by working as SEN teachers. In the following sections, I will illustrate in more detail what the teachers learned from their current workplaces.

8.2.1   Learning for Work

In a broader sense, a variety of learning experiences in their present workplaces greatly benefited the professional image development of the SEN teachers. As Suvi shared, the everyday learning experiences at her workplace made her consider herself "more as a special education teacher". This type of change was not instant but gradual and sometimes even unconscious:

> It's really hard to say that I would have … I don't think I have done any … changes like […] it just work changes me gradually kind of thing […] Like … not a conscious choice. (Suvi)

On the other hand, from a more practical perspective, there were three significantly positive aspects which the teachers were aware of in terms of their professional development through informal learning: they learned to become lifelong learners, pedagogical experts and reflective practitioners.

Becoming Lifelong Learners

Inspiringly, the teachers interviewed for this research clearly recognised the importance of being lifelong learners in the SEN teaching profession. As Niina pointed out, meeting different people in different situations all the time required the teachers to constantly "be changing and learning", which was not only identical to Hilla's viewpoint but also exemplified in the case of Linda, whose educational ideology was fundamentally changed by her SEN teaching practices. It appeared that the ability and the phenomenon of 'self-adaptation', the constant negotiation in a dynamically changing professional landscape, was necessary and common in the SEN teaching profession:

> You have to do this for make self-adaptation all the time [...] Something smaller [changes] all the time. [...] I make self-adaption every day, so that ... how could I do this? And could I do that better next time, and so on. (Hilla)

> I am very different teacher now. [...] All this way I have improved my skills and my thinking and my thought about what is learning and what is teaching has changed a lot. (Linda)

Unsurprisingly, realising the simple truth expressed by the American novelist Louis L'Amour that "The only thing that never changes is that everything changes" can make one a humble and lifelong learner. Just as Anna told me, the changing nature of the SEN teaching profession dissolvs, to a certain degree, her ego. She felt that she would become a "bad teacher" once she stops learning and improving; a 'good teacher' should adjust his or her teaching style according to students' needs so that students can enjoy the learning process. Even though it is not always easy to not be content with what she has achieved, she tries to humble herself throughout her lifelong learning journey:

> I have to down myself sometimes when I am doing my job, I have to have a feeling that I didn't make a good job ... because it's the only way that I can improve my teaching. [...] I think that I am already good enough, there is nothing to be changed, and that makes me a bad teacher. [...] I try [to keep humbling myself]. [...] I feel that I have some much to learn still. [...] As a teacher, it's not good that you have too many routines, because student changes, you have to always take different kind of look to the students. [...] because the main thing is to make the students learn something and enjoy about their learning, not me to teach them in my way. (Anna)

Becoming Pedagogical Experts

Another significant aspect of informal learning at the workplace is that the teachers had learned to become pedagogical experts. Niina, Suvi and Laura all stated that their SEN teaching practices have sharpened their teaching skills and altered their teaching styles. For example, Suvi said that she was a 'quick person' by nature and, at a certain point, tended to multitask; however, this way of teaching

did not fit well with the learning styles of her students with severe disabilities. Hence, she learned to slow down her teaching pace and focus on one task at a time:

> My [personality] is quite like … public and fast, and I have had to be more … like … focus on one thing. […] In the beginning of my years, I tried to push like … so much information, and now I have it all like … like quarter of that information what I tried to do before. […] I work with severely disabled students at the moment, so … it's better need to be … the present … and only thinking of that one thing at a time with them. (Suvi)

Niina also changed her style of interacting with students in response to students' special needs, especially when they had problems with obeying rules. She had a "soft" personality that made her more flexible but less effective in dealing with the students' behaviours. As a consequence, she has learned to be more discipline-oriented or more "logical" based on the situation so that she can properly help those of her students who have problems adhering to certain principles:

> I have learned that … what's that … boundaries or … rajat[boundaries]. […] I am telling you have to … these are the rules, and it's safe for students. […] I think it's very important for who have those life management for problem solve. […] I have changed because perhaps I was little … some kind 'soft' when I was young … but I have noticed that it's better … in some things that there are rules, it's better also those young people and they feel them safety. […] In some cases rules must be strict. […] It's easier for students if I am logical, and every time behave in some situation the same way. (Niina)

In addition to changes in teaching styles, the teachers indicated that their teaching skills have been improved towards a clearer and more structured direction. Because students with special needs sometimes have problems comprehending learning material effectively, the adjustment in either the materials or how knowledge is delivered is necessary. Therefore, with her practical teaching experience, Laura has become more aware that she has to make her teaching as clear as possible in order to ensure that her students understand what she is teaching:

> I try to be more clear in my teaching, and … and maybe that's one main point. […] I have to think what I say and how I say it, so I will be as clear as possible, so they can understand what I mean. (Laura)

Becoming Reflective Practitioners

Apparently, becoming either a lifelong learner or a pedagogical expert requires the teachers to be reflective practitioners so that they are able to pay close attention and make any adjustments necessary to the SEN teaching profession. Some of the reflective actions implemented by the teachers are valuing and becoming more attentive to a student's individuality. In other words, the teachers do not seek to impose their professional opinions on students; instead, they respectestudents' choices and give students enough space to act and think independently. In the eyes of the teachers, their work is not about doing things in their own ways but about serving as a 'scaffold' to assist students in such a way that each student's individuality can be appreciated and developed:

> See the … the person 'an individual', so I think I have become better in that one … seeing the student and watching why are they special. (Sofia)

> I learned to think that … everybody has their own right to … to … think about matters, so I can't like manipulate student to think how I want them to think or act … I used … in the beginning I used to think that I know how things … things should go, and … and I tell them this is the way, how it works, but … in these years I have learned that every one of us … we have to find our own way to do things, and … and in that finding, I can be of an assistant with experience, and with my skill, but I can't tell what to do. (Katri)

Valuing the individualities of students also made the teachers better listeners. As Niina explicitly pointed out, young people are "professionals in their own life", so paying careful attention to students' voices is vitally important for teachers to properly understand their problems. Some teachers, such as Sofia and Katri, had the shared learning experience of becoming better listeners through their teaching practices. They all value and have become more aware of the significance of listening in their work:

> I think I am a better listener because in that job you have to have very good listening skills I think. (Sofia)

> I have learned to listen better. (Katri)

However, at least for Päivi and Suvi, listening skills did not seem to be innate abilities. They both frankly admitted that, in the beginning, they were not good at listening. Päivi shared that she was once unaccumstomed to not taking students' voices seriously, and it took quite a long while for Suvi to learn to listen. Luckily, it appeared that these two teachers had learned their lessons through their teaching experiences, which had raised and improved their awareness of listening to students:

> I [was] immature and young, I … I [didn't] understand … how important thing is that … stop and listen. […] [Now] I stop to listen … student. (Päivi)

> I think it took quite many years to … that I … now I first … listen the students' need, I think, rather than think what I have to … teach them … like … the students' need have come even more important to me. (Suvi)

Becoming more appreciative of students' individualities and more attentive to their voices promptly broadened the teachers' minds. Because they now had a more practical and comprehensive view on handling challenges, the teachers gained deeper insight into the students' problems. In the educational setting, sometimes the problem itself can be considered as only the tip of iceberg; what matters more is the 'iceberg' beneath the sea. This was why Jonna, as a reflective educational practitioner, tried to avoid 'not seeing the wood for the trees' and strive to 'get to the bottom of things':

> Nowadays I should have seen what's behind the problems of these youngsters. […] I think there's not only one problem, but there's something behind them, so that is something I try to find out what's behind there. (Jonna)

8.2.2 Learning from Work

Since teaching practices are tightly interwoven with teachers' own lived experiences, it is logical to say that teachers' personal values or private lives can also be influenced by what they learn from the SEN teaching profession. In the present study, many teachers clearly attributed their conceptual and attitudinal changes in their personal values and lives to what they learned from their teaching practices at the workplace. For example, in terms of conceptual changes, Suvi used to have a stereotypical view of people with severe disabilities and was convinced that they had miserable lives. As a result of witnessing how positively students in her class enjoyed their lives, her understanding changed. She no longer considers 'severe disability' and 'miserable' to be synonyms; instead, she understands that people with disabilities can live their lives as meaningfully and delightfully as those without them:

> I learned that everyone's life is … is worth of living kind of thing … and seen how happy my students are, and I … I always thought before that … like … the people with severely disabilities have so bad life, but it's not like that, I think they have great life, because they are living every day … every day is important for them, they are not waiting for tomorrow, they are living in that moment, and maybe that's what I learned from them as well. (Suvi)

Niina and Linda also experienced fundamental conceptual changes in their personal lives because of what they learned from the SEN teaching profession. Working in a professional field requiring such close and intensive interaction with various individuals and situations on a daily basis has undoubtedly made them more insightful and broader-minded about who they meet and the situations they encounter in their private lives:

> I think it ... influence very much, because I have more point of views about things. (Niina)

> [This profession influences] how I … I meet people, what I think about people and situation, how I … how I … act in some situations also … and also this … this experience and my studies give me some this kind of knowledge that I know and I see quite much about people which I meet.[…] This experience gives a lot knowledge of human. (Linda)

Regarding attitudinal changes, the professional experience greatly transformed how the teachers saw, understood and interacted with others. As Päivi pointed out, the SEN teaching profession definetly "impacts how to face people and value [diversity]". Based on the data analysis, I identified at least three facets in which the teachers experienced attitudinal changes in their lives: they became more interested in people, valuded diversity and equality more, and were more proactive and cooperative.

More Interest in People

Working as SEN teachers also further aroused the teachers' interests in human personality and motivation. The SEN teaching profession places strong emphasis

on students' individualities, which means that SEN teachers have to pay special attention to the inter- and intra-individual differences of each student. Inevitably, this 'professional habit' has also been revealed in the way the teachers deal with others in their lives. They tend to care about what motivates a person and express their interest in how a certain set of qualities can make one person distinct from another:

> When I tend to talk with people, I think like … I think of the motivation in … in … like why they are interested in something. (Suvi)

> I think I appreciate people's personality a lot. (Jonna)

Valuing Diversity and Equality More

Furthermore, working in the SEN teaching profession made the teachers better appreciate differences and equality. This profession earnestly strives to embrace and value students as they are, which indicates that, as Jonna specifically stated, SEN teachers "see differences as power". In her eyes, "everyone has something really special and something [s/he is] good [at] it."' Niina also identified with this notion, transferring her attitude of appreciating diversity from her professional to her private life:

> I see that difference is a strength, also in private life. […] In my private life, I can think also if be my neighbors or hobbies also 'oh … you can think also that kind of thing. It's right but it's different. (Niina)

Valuing diversity implies seeing people equally. This was exactly how Katri considered the influences her teaching experiences have had on her personal values. She thought that everyone has the right to be what they are, even if one might not agree with the way some people live, and that sometimes one has to stand out to fight against inequality:

> Whatever we do or think, we are all equal, and […] all the people have the same rights, we do different things, and … and I … I don't approve all the things that … other people do, but […] it's their right to make their own decisions. […] And also I am very … easily … going to … to … speak loudly, and going for […] for people that I think are treated badly, or … treated not equally. (Katri)

Becoming More Proactive and Cooperative

Working as SEN teachers transformed how the teachers interacted with people in their lives in a more proactive and cooperative manner. The SEN teaching profession requires a proactive approach to assist students through a multiprofessional collaborative model. In other words, SEN teachers tend to prepare themselves for or intervene in students' situations in an (pro)active way with the help of other professionals. Because of what they learned from their work, the teachers became more swiftly aware of others' needs and better able to help others in their private lives; in addition, their 'team spirit' was also enhanced:

Maybe I think about more … about … my family and my friend do and … and can I help … to do something … find jobs … find the … study place and … and … I think a lot of … things more. (Päivi)

Maybe I have learned to be more acceptable to work with other people. (Sofia)

Summary: Figure 21 illustrates the themes identified in the interviews concerning the informal learning of SEN teachers in the workplace. As shown, what the teachers learned from their work influenced not only their SEN teaching practice but also their personal values and lives in at least five different ways. In terms of the SEN teaching profession, the teachers became lifelong learners, pedagogical experts and reflective practitioners; regarding their personal values and lives, they experienced both conceptual and attitudinal changes.
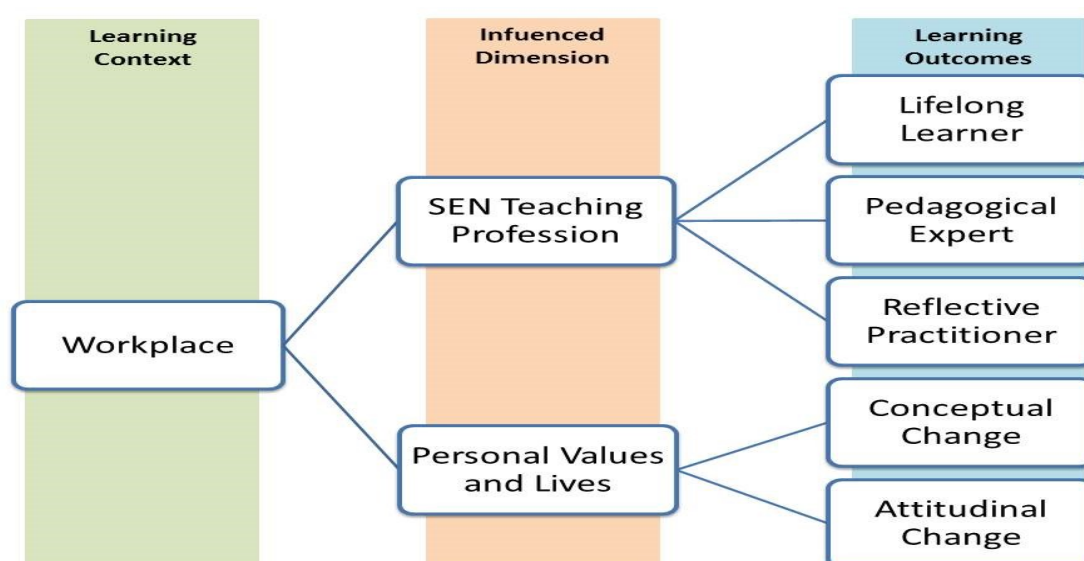
FIGURE 21   Influences of workplace learning on SEN teachers

8.3   Learning from Private Lives

In this section, I will present the significant and interesting influences that negative personal experiences, marriage and child raising had on the teachers' work.

8.3.1   Negative Lived Experiences

The first specific aspect of personal lived experiences explored in this study that influenced SEN teaching practices in several ways is the negative experiences in a teacher's life. In the interviews, I asked the teachers to recall some of the negative episodes they had experienced during their time as a student or a teacher and to think about how these negative incidents could influence their professional practices.

According to my analysis, the negative incidents that affected the teachers were concentrated in three particular contexts: family life, student life and work life. Within these contexts, six influential factors were mentioned by the interviewees that brought about a profound effect on their SEN teaching careers: children, school teachers, the interviewees themselves, students, colleagues and the teaching profession. In other words, even though there was no adequate previous research that directly confirmed the relation between negative personal lived experiences and the development of the SEN teaching profession, the teachers I interviewed were well aware of the influences negative lived experiences had on their work.

In Niina's case, she considered the experiences gained from her very demanding and difficult work as great opportunities for her professional development rather than 'negative' incidents. This kind of positive attitude towards life certainly makes Niina a lifelong learner and enables her to become over time more skilful in problem solving:

> Perhaps I don't view them are negative. A lot of work but I have learned a lot about them. […] I have needed those experiences that I have come perhaps better … and better understanding. […] They are learning experiences. And that I told if I don't manage or succeed, I try something else. […] I don't remember the word 'ratkaisukeskeinen'- problem solving. (Niina)

Anna shared the same idea that so-called 'negative' lived experiences are simply 'challenges' and precious opportunities to learn something important. Anna's previous work experiences as a class teacher resulted in her subsequent career change to be a SEN teacher. Through interacting with students in larger groups, Anna got to know herself better and came to realise that a more individualised teaching approach was just what she wanted. Therefore, after her one-year experience as a class teacher, she decided to shift to the SEN teaching profession:

> I don't think I have so many negative experiences, in a way that … I could call them negatives … I could call them teach me something … And … first … the first experience when I was the class teacher … with no experience, I had good … support, but it was time that I think that teaching classes big group is not for me … Because I need more like … face-to-face teaching … small groups. […] It made me something to understand about myself. (Anna)

The other interviewee who changed her career to become a SEN teacher due to the negative experiences in her previous teaching life is Suvi. As a regular teacher for years, Suvi found that "there is no enough time for each student" who needed special support, and this was somewhat against her teaching philosophy. Thus, like Anna, she chose to reorientate her career path and pursued working as a SEN teacher. On the other hand, Suvi alluded to the notion that, besides the incident in her previous work life that led to the career change, a negative experience in her student life also had an influence on her SEN teaching profession. She was once mocked in public by the principal of the school she attended:

> When I was a student about 16 years old, 15 years old, there was a principal who was teaching history for us … And that … principal wanted always us to stand up when

we answered the question … and … and … I was there like … I can't answer the question, and then he told my name, and I stand … stand up, and … for some reason I froze like … what's gonna happen, and … I supposed to tell the 'windmill' … the 'windmill' was the answer, and I couldn't figure it out … I knew what I wanted to say, but I couldn't find the word for it, so he was shouting that 'This is the windmill.' Like the … this one, and then it was called … I call it 'läpykkäratas', which is … funny word for it, now I always heard that 'This is the läpykkäratas girl' kind of thing … so I felt like the teacher didn't … um … like … like how we works … interact … like the in … it wasn't equal interacting, it was like you're making a joke of that kind of thing. (Suvi)

From Suvi's rather vivid illustration of how she was mocked by an educational practitioner, it is not difficult to see how this student life incident greatly influenced her professional development. She knows how embarrassing it can be to be humiliated in public and how important it is to maintain a student's personal dignity even when s/he fails. Instead of 'making fun of' her students, Suvi 'has fun with' them:

'I don't … make fun of my students, I … if we are having fun, we have fun together, but I don't make fun of them.' (Suvi)

Unfortunately, Suvi was not the only 'victim' of poor teacher-student interaction in student life. Päivi also reported 'sufferring' from a similar incident. As a 'special' child who already knew how to read and write at a very young age, Päivi was mocked by her primary school teacher and isolated by her classmates. Her individuality as a child was not respected and valued, which fortunately taught her that SEN teachers must appreciate the uniqueness of each student:

The primary school teacher used to mock me when I was a little […] discriminated against me, because I could already read and write […] I treat all students as individuals … I do not discriminate and I do not isolate [them]. (Päivi)

Unlike Päivi being wronged for her precocious intellectual development, Linda appeared to have a better childhood experience of school. She went to school when she was six years old, which was uncommon in the Finnish education system. It made her the youngest and very 'special' in her class. Interestingly, Linda did not find this experience to be negative and she was not discriminated against by her teachers or classmates. She admitted that her teaching practices significantly benefits from this, and she felt that her experience of being different makes her better able to value and support her students' individualities:

I went to school when I was 6 years old, normally in Finland we go when we are 7 … But I came … 6 years old […] I went school earlier, I was youngest in my class. […] I was different in my class, because I was younger, I think this … this is the experience which is very important for me, also for my … my … my profession … I think that it gives me […] this thinking that we everyone are different. […] This experience or this diversity or other … otherness … we are so … so different every people … And we can survive, and everyone has their own … needs, and teacher has to … have to … has to … give everyone what she or he needs. (Linda)

Apart from student and family lives, the findings revealed that the teachers' expertise was also influenced by any uneasy interactions with colleagues or students. For example, Katri was dissatisfied with her colleagues' negative attitudes

towards students with SEN, especially those with low motivation to study or social problems. Since many of her colleagues tended to give up on students who had problems other than learning difficulties, Katri had been trying to improve her SNE expertise by participating in a professional development project and studying a few subjects by herself so that she would have the necessary professional knowledge and skills to help as many students as possible:

> I have had negative experiences by other teachers. […] They tend to think that students with the problems in reading or math, they are … they are ok, they should have special education, that's fine, or students with problems in … in languages. […] BUT the students with the … with the social problems, problems with motivation or coping with teachers and so on, I think … most of the teachers … still think that those students should go somewhere else. […] These experiences have influenced … to me the way […] I … gain some more information for me how to go with these students, and also I am leading a … project, trying to find out how to cope with this problem in … in our school, and … and … for search matter, I am studying social subject myself in … to be a sosionomi […] [so that] I could cope these problems, so that's how it influenced me. (Katri)

As for the valuable lessons learned from interacting with students, Hilla attributed her increased awareness of using proper terms to express her ideas to a terrifying experience of handling students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD). She once had to cope with some students with EBD on her own, and these students were strong young men who could have posed a serious threat to her safety if they had lost control. This experience, to some extent, scared her and determined her to be more careful in the future about wording and patterns of interaction:

> There have been two or three such students I have been a little bit scared. … it was very important to think very carefully what you say or … how you express your feelings or something like that. […] Their behaviour was … like unbalanced, they could become angry very easily. […] The only fact that you have to think very carefully your words and your means. (Hilla)

Summary: Some participants' negative lived experiences prompted their decision to follow a new career trajectory and become SEN teachers. However, it is inspiring that despite the various negative incidents they have experienced in their family, student and work lives, most of the teachers transformed 'the power of the dark side' into 'the power of the bright side' and over time have become well prepared to be more emotionally and intellectually qualified teachers. Figure 22 illustrates the main contexts and factors that contributed to the participants having negative experiences and that also significantly affected their work.
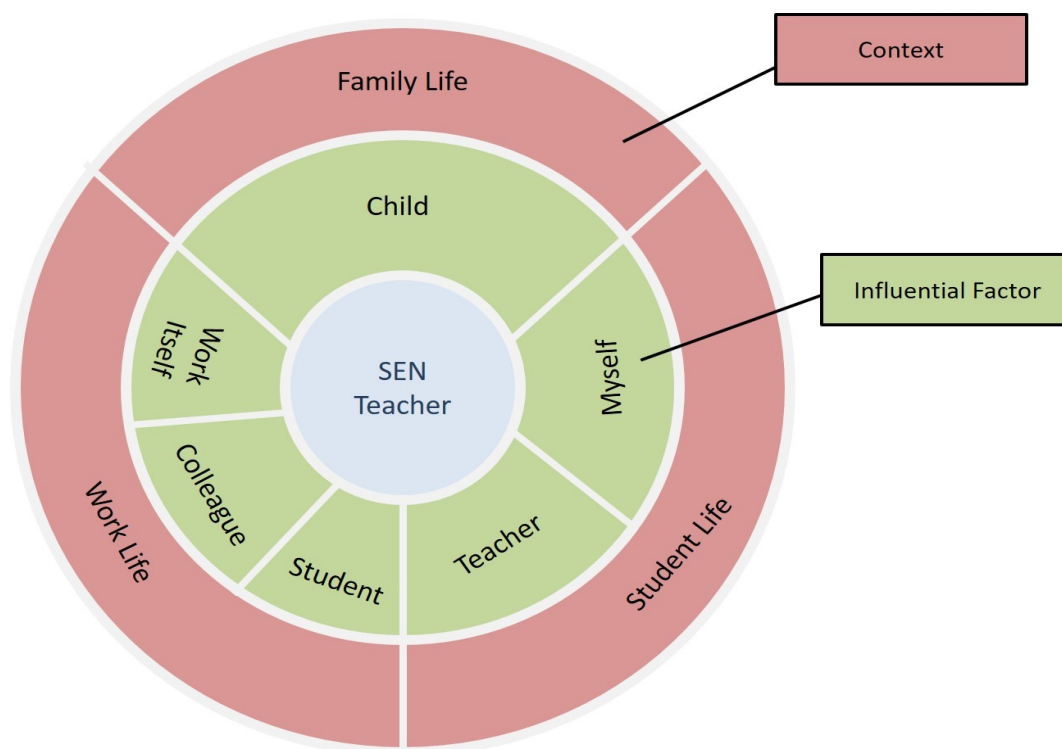
FIGURE 22   Contributing contexts and factors to SEN teachers' negative lived experiences

8.3.2   Experiences of Marriage and Child-Raising

In addition to the influences that a certain personal negative lived experience could have on the SEN teaching profession, I was very keen to know whether the experiences of married life or raising a child/children could also affect teachers' attitudes towards their work and their relationship with students, or give them more practical knowledge of how to deal with students with diverse needs. As work is part of our lives and inevitably interwoven with our own lived experiences, each event, incident or process in our lives has a certain influence on *how* we teach and interact with people at work. For this reason, in the interviews, I asked the teachers to ponder the possible influences their experiences of marriage or child raising could have on their expertise or profession.

Regarding marriage, expectedly, some of the teachers, including Päivi, Suvi, Sofia and Tuulia, stated that getting married has not had any influence on their work. This probably resulted from the way they interpreted my question: I assume that these four teachers simply considered marriage as a personal matter which is unrelated to their work lives, rather than viewing life as a continuous process in which individuals accumulate various experiences over time to make them what they are today. However, Lind's response indicated that she took this view. Her unhesitating response to the question was: "My private life big influence to me because it is part of me".

With the exception of Päivi, Suvi, Sofia and Tuulia, the other seven teachers, including Linda, acknowledged the explicit or implicit influence their experi-

ences of either marriage or child raising had on their work. After further analysing these seven teachers' responses, I found that what they learned from or experienced during marriage or child raising somewhat affected either positively or negatively their professional relationships. One of the relationships influenced by these experiences was the relationship with the work itself. For example, Niina mentioned that she "reflects more" because of her married life and child raising experiences. Anna also shared that she finds her work less stressful because of what she learned from her marriage (or, more precisely, her divorce). As she experienced a divorce following a long marriage, she came to realise that things do not work when there is no mutual effort to maintain a relationship. This learned principle has also proven to apply to her work life. She understood that both the teacher and the student share the responsibility for the student's learning progress, and this idea has helped her stop trying to be a 'perfect teacher' who must fulfil an endless commitment to student learning:

> I did divorce about 15 years ago. […] I found out that it's not always … I can't do all the jobs, someone he has to do, and I didn't feel that I make a failure. […] Maybe it influenced in a way that if … I have a so-called difficult student, and he don't do … she don't do what she … is supposed to do, it's not always my fault, if I give the best I can, and someone don't take it, there is nothing I can do, the other one have to take the responsibility, maybe that's why I don't take so much pressure of my work. (Anna)

The 'stress-alleviating' function of personal family life was also mentioned by Jonna. She thought that having a family life, implying marriage or child raising, could help her recharge and take her mind off the hustle and bustle of her work:

> At least I can say that when I am home, I have to forget problems of my students, so it helps you in the work. (Jonna)

On the other hand, choosing not to get married or have a child also had certain influences on some of the SEN teachers I interviewed. For instance, without a family life, Katri found that she has more time to develop herself professionally and to devote herself to work:

> 'I haven't get … got married, and I don't have any kids … So … I am sure that this kind of devotion that I am having for my job now, it wouldn't be possible if I have a family of my own … […] what I am doing after work is also … some … they all have something to do with … with the special education teaching. […] If I have a family, I could work normally as a SEN-teacher, that's no problem, but I couldn't develop myself the way I am doing or … the way I have done.' (Katri)

In addition to the positive influence that a married life or raising a child could have on SEN teachers' work, surprisingly and unfortunately, having a child under seven years old had a dramatically negative impact upon the female teachers, particularly on their employability, their work performance as expected by their colleagues and the promotion opportunities open to them. In her interview, Sofia spoke again and again about her experiences of being less employable and being judged by her colleagues simply because she had very young children (more detailed information provided by Sofia is included in Appendix 4):

Lower Employability

Once I was said it directly that 'you have … your kids are so small that we are not going to choose you' … and then once I just saw it in his face because … for the whole interview, he was smiling, and when I told him that my kids are 3 and 5, and he went a 'Ho'. (Sofia)

Undervalued Work Performance

Personally I have an experience that there was a time … actually a period when my kids were very sick, and I had to be absent from work quite a lot … day … well, maybe two days a week, and then I was working for two weeks, and then again two days off and now … and it does influence on the colleagues and for the supervisors as well. […] The supervisor might be thinking that why … why she is always off because of the kids. (Sofia)

Fewer Promotion Opportunities

If they are looking for supervisors, they mainly choose man […] it was in my school, and it just happened a month ago. […] The woman was more educated, and she actually had the education unique to … to be able to work very well in that job, and she had EU experience, and that man didn't have experience at all, so … nobody really could understand why he was chosen. (Sofia)

The second influenced working relationship was the relationship with students. Evidently, the teacher-student relationship greatly benefited from the teachers' experience in raising their own child(ren). A common view held by five of these seven teachers was that in different ways they felt that they have "more feelings" for their students. For example, Niina asseted that she values her students more because she realises that each of them is also someone's child:

If you have own kids, you have more feelings. […] You think that everybody in my classroom, he or she is somebody's child. […] I have to … behave them … what behave that … take care of them because they are very important for somebody. (Niina)

Those teachers with some child rasing experience not only appreciated their students with SEN more but also better understood them. For instance, Hilla had experience of raising a child with SEN, so her personal experiences of dealing with her own child greatly helped her provide professional assistance to her students with similar challenges. Linda also alluded to this notion of better understanding students. She had four children who are all different and encounter individual problems in their lives. As a result, she became more experienced in figuring out how to handle the challenges her students faced:

In that office where I am, there are very many […] there are terrible much mental disturbances, mental illnesses. […] It's easier for me to understand [the students] and try to help them because of my very hard school with my [child]. (Hilla)

I have four children, and they are … every … everyone is very different from others […] my children are the best teachers for me: how to educate and how to … how to solve different problems […] some of my children have … and every of children have has some kind of problems in their lives. (Linda)

After reflecting on how child raising experiences influenced their work, the teachers highlighted the importance of embracing the individuality of each student. Child raising appeared to have substantially contributed to the teachers' attitudinal changes from 'teacher-centeredness' to 'student-centeredness'. When I asked Anna how much her experiences of raising her own child affected her expertise, she responded: "very very much!" Before having her own child, Anna thought that all babies did the same things: sleep, eat and sleep. However, giving birth to her first child completely revolutionised her idea of children. She had to adjust to her baby's schedule and learn to respect his or her individuality. The lessons Anna learned from this experience largely applied to her relationship with her students: to support students based on what they really need rather than what she, as an educational expert, thinks they need:

> Before I had my children, I thought that babies are some … they sleep and eat and sleep … And … my first-born wasn't anything like that … […] so I have to change completely my thoughts about children. […] I understand that they are so individual, you can't change children, as a baby, they have their own personality in a way. […] I have to change my life because of the needs of my children … and that's make different my thinking, and to my thoughts about other people too. […] Because I think about the students now, maybe … I look what they … they are … what kind of people they are … what they need … more than what I have to give them … I have to see first what they … what they need, and then I can think what could I help them. (Anna)

Just as 'individuality' was what the teachers became more aware of based on their child raising experience, so too they learned to adopt a more holistic view on an individual's development. Similar to Anna, Laura gained more long-term insight into her students' lives from her own child, and learned to take her students' futures more seriously:

> I think I am bit different now than earlier. […] This responsibility which I take now … maybe a bit more serious than before … and … maybe I can now think … see … how it's important to … to think about this student's future and their … future lives so … that's maybe what I now think more than before when I haven't my own kid. (Laura)

The third identified working relationship to be influenced was that with their students' parents. Those teachers who were paretns themselves could easily 'put themselves in the shoes of the students' parents. As mentioned above, having a child with SEN helped Hilla better understand students with similar challenges and develop deeper empathy for her students' parents, especially towards their feelings of helplessness due to scarce resources for their children:

> At that time, at the end of 1990, no support at school. […] I couldn't do anything for that, it was just [my child] that had to be active. […] As a rule it's often quite difficult to get mental help quickly because of the lack of resources. (Hilla)

In addition, by putting themselves in students' parents' shoes, teachers can appreciate not merely the parents' efforts but also the importance of communication. Although Suvi felt that her married life hasnothing to do with her expertise, she gave credit to her child raising experiences for her valuing more the role of her students' parents in their education:

I don't think the marriage … has anything to do with that but … I think the children … yes … I have two children and I think … like I understand the parents better … and […] I … take their thoughts (I appreciate parents knowledge about their own children more) … more seriously … than I probably would if I wouldn't be a mother. […] I listen to them more carefully. (Suvi)

Finally, I identified that the relationship with colleagues was also influenced by the teachers' personal lived experiences. Teacher-teacher relationships were cultivated mainly through lessons learned from married life. As Niina pointed out, she became more flexible and team-oriented and developed better communication skills, such as compromising and consulting.

If you are living with your husband, you must that … that flexibility. You can't live together if you … I don't … I want to do this like this, you have to negotiate how we do, how we want to do this. […] you must have sometimes compromision [compromise], and I think that consulting … some kind of consulting also. (Niina)

Summary: Overall, these findings indicate that the teachers' personal lived experiences of marriage and child raising could not truly be isolated from their SEN teaching profession. Their SNE expertise was implicitly or explicitly interwoven with what the teachers learned from their married lives and their experiences of dealing with their own children. This fact is demonstrated by the influences in four distinct professional relationships: with work, with students, with students' parents and with colleagues. Figure 23 shows how these four work relationships were influenced by the teachers' marriages and child raising experiences.
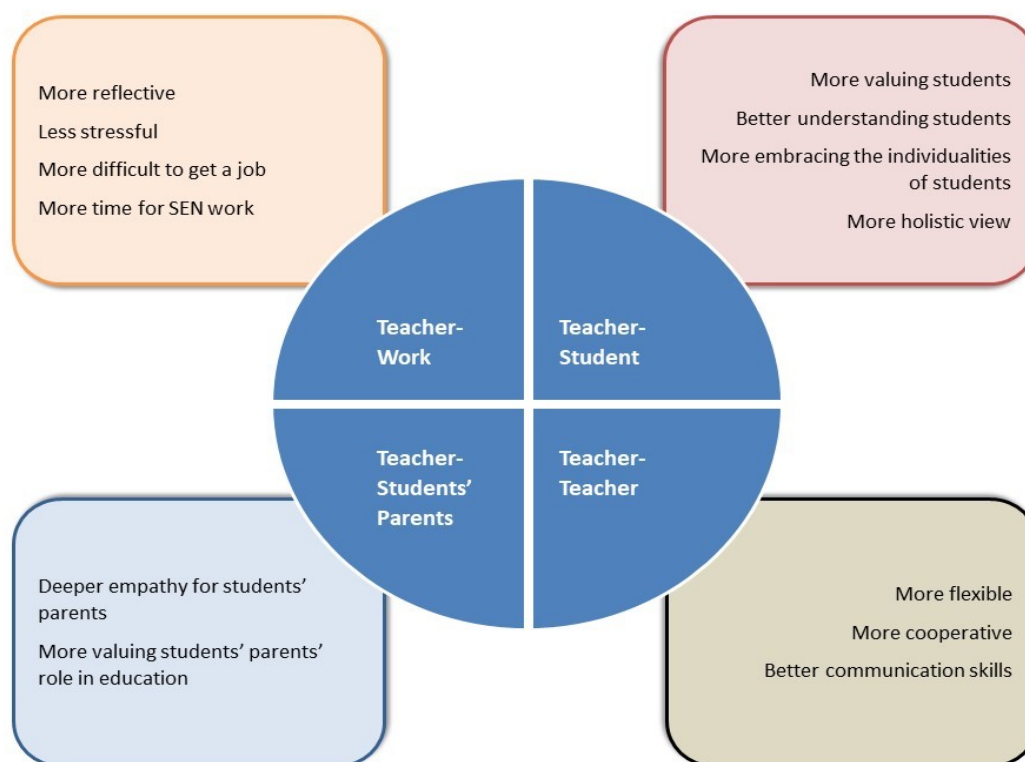
FIGURE 23   Influences of marriage and child-raising experiences on the work of SEN teachers

9 JOB SATISFACTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS TEACHERS

This chapter covers some of the questions I asked in the last section of the interviews. These questions are related to research question 5: "How satisfied are SEN teachers with their jobs in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?". More specifically, I examined SEN teacher job satisfaction in terms of 1) retention; 2) thoughts of leaving; 3) self-evaluation of being fit for the work and 4) willingness to recommend this profession as a career. In the sections that follow, I will present the research findings on job satisfaction in relation to these four aspects.

9.1 Reasons to Stay

Despite the frustration, stress and various challenges experienced at work, as presented in Chapter 6, none of the 11 interviewed teachers had ever decided to 'drop out' of this profession. Based on the data analysis, two main factors were identified which appeared to contribute to teacher retention: external conditions and affective reactions. Regarding the external conditions, the teachers mentioned that receiving material rewards (salary) and having corresponding qualifications were the reasons for staying. As Hilla explained when I inquired about the reason for her still working as a SEN teacher, "Naturally, first, to get money, so it's possible to live", indicating that being employed is itself a justifiable reason for staying in this profession. Along with earning a regular wage to support her daily expenses, Tuulia also mentioned the corresponding training background as an external factor that influenced her decision to stay: "I am qualified for this profession."

In addition to the external conditions, two affective reactions appear to be related to the retention of the teachers. The term 'affective reactions' here represents the teachers' emotional responses to various facets of their work. Based on the themes emerged from the data, the teachers' affective reactions were provoked by both the work itself and the students with SEN, which were the key

mediators in their decision to stay. Since the teachers talked about their affective reactions to the job much more than the external conditions, in the following two sections, 9.1.1 and 9.1.2, I will further elaborate how the teachers' affective reactions to their work and students influenced their willingness to stay in this teaching profession.

9.1.1 Affective Reactions to the Work

First, the positive affective reactions to the SEN teaching profession offer an adequate explanation for why these teachers preferred to keep working as SEN teachers rather than switching career paths. Although the work is quite multifaceted, demanding and burdensome, all of the teachers knew how to look on the bright side. They used several positive terms in the interviews to describe their work. For example, Suvi, Linda and Laura generally considered their work as "important", "meaningful" and "rewarding". They felt that this profession is valuable to society and brought them a sense of achievement. Moreover, Niina and Anna described their work as "challenging" yet "interesting". The fun of the SEN teaching profession resulted from the challenges of the work itself, which could be attributed to the multilayeredness of the profession, just as Suvi said: "Every day is different." As I mentioned in the previous chapters, in response to the great variation at work, 'being flexible' is one of the most important personality traits a competent SEN teacher should have. The situation of dealing with students and their parents, internal workmates, external professionals, etc., could vary from one day to another or, sometimes, it could even change on an hourly basis. The complexity of SEN teaching practices not only challenges the teachers' professional knowledge and skills but is also a factor in driving them to improve their professional practices. This was refleted in Anna's comment that:

> There are so much need to learn that it's like … every day brings something new … and that's something I like. (Anna)

Apart from the positive adjectives used to describe this profession, the teachers also revealed the importance of exercising an influence. In other words, the feelings of being able to work as a lifelong learner and to play an influential role in the workplace reinforced the teachers' desire to stay on this career path. As previously mentioned, the teachers found this work intriguing because of the challenges caused by its multifaceted nature. These challenges, as Suvi shared, bring something new for the teachers to learn and improve their work: "I like the job, and it's … every day is different, and I feel like I can develop in this job." Niina also pointed out that "[You] always can learn more [from this work]." Apparently, such workplace learning experiences quenched these teachers' thirst of lifelong learning and continuous professional development, both of which adequately explain teacher retention. Furthermore, working in this field provided the teachers with a great opportunity to exert their influence not only on the advancement of SEN teaching practices but also on the futures of students with SEN:

> I like the job … and I … I like the job because I … I feel that … we have really really lots of power to … to make the future as we teach the young students to be professionals and help them to get work, and make this world better, I hope. (Katri)

9.1.2 Affective Reactions to Students

On the other hand, teacher retention could not be explained by the teachers' affective reactions only towards work. Since students with SEN are the primary recipients of SEN teachers' professional services, implying a close teacher-student relationship), to a certain degree the teachers' affective reactions towards their students inevitably influenced their decisions to remain on this career path. As Päivi clearly put it: "The students need me, I think. I have to be there"; her 'sense of belonging' amongst students significantly contributed to her willingness to continue as a SEN teacher. 'Enjoying working with students' was another affective reaction of the teachers towards students. A meaningful finding from the data is that this affective reaction appeared to be identical to the main reason the teachers chose teaching in the first place. Looking at Jonna and Anna, for example. Both of them truly enjoyed working with young people and valued and loved their students. Their genuine concern for these young people's wellbeing undoubtedly played a vital role in continuing in the SEN teaching profession:

> I think I have great students, I like them, and … and that's the main reason. (Jonna)

> I think young people are so [interesting] … people are interesting, but young people specially … and I … I like to work with them. (Anna)

Summary: the external conditions, such as material rewards and corresponding qualifications, and the affective reactions towards their work and students, played influential roles in the teachers' reasons for staying in the SEN teaching profession. Figure 24 provides an overview of each of the abovementioned factors that explain teacher retention.
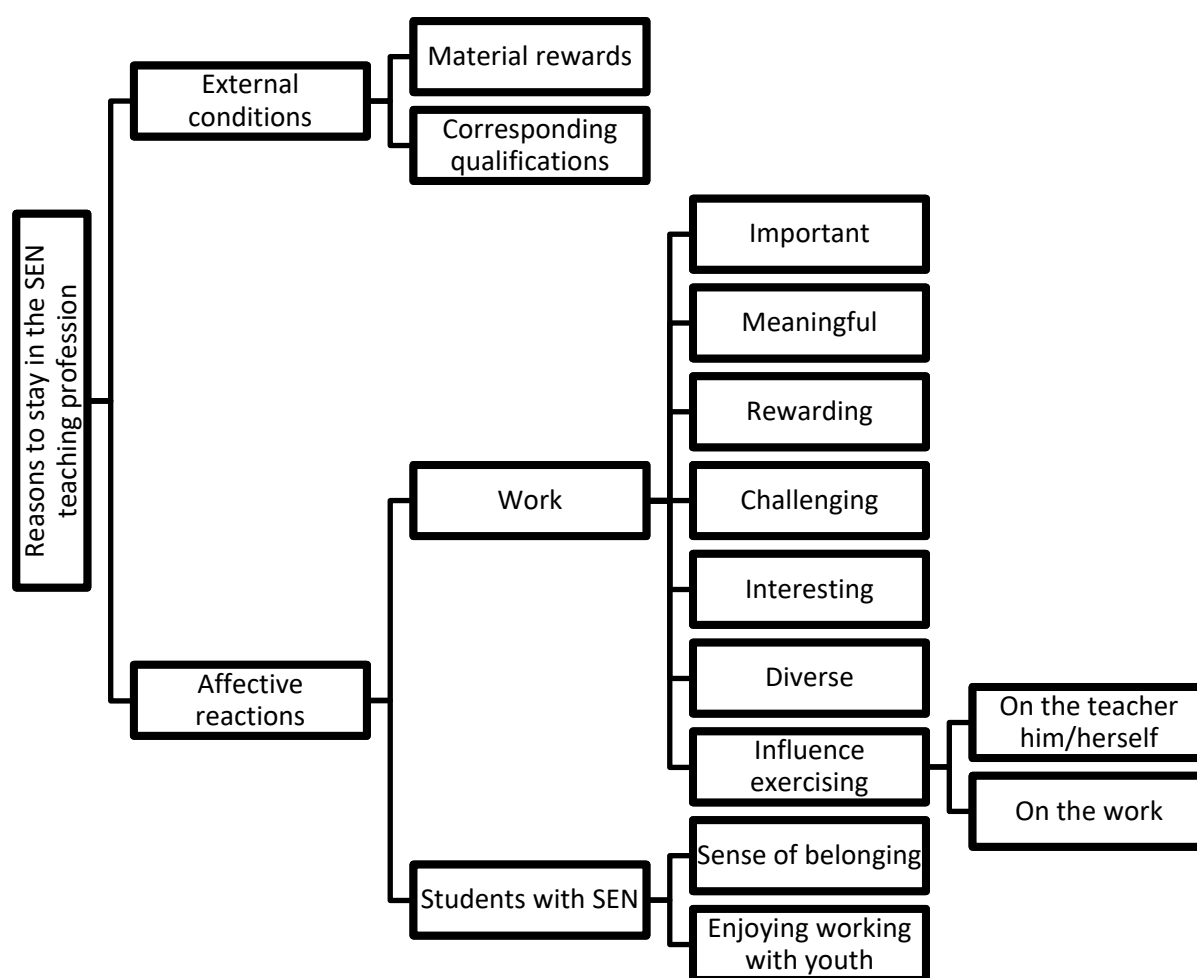
FIGURE 24   Reasons for staying in the SEN teaching profession

9.2   Reasons to Consider Leaving

Although most of the interviewees were content to continue working as SEN teachers, this does not necessarily mean that they had never thought about leaving. Surprisingly, except for the very positive responses given by Päivi, Sofia, Tuulia and Katri who had never thought about leaving, the other eight teachers indicated that they had at least once considered to pull out of this career path. Two of the eight teachers, Niina and Linda, had already firmly decided to start new professional journeys somewhere else. In the case of Niina, she did not exactly want to "change the whole career" because she found SEN teaching interesting and close to her heart. Instead, she transferred her expertise to a higher level so that she could have a more holistic perspective on this field and pass on her professional experiences and knowledge to prospective SEN teachers:

> Now I change … I am doing in the different place, and that's … that reason that … I can see things from different view. When I am educating special need teachers now,

> and I have seen how way are working in vocational school, and how students are man-aging? Now … perhaps I can … transfer my information to new special need teachers. (Niina)

In contrast to Niina's clear and concrete aim to further develop her SNE expertise, Linda's decision to withdraw seemed to be unsure and compelled by 'a sign of the times'. Due to the economic depression in Finland that had inevitably a great impact on the schools in the region she worked, Linda had just determined, the day before our interview, to temporarily leave her position to think about her future career. She explained that her school and others in the same region have been experiencing a dramatic change in order to 'more effectively' control the education budget, which has been causing her considerable distresss and concern (more detailed context given by Linda is included in Appendix 4):

> They are [cutting] down this student numbers in our vocational school … here in [my city], and also in [this region]. […] We have to reduce our … our vocational school here […] when something is cutting down, those who are poorer or weakest or who have special needs, they are the … not the first thinking, but they are the least … the last ones who are thinking … so I am afraid what happen in next year? […] This is … so confusing […] I am afraid about that. … whole Finland, and mostly these cuts-down things are … made in … in [this region]. (Linda)

Apparently, Linda strongly disagreed with the government over the austerity policy on education because it seriously jeopardised the right of students with SEN to learn. Therefore, the entire process of changes put her in a complete fog about her career. Given that she was quite perplexed by the current situation and the future of her school, Linda had made up her mind to leave for a short period to rest and reflect on what she needs to continue her career:

> I have made a big decision yesterday. […] in next year I take […] Leave of absence … and I will see … I will take a little distance and see what happens here in vocational school … so many changes are happening now, also from the government side, and also in our [region's] vocational school. […] I will take … take off now, and look around and … think if it's my place to go back to grammar school as a special education teacher. (Linda)

Aside from Niina and Linda, some other teachers also expressed their consider-ation of leaving. Similar to Linda, Anna was considering other career options be-cause she was worried about being laid off due to the budget cuts affecting her school:

> What happen now is was there … there are coming things that … they are firing people, if they fire me, I had a plan what I could do … I could go somewhere else to work somewhere. (Anna)

However, another possible explanation for Anna's thought of leaving lies in her open-mindedness to many other future career possibilities. Before working as a SEN teacher, she had years of experience in various other fields. Therefore, change appeared to be a constant in her life:

> I have been … all my life because I never have any plans to be something … I am … I am … I have done something that just happened. […] I am doing just what feel like, I stay home because I had child that she is … wasn't easy to take daycare … but usually I get the best out of [my life]. (Anna)

Consiering the likelihood of ending up unemployed as well as always being open to changes and fun, every now and then, Anna thought about leaving. She seemed to look at her career transition in a rather positive manner. As presented earlier, Anna was undoubtedly a passionate SEN teacher; however, it would not be surprising if one day in the future she decided to pursue other career:

> I like to do things, and … what I have been dreaming is that … ok, I … spend the … winter teaching, in the summer I go do something somewhere else, it doesn't matter where or what, but go abroad or something I like that … I always have all different kind of ideas. […] If I work … like 10 years the same kind of job, maybe I would need to change in somewhere else, do something else. (Anna)

Although Jonna, Hilla and Suvi's reasons for thinking of leaving were totally different from Anna's, this idea flashed across their minds at times as a result of great stress at work. Yet, it resembled 'retreating' from the tumult of the work more than leaving the SEN teaching profession for good:

> Sometimes when I need some peace during work days, then I have thoughts something like that, but nothing seriously. (Jonna)

> Yes, when I was too tried and stressed … but […] occasionally. (Hilla)

> Well, yes, I have … sometimes … I feel like there are so many … even though I am the person who enjoys being with many people, like talking with everyone, but sometimes I feel like I would just like to go in the … alone in the room and be there by myself. […] But it's not … no serious consideration ever … Because this is so … you have to concentrate on every person so much, then … you would just like to be with your own … sometimes. (Suvi)

As for Laura, she had been pondering over reorientating her future career for two very practical reasons: the distance she had to commute and the school climate. When I asked her whether she had ever thought about changing her career path, she mentioned that the long commuting distance from home to the current workplace would be one influence on her decision, even though she still would like to continue working as a SEN teacher:

> I am traveling every day. […] It is about 75 kilometres, so that's one point, but that's only … my own reason. (Laura)

The other reason why Laura was considering leaving was because of the poor leadership at her school. Unfortunately, the lack of a long-term vision for the school-based SEN teaching practices and of sufficient support for and acknowledgement of Laura's work by the school leader created a poor working climate that led to Laura's consideration of leaving:

> Maybe then is the … leaders don't see the importance in SEN-teaching and supporting this kind of student … because we don't have this quite ready system yet in our college, and if the leaders don't want to create that system, so I think it's a bit problem. (Laura)

Summary: To conclude, the teachers expressed a variety of perspectives in relation to their thoughts of leaving their current positions or the SEN teaching profession altogether. From a macro point of view, the budget cuts caused by the national economic recession played a crucial role in influencing the teachers' consideration of leaving. At the meso level, the unsatisfying and unsupportive working environment also contributed to the teachers' unwillingness to remain in their jobs. At the micro level, certain personal factors, such as the personal career plan, commuting distance and stress experienced at work, affected their propensity to leave or stay. Figure 25 illustrates the factors that explain the teachers' consideration of leaving their current teaching positions.

Personal Factors

1. Passing on professional experiences and knowledge
2. Being open to the possibilities life has to offer
3. The burden of the commuting distance
4. Stress at work

School Climate

Poor leadership

Economic Depression

Uncertain career future
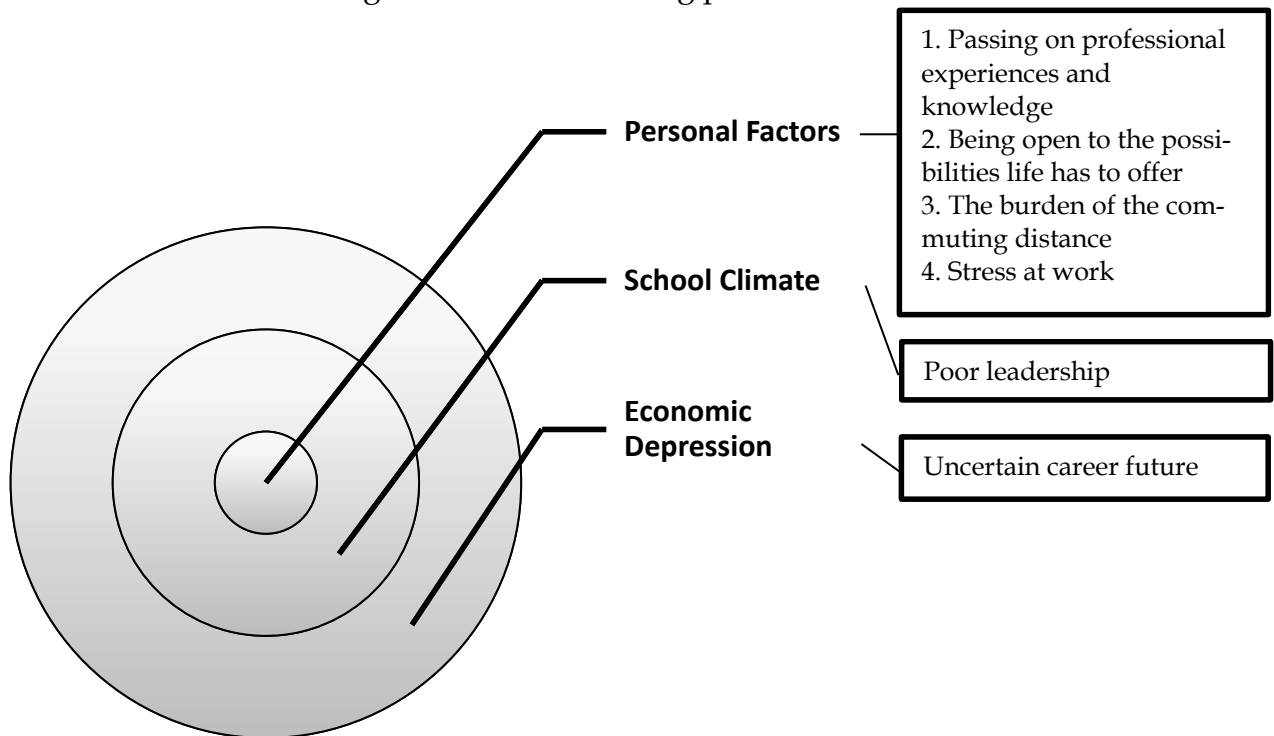
FIGURE 25   Reasons for considering leaving the SEN teaching profession

9.3   Reasons to Rechoose This Profession

When I asked the teachers if they could go back in time and choose again, would they still like to work as SEN teachers, not surprisingly, each of them gave a strong 'yes'. From the radiant smiles on their faces during the interviews, it was not difficult to understand and feel their great enthusiasm for this profession. Sofia even expressed her 'regret' for choosing this career path a little too late. If

she could turn back the clock, the SEN teacher education programme at the University of Sciences would be her first choice instead of the study of hospitality management at the University of Applied Sciences:

> Yes, yes, definitely … I might even get into it earlier … like … maybe go to the university to study it … to be … laaja-alainen (comprehensive)… erityisopettaja (SEN teacher). (Sofia)

Niina also firmly voiced her deep affection for this professional field. In her opinion, this second-best decision of her life (the first-best being her marriage) was still worth her devotion if she could go back in time because she felt that in every aspect the SEN teaching profession was her 'rightful place':

> Yes, absolutely yes. I … that was my best choice, after marriage [laugh]. … Yes, it's … I think my … my mind, character, and skills, and background, and everything suits, match with that. (Niina)

Two major reasons were identified which appeared to contribute to why the teachers would choose this profession again: personal factors and the characteristics of the SEN teaching profession. With regard to personal factors, qualification, educational philosophy and personality traits explained the teachers' preference for this profession. Apart from the required professional skills and knowledge, as Niina shared earlier, Linda and Katri pointed out the significant roles their educational philosophy and personality traits played in their choosing this career. Identical values of individualised instruction and matching personality traits made them find the SEN teaching profession a perfect career path:

> Yes, yes, yes, I want to be SEN-teacher … definitely … Yes, because … I earlier said that also … that I think that it's all … my philosophy is now that it's not … it's not possible to teach a group of people, it's always … always … only one … it's so individual process that everything has to go individual way, and this profession gives possibilities to teach individually. (Linda)

> I have these characters … That … it's important. (Katri)

On the other hand, the characteristics of the SEN teaching profession, such as unexpected fun, variation, psychic rewards and meaningfulness, contributed to the teachers' eagerness towards choosing again this career path. This fact was clear and intriguingly identical with what I revealed in the previous section of this chapter about the teachers' reasons for staying in the SEN teaching profession:

> Yeah, there is so many different kind … I think that I need a job that have … it's not the same all the time, it's different and it changes a lot … and special teaching is something that you never know what's coming to you … And that's why I make it … make it interesting, and enjoyable, and … I just like it. (Anna)

> As I said, it's rewarding, and … and important, and I think I have something to give to those students. (Laura)

Summary: Together, these findings provide meaningful insights into teacher job satisfaction. The reasons the teachers viewed the SEN teaching profession as the best career choice are explained by some personal factors and their being fond of the characteristics of the SEN teaching profession. A concise illustration of these findings is briefly presented in Figure 26.

Personal factors	•Educational philosophy •Personality traits •Qualification
Characteristics of the SEN teaching profession	•Interesting/Diverse •Rewarding •Important/Meaningful
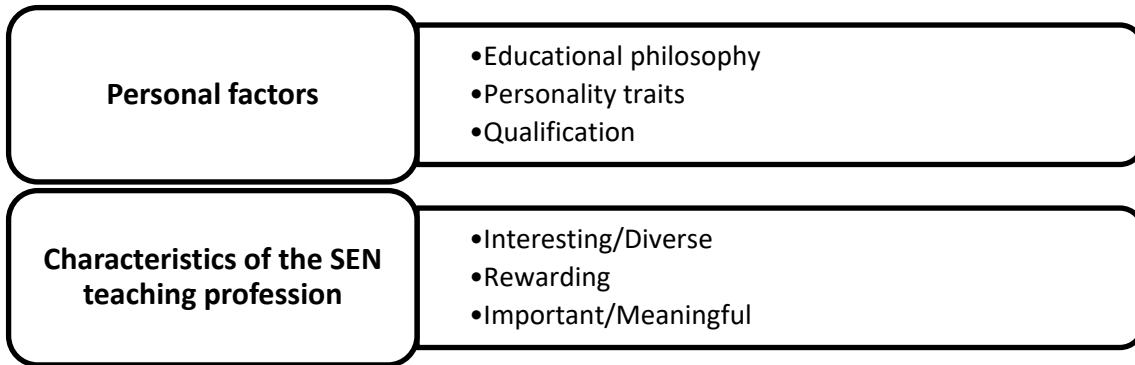
FIGURE 26   Reasons for rechoosing the SEN teaching profession

9.4   Reasons to Recommend This Profession

Whenever each interview came to an end, I asked each teacher if she would like to recommend this profession to others as a good career path. I took this question as a meaningful and important indicator of wheter the teachers were generally satisfied with their work. Despite all kinds of ups and downs at work, most of the teachers gave their hearty recommendation to the SEN teaching profession. However, their recommendation was offered on the condition that certain matching personality traits and valuing the significance of SNE were required. For example, Niina, Jonna, Hilla, Suvi and Anna mentioned being social and flexible are two desirable personality traits for this profession. In Chapter 6, the diverse aspects of the SEN teachers' work were presented, one of which was the interaction with various groups of people on a daily basis. Being a SEN teacher inevitably entails socialising with individuals with a variety of needs and expectations. This is why Niina said: "If you are [a] teacher, or especially if you are [a] special need teacher, you must like people." In other words, SEN teachers "are not afraid of different people" and "value difference as strength". This does not mean that one has to be a 'social butterfly' pleasing every student; rather, as Anna shared, a SEN teacher must "respect the people the way they are". Moreover, Jonna suggested that working as a SEN teacher requires "sense of humour" as a 'lubricant' while interacting with young people:

> This is great work, because you … you can talk with young people, and have idea of … of their lives, and … and you can love with them, and … yeah … you can use your … your sense of humour in this work really much … You don't have to be always … like serious. (Jonna)

The personality trait of embracing diversity manifestes not only in interpersonal interactions but also in constantly handling changing situations at work. As mentioned many times in this chapter and other ones, the numerous challenges SEN teachers face result from the multifaceted aspects of the profession. Under the circumstances of various persons and situations being interwoven in SEN teachers' work landscape, changes are predictably common. Therefore, being relatively flexible is necessary in this profession:

> If he tolerates different … like changes … that's the one of the most important, and … and diversity, and … so you can't do according … like … your plans … if you want to know what you do, so you can't be SEN-teacher. … You have to have very many different roles (to be mother is one of those!), all the days are different, and the plans are changing almost all the time. (Hilla)

On the other hand, the teachers also pointed out that valuing the significance of SNE was another essential prerequisite for this career path. Since SEN teachers spend a lot of time working with and for students with SEN, they change and influence students' lives unobtrusively and imperceptibly, both immediately and in the long run. This was another reason the teachers gave for wishing to stay in this career. Most of them found it intrinsically rewarding when they produced positive changes in a student's life. Notably, apart from the professional knowledge and skills, the teachers' personality traits played a valuable role in this "great work" of educating and cultivating the younger generation. Put differently, the SEN teaching profession is an art of incorporating teachers' personality traits. Suvi emphasised to "use your personality" with professional competence to generate a series of 'ripples' upon the students' personal worlds:

> It's very important that you love that work, because you have … teacher have very big influence on young people, they are more … with young people than the parents per day, perhaps seven days … seven hours per day, and parents much less. That's why very … it's very important that the teachers really like their work and respect their most young students and try to do their best. (Niina)

Summary: Overall, these findings concerning SEN teacher job satisfaction seem evident. Notwithstanding the multitudinous challenges, the teachers found this profession so enthralling that it was a career path worth a hearty recommendation. Figure 27 illustrates the two factors the 11 teachers pointed out that one should consider prior to embarking on this career path.
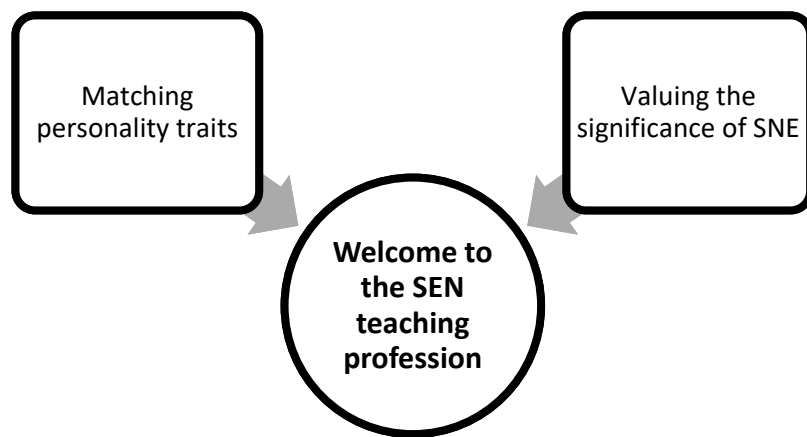
FIGURE 27   Reasons for recommending the SEN teaching profession

10 DISCUSSION

> For teachers, what goes on inside the classroom is closely related to what goes on outside it. The quality, range and flexibility of teachers' classroom work are closely tied up with their professional growth – with the way they develop as people and as professionals.

> – Andy Hargreaves (1993)

As the first of its kind to exhibit an all-round view on the SEN teaching profession within the Finnish inclusive IVET context, this study set out to profile the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers working in Finnish inclusive vocational schools during an era of challenges and changes. In this chapter, I will first summarise the key findings based on the semi-structured interviews. Second, I will present the important insights developed from these findings as conclusions in light of the previous empirical inquiries. Third, the inherent research limitations will be considered. Finally, further implications concerning the SEN teaching profession and future research possibilities will be discussed.

10.1 Summary

The main purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers within the context of Finnish inclusive IVET and to expand our knowledge of the complexity of the SEN teaching profession. In order to achieve this purpose, five major research questions were framed and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 SEN teachers working in inclusive vocational schools across Finland.

The first research question, "Why do people choose to work as SEN teachers in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?", is answered in Chapter 5, which demonstrates the reasons behind the teachers' choice-making regarding their SEN teaching careers. That is, why did they decide to become teachers? Why did they choose to be teachers in the field of SNE? And how come they wanted to work in

inclusive vocational schools instead of other educational settings? Their motivations to enter the SEN teaching profession within the inclusive IVET context could be broken down into three decisive factors: personal, work-related, and contextual factors. In terms of personal factors, the research participants chose to work as teachers because they had a keen interest in working with young people and a strong sense of social conscience to contribute to society by passing down their own expertise. Furthermore, the teachers decided to work in the field of SNE out of altruism towards those in need and, curiosity about learning difficulties and because they identified with the values of SNE.

Although the research participants did not mention any work-related factors during the interviews concerning their reasons to be teachers, they shared that they chose to work as SEN teachers because they preferred the close teacher-student relationship at work. As for why they wanted to be SEN teachers specifically within the IVET context, this could be explained by the complex nature of VET which brought the teachers a variety of exciting intellectual challenges. In terms of contextual factors, the national economic depression seemed to play a pivotal role in their career choices. For example, one interviewee shifted her career trajectory from a vocational industry to an educational one, particularly in the realm of IVET, as an unavoidable result of there being no future in her previous work. On the other hand, fortuity, that is, unexpected opportunities, explained why the teachers ended up working in IVET as SEN teachers. However, instead of passively receiving what life brought her, one teacher shared how she actively created the opportunity for herself to become a SEN teacher by studying SNE, a qualification that usually implies higher employability.

The second research question, "How do SEN teachers perceive their work in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?", is answered in Chapter 6, which uncovers the complexity of SEN teachers' work in inclusive vocational schools. It focuses especially on three particular themes:

- The characteristics and competences of the SEN teaching profession;
- Emotions and resilience in the SEN teaching profession;
- The gap between preservice teacher education and the realities of work.

Based on the interviews, the SEN teaching profession is first characterised as being worthwhile but also burdensome. The work is considered fun, rewarding and very meaningful; at the same time, it can be rather variable, challenging and demanding, requiring a holistic view of students' needs. The ambivalence experienced at work implies that some personality traits, such as patience, humaneness, the ability to listen and flexibility, were highly desirable for this profession to balance the conflicting nature of the work. Another characteristic of the SEN teaching profession is that the teachers need to play both a professional and a caring role on a daily basis. In other words, this profession encompasses professional as well as emotional labour. As professional SNE experts, the teachers must have a profound knowledge of how to enable student learning by means of

identifying their difficulties, designing specific curricula and teaching materials, providing adaptive instruction and implementing pedagogical methods to deal with students' diverse needs. On the other hand, as comprehensive caregivers, the teachers not only support students in various ways by, for instance, empowering them, accompanying them to medical services and offering extra help outside working hours, but also raise their confidence and create safe learning environments where each student's individuality can be embraced.

Third, the SEN teaching profession is characterised by its multiprofessional teamwork. This indicates that, in order to meet the diversity of students' needs, collaborating with other internal workmates and external partners is an integral part of the SEN teachers' daily teaching practices. In this multiprofessional teamwork with partitially shared goals, the SEN teachers play a role in circulating information, coordinating resources and providing professional suggestions from an SNE perspective. When it comes to working with internal workmates, the SEN teachers serve as consultants to assist colleagues in tackling students' problems and co-teach with other instructors whenever necessary; moreover, they work as 'bridges' connecting their co-workers with the external resources. However, the SEN teachers' expertise and contributions are not always appreciated and sometimes considered as 'less professional'. With respect to cooperation with external partners, the SEN teachers' work covered not only the vertical relationships with comprehensive schools and employment offices to assure the smooth transition of students with SEN from one life phase to another, but also the horizontal ones with other professionals and students' parents to properly handle different aspects of their students' problems.

The last important characteristic of the SEN teaching profession relates to the downsides of the work. Its complexity might inevitably lead to excessive stress on novice SEN teachers, who have too much to learn and accomplish with very limited experience. Furthermore, the complexity of the work also manifests in role and task inconsistency. That is, regardless of the uniform quality and curriculum of preservice teacher education, what a SEN teacher really does varies significantly from one school to another and depends highly on whether SNE is truly valued by the school leaders. The other alarming message concerning the downside of this profession is employment insecurity, which means that only part-time work contracts are available due to the government budget cuts. Although this downside is not directly correlated with the SEN teaching profession itself, it does greatly affect the enthusiasm for the work.

Together with the characteristics of the SEN teachers' work, what constitutes an (in)competent SEN teacher is also one focus of this study. Three professional competences were identified as crucial to the SEN teaching profession: SNE knowledge, skills and ethics, personality traits and social skills. SNE knowledge, skills and ethics refer to the SNE expertise as a whole, necessary for various pedagogical practices, such as dealing with student learning problems or promoting student employability. Personality traits indicate the desirable qualities for this work, such as calmness, flexibility and sociability. Social skills, as

mentioned frequently in the interviews, mean the abilities to establish and maintain relationships with students and other workmates. The teachers stated that the (in)competence of a SEN teacher should be regarded through the lens of the three abovementioned competences plus the working context.

Additionally, the SEN teaching profession inevitably entails a lot of emotion. The teachers in the interviews experienced various ups and downs at work. Three major factors contributed to their happiness in their careers: students, students' parents and a series of small experiences. Students making progress, enjoying their own lives and expressing their gratitude and students' parents showing appreciation brought great joy to the teachers. Maybe for some it was not easy to name one single reason explaining the happiness they experienced at work, but it was evident that their work brought them considereable satisfaction through a variety of little, though memorable, experiences. On the other hand, the SEN teachers also underwent many-sided frustration and stress. In terms of frustration, the student is the first factor to 'take the blame'. For example, the lack of motivation and appreciation of SNE resources and substance abuse considerably disheartened the teachers. Another factor responsible for frustration is the relationship with internal workmates. The SEN teachers frequently mentioned that their colleagues' negative attitudes towards students with SEN depressed them a great deal. These negative attitudes manifested not only by regarding students' failures as the consequence of being 'lazy' but also through uncooperative tendencies at work. Moreover, as internal workmates, the school leaders' lacking the proper understanding of SNE and not appreciating the SEN teachers' expertise contributed greatly to the SEN teachers' frustration. Other than students and colleagues, the work itself also accounted for the teachers' frustration, with some examples being the uncertainty of student learning outcomes and excessive paperwork.

Interestingly, in terms of stress, although students were one of the major factors contributing to SEN teachers' ups and downs, they were not explicitly mentioned in relation to teacher stress. Instead, I identified four other reasons: the challenging and demanding nature of the work, confusing educational policies, negative attitudes from internal workmates and self-reflections of the teacher him/herself. In the interviews, most of the teachers shared that their stress resulted mainly from the heavy workload with limited time and resources. More specifically, multitasking to deal with several expectations/problems simultaneously and in collaboration with multiple individuals plus many types of paperwork genuinely exhausted the teachers. In addition to the abovementioned relatively 'controllable factors' that put teachers under stress, such as paperwork and diverse student needs, certain 'uncontrollable factors', such as confusing educational policies at the national and institutional levels were identified as another source of stress. The SEN teachers experienced great amout of pressure due to the government budget cuts in education leading to an uncertain career future as well as confusing procedures for using SNE funding within the school. As mentioned earlier, the negative attitudes from internal workmates partly contribute to teacher frustration. Here, these negative attitudes due to oversimplifying

the reasons behind students' failures are also to some extent to blame for the SEN teachers' stress. All in all, the SEN teachers were strained by work, colleagues and national/institutional policies because, as reflective practitioners, they took their profession seriously and continued to 'force' themselves to improve their teaching practices.

It is very important for SEN teachers to be resilient to frustrations and stress experienced at work and maintain their passion. In the interviews, the teachers shared five things that helped them bounce back and move on: the students, the students' parents, internal workmates, work itself and SNE administration. Just as the students and their parents brought joy to the teachers, they also played key roles in strengthening the teachers' resilience by, for instance, making progress in small steps or showing appreciation. Regarding internal workmates, whether as leaders or regular teachers, their supportive attitude, trust, recognition of the SEN teachers as real professionals, implying a good teamwork atmosphere, brought the teachers not only confidence but also a sense of autonomy. This in turn had a positive impact on the SEN teachers' resilience. In addition to students, students' parents and colleagues, the diverse nature of the SEN teaching profession was shown to be helpful in increasing the SEN teachers' resilience and maintaining their passion. Expressly, the opportunities to participate in different projects and the great extent of variation of work created a certain 'fun' which benefited the teachers' professional development. The last factor contributing to the SEN teachers' resilience is a well-functioning SNE administration system, which could be achieved by granting SEN teachers the adequate trust and authority so that their autonomy could be enhanced, allocating the resources more justly, planning the work schedules better so that the teachers could use their time more effectively and providing long-term (or even permanent) contracts to secure the teachers' employment.

The negative emotional reactions at work summarised so far were actually provoked by the difficulties the teachers encountered on a daily basis. These difficulties relate to insufficient SNE expertise, limited resources, the negative attitudes of internal workmates and unprofessional leadership. Ideally and in practice, the SEN teaching profession nowadays requires more comprehensive knowledge and skills although it is not easy in reality for the teachers to master all the necessary theories, measures or specialised subjects within a short period. Therefore, the teachers sometimes found themselves lacking the professional competences required to better tackle problems at work and meet students' needs. The paucity of resources was another difficulty the teachers had to deal with regularly. This refers to the fact that, for example, the teachers did not have enough time to get their work done and to cover all the students' needs. Without enough ready-made individualised learning materials, it was also difficult for the teachers to fulfil each student's special needs. Moreover, the negative attitudes from internal workmates, resulting not only from the divergent educational ideologies other colleagues held but also the unwillingness to change due to being 'more senior' in the team, again, made the SEN teachers' work difficult. As internal

workmates, school leaders also shared responsibility for the difficulties encountered by the SEN teachers at work. If the leaders lacked a good understanding of SNE and showed no appreciation of the teachers' SNE expertise, the SEN teachers' work would become more challenging.

Regardless of these difficulties, the teachers I interviewed insisted that the SEN teaching profession was continually evolving. With the growing demand for qualified SEN teachers, due to more students with SEN studying in inclusive IVET settings, this profession is more socially appreciated yet also becoming more demanding and challenging. More specifically, the work of today's SEN teachers requires more team effort instead of individual labour compared as in the past. This implies that the SEN teaching profession needs broader competences rather than merely SNE-specific knowledge and skills. Also, SEN teachers used to work mostly with the students' learning difficulties, but nowadays their roles and tasks are becoming more diverse. Therefore, in order to respond to the changes, the SEN teachers in this study suggested that, first, SEN teachers' work must be unified (to some degree) to ensure that students with SEN in different schools can receive necessary support of the same quality. Second, the SEN teaching profession needs to be more widely recognised as a 'real profession' so that their status and expertise can be valued more. Third, more SNE knowledge and skills should be commonly taught in regular preservice teacher education, which would instil in teacher candidates inclusive practices as 'common sense'.

The changing roles and tasks of SEN teachers has inevitably opened up a gap between what they have learned in their preservice teacher education and what they were faced with doing in reality in the work situation. In terms of content, the SEN teachers mentioned that contemporary preservice teacher education programmes are too theory-driven and focused on learning difficulties, which does not help much with dealing with the diverse practical challenges at work other than students' learning problems. In other words, preservice teacher training overemphasises research instead of providing practicable 'survival kits' to tackle the various difficulties students have nowadays. Furthermore, the limited scope of educational settings introduced during preservice teacher education was another concern the teachers mentioned. In practice, the roles and tasks of SEN teachers vary from one place to another, not only inter- but also intra-institutionally. On the other hand, in terms of structure, the SEN teachers argued that today's preservice teacher education is too short to prepare them for the multifaceted tasks and roles they face at work. This is even truer for those who shifted their career paths from other industries to education. Without a thorough training in pedagogy, even if a teacher may be good in a certain field, s/he might not be a good educational practitioner.

Chapter 7 presents the teachers' reflections on their preservice teacher education, as a means of formal learning, from three angles: what they found useful, what they found insufficient, and what they suggested improving. Their responses provide the answers to the third research question, "How do SEN teachers reflect on their preservice teacher education in preparing them for their work in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?" Most of the SEN teachers in this study

showed their genuine appreciation for what they learned during their preservice training programmes. In general, the coursework introduced various theories, perspectives, and measures as the foundation of SNE expertise, through which three essential domains of SNE competence were developed: SNE knowledge, SNE attitudes and pedagogical knowledge and skills. In the domain of SNE knowledge, the basics of learning theories and of diverse special needs were taught, although the focus was more on learning difficulties. Regarding SNE attitudes, an open mind towards diversity was cultivated, and the value of social interaction was established. All manners of pedagogical studies essential for the SEN teaching profession were introduced as part of the pedagogical knowledge and skills curriculum. Along with coursework, the benefits of the fieldwork experiences were also acknowledged. Two elements of fieldwork that played important roles in developing the teachers' SNE expertise were specifically mentioned: field observation and mentorship. Through well-organised visits and teaching practices in schools with different models and levels, hands-on know-hows were learned. Through quality interactions with experienced mentors, the professional identity and the concept of being a lifelong learner were formulated. Together, coursework and fieldwork offered the whole package of SNE expertise to make the teachers qualified and competent in the field of SNE.

Although the SEN teachers considered their preservice teacher education generally useful for their work, they found themselves insufficiently prepared by the training in three areas: the knowledge of psychological problems, of social/life management problems and of severe disabilities. Hence, in order to better tackle the diverse needs of students in today's classrooms, the teachers came up with several constructive suggestions to improve the quality of preservice teacher education. In terms of coursework, preservice teacher education should first provide more studies on youth psychological problems and social/life management issues. This implies that the corresponding practical knowledge of diagnosis and pedagogical skills with a case study approach should be more emphasised. As the national core curriculum is one of the major frames of reference SEN teachers use to evaluate students' abilities and design adaptive teaching, it should also be the realm a SEN teacher candidate becomes more familiar with. In terms of fieldwork, despite the fact that field observation and mentorship were highly appreciated by the teachers, it was suggested that these two elements should be more diversified and highlighted to gain a more comprehensive view of teaching practices in different settings and to foster the development of professional identity. Overall, given that the challenges SEN teachers face at work are no longer merely about students' learning difficulties but have become more complicated, in terms of teacherhood, it was suggested that contemporary preservice teacher education should be upgraded in order to incorporate more necessary studies within the fixed, short duration of training so that an all-around SNE expertise could be built.

The fourth research question, "How do SEN teachers develop their expertise through their lived experiences?", is answered in Chapter 8, which focuses

on SEN teachers' informal learning through their various personal lived experiences and also, more specifically, presents a vivid illustration of how teachers' experiences from prior vocational careers, the present workplaces, negative life incidents, marriage and child raising benefit their SEN teaching profession. When it comes to prior vocational careers, eight out of the 11 participating teachers used to work in other industries prior to entering the SEN teaching profession in IVET. Through these work experiences, a vast and varied first-hand professional knowledge and skills were acquired and had significant and profound influences on the participants' teaching practices at the time of the interview in the following three areas: pedagogical, interpersonal and contextual competences. The coaching skills learned from previous work, which entail the proper understanding of individuals, manifested in the teachers' pedagogical competences. The teachers' interpersonal competences were also improved through their former vocational careers. They pointed out that they had a better knowledge of people with different backgrounds, expectations, and needs, developed a strong commitment to the students they assisted and became more patient, flexible and tolerant at work. With practical work experiences in other fields, the teachers had a broader and deeper view on the various walks of life, based on which they were able to take into account students' situations from a wider angle; in other words, their contextual competences were advanced.

Another aspect of the teachers' informal learning concerns the current workplace. Usually known as workplace learning, the practical experiences acquired through daily teaching practices affected the teachers in several ways. First, the teachers learned to become lifelong learners. The complex and unpredictable nature of work forced the teachers to be humble and to keep learning so that the diverse needs of students and others could be properly met. Moreover, the teachers learned to become pedagogical experts. In other words, their accumulated experiences sharpened their instruction skills and enabled them to adapt how they taught and responded to students to various situations. Third, the teachers learned to become reflective practitioners, which made possible their lifelong learning and professional development. The teachers constantly and continuously examined their own actions, values, perspectives and attitudes to gain deeper insight into the students' problems and be more aware of and attentive to each student's individuality and needs.

Many of the participating teachers clearly attributed the conceptual and attitudinal changes in their personal values and lives to the SEN teaching profession. For example, in terms of conceptual changes, one teacher mentioned that she no longer regards 'severe disability' and 'miserableness' as synonyms after witnessing how happily her students enjoyed their lives. Furthermore, given that the SEN teaching profession requires close and intensive interaction with various individuals and contexts, the teachers developed a wider knowledge concerning those they met and what they encountered in their private lives. As for the attitudinal changes, the teachers experienced a series transformation in how they

saw, understood and interacted with others in their personal lives. More specifically, they became more interested in people, proactive and cooperative within their personal social network and valued diversity and equality more.

The third aspect of informal learning focused on the teachers' personal lives in terms of negative life incidents and experiences of marriage and child raising. According to the analysis, three main contexts in the teachers' lives were identified where certain negative incidents took place: family, student and work lives. Although such negative incidents left the teachers with some psychological scars, it is inspiring that they channelled these experiences to make them serve a very positive role in their work. For instance, with the experiences of being mocked themselves for acting differently, the teachers were more aware of the diversity and individuality of each student. Seeing colleagues give up on students with SEN also pushed the teacher to improve her SNE expertise to help as many students as possible.

In terms of marriage and child raising experiences, both had negative and positive impacts on the SEN teachers' work. Unfortunately, being a female plus having very young children had a negative impact on career development. Based on a case in this study, such a status could greatly lower employability, undervalue work performance and limit promotion opportunity. On the positive side, the experiences of marriage and child raising greatly benefited four categories of professional relationships the teachers had to manage: the relationships with work itself, students, students' parents and colleagues. In the relationship with work, married life experiences improve reflective practices and offer a space for stress release. Within the context of teacher-student relationship, child raising taught the teachers to express more empathy towards students, hold more holistic views on students' problems, have a realistic understanding of students' needs and become more attentive to the individuality of each student. Such child raising experiences had positive influences on the teachers' relationship with students' parents as well. Parenting helped teachers better comprehend the parents' feelings and problems and value parents' roles in SNE. The fourth influenced work relationship was the relationship with colleagues. One teacher mentioned that her married life experiences taught her to become more flexible and team-oriented and develop better communication skills, which are very useful qualities and abilities for her wrok.

The last research question, "How satisfied are SEN teachers with their jobs in the Finnish inclusive IVET context?", is evaluated in Chapter 9 disclosing the reasons for teachers' willingness to remain in or intention of leaving the SEN teaching profession; furthermore, it examines whether the teachers would recommend this profession to others who are interested in it. Despite the various frustrations, stress factors and difficulties experienced at work, the 11 SEN teachers in this study did not 'drop out' of this profession. Two main factors were identified to contribute to teacher retention: the external conditions and affective reactions. In this context, the external conditions mean that the teachers decided to remain in the SEN teaching profession because they were adequately qualified and needed the salary to pay for their living expenses. However, most of the

teachers expressed more intrinsic motivations; their affective reactions towards the work and students affected their decision to continue working in this field. Despite the enormous challenges entailed by this career path, the teachers generally considered their work as important, meaningful, fun and rewarding. Additionally, the sense of agency also partly explained their retention. The autonomy the teachers experienced at work in terms of developing themselves, improving SNE practices and influencing the students' lives had a positive impact on their decisions to stay. On the other hand, since the SEN teachers had a close and intensive work relationship with students with SEN, the affective reactions towards these students inevitably also accounted for the teachers' retention. Feeling needed by and enjoying working with students played a vital role in keeping the teachers in the SEN teaching profession.

Although most of the teachers decided to continue working in this field, this does not necessarily mean that they never thought of leaving. The consideration of leaving did not result from not liking this profession but was determined by a few personal factors, the school climate and the economic depression. Personal factors include, for example, being open to other possibilities in life, becoming exhausted by the commute and work or having the possibility to apply the SNE expertise to other educational settings of different levels. In the context of the school climate, poor leadership also contributed to the teachers' potential attrition. One teacher in this study mentioned that she might consider leaving due to the leaders' lack of long-term vision of SNE development. The last reason for the teachers' consideration to leave is the economic depression currently hitting Finland. An uncertain career future caused by the government's austerity policies, which entailed cutting the education budget, unfavourably influenced the teachers' willingness to stay.

When I asked the teachers whether they would choose this profession again if they could go back in time, each of them gave a strong 'yes'. In their opinions, the SEN teaching profession was the best career choice. One major reason behind the preference for this profession was that the teachers identified with the SNE field in terms of personality traits and educational philosophy. The teachers thought that they had the personal values identical with SNE and matching personality traits, which granted them to some extent the potential to work competently in this field. Therefore, this profession seemed the perfect career for them. The other reason consists in the diverse, interesting, rewarding and meaningful aspects of SNE. More precisely, the unexpected fun, variation, psychic rewards and the contributions SNE brings to the individual student and society at large fascinated the teachers so much that they all would love to choose this career path over again , and even begin training for it earlier, if they could go back in time.

One more indicator I used to examine teacher job satisfaction was whether they would recommend to others this profession as a good career path. Most of the teachers would firmly and enthusiastically recommend it, but a few did so conditionally. Considering all kinds of pros and cons involved at work, the teachers suggested that certain personality traits and values are required and desirable if one is interested in getting into the SEN teaching profession. After all, to some

extent, this profession is like an art in which the teachers need to use themselves to create. In terms of personality traits, the teachers stated that it is important to be flexible and have a genuine interest in people because dealing with individuals of diverse needs and expectations under varied circumstances is an integral part of a SEN teacher's daily practice. Moreover, a sense of humour is also desirable, especially when it comes to working with young people. In addition to matching personality traits, the teachers suggested that identical values with SNE constitute the other main factor one must consider before choosing this career path. Based on the teachers' experiences, SNE is much more than teaching; it involves a variety of activities that can have lifelong influences on a student's life. Accordingly, acknowledging and appreciating the significance of SNE was considered an essential prerequisite for working in this field.

10.2 Conclusions

The role of SEN teachers in Finnish inclusive vocational schools has become increasingly important not only because most students with SEN have opted to study in inclusive vocational schools for their upper secondary education but also because more and more students in inclusive IVET have been in great need of special support due to their diverse difficulties (either in learning or living). However, far too little attention has been paid to the complexity of the SEN teaching profession. Within this context, the present qualitative study delves into the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers working in inclusive IVET schools across Finland. Several interesting and important findings have already been summarised. In this section, I will further interpret them in light of the previous empirical inquiries.

10.2.1 SEN Teachers' Career Choices

As mentioned in the literature review, what motivates people to enter the teaching profession involves multiple factors, such as altruism, satisfaction derived from work, salary, a long summer holiday, a good preparation for family life, the opportunity to use teaching as a stepping-stone to another career, and so on. A variety of career choice motivations were also identified in this study. First, this study confirms the sense of mission encompassing both an altruistic and intrinsic nature underlying SEN teachers' career choices. On the one hand, this finding broadly confirms the results of other studies in this area highlighting the desire to work with youth, especially with those in need of special support (Aaron, 2003; Gavish, 2017; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; OECD, 2005; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Tigchelaar et al., 2010; Watt & Richardson, 2008; Zhang et al., 2014). In other words, working as SEN teachers seemed like a "heart call" (Stephens & Fish, 2010) because the teachers chose this career path out of their altruistic/ethical-moral motivation. As 'caring' is a fundamental aspect of the teaching profession at large (O'Connor, 2008), it is encouraging that the desire to work with young people

and help those with SEN was explicitly expressed as the major inner drive motivating the teachers to work in this field.

On the other hand, what the teachers shared concerning their reasons to become SEN teachers in IVET also accords with the intrinsic/intellectual motivation revealved by previous inquiries (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Berger & D'Ascoli, 2015; Bestvater & Nägele, 2010; Gavish, 2017; Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014). Despite the challenges and difficulties the SEN teaching profession entails, influential factors, such as the variation/challenges at work, a curiosity about SNE, a desire to pass on professional knowledge and experiences, and a correspondence between one's values and the SEN teaching profession, play significant roles in explaining why people want to work as SEN teachers in IVET. Given the fact that most of the interviewers were, broadly speaking, career-changers, embarking on the SEN teaching profession in VET was somehow more like a continuation of career development or a 'homecoming' journey from the 'vocational wilderness' to where their hearts belong (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2015; Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003).

Furthermore, according to Berger and D'Ascoli (2012) and Berger and Girardet (2015), opportunity serves as a special factor contributing to the decisions of career-changers to become teachers. This aspect is clearly reflected in the findings of the current study as well, as some teachers ended up working as SEN teachers in VET literally by chance. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they worked in this field without passion or strong motivation. Their altruistic personality or enthusiasm for SNE still greatly contributed to their active engagement at work, as shown in the data. Rather than passively receiving an unexpected work offer leading to the SEN teaching profession in IVET, one teacher in the interviews created her own opportunity in a proactive manner. She decided to study SNE so that she could work as a SEN teacher simply because she was aware of the relatively higher employability available in this profession. While only one teacher in this study specifically mentioned this motivating factor, which seems 'less positive' within the Finnish context, it is interesting to see outcome expectations (i.e., personal utility values or material/practical/extrinsic factors) remain a primary concern when seeking work as a SEN teacher (Fox, 1961; Huberman & Grounauer, 1993; Richardson & Watt, 2006, 2010, 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2008, 2012; Zhang et al., 2014).

Finally, this study corroborates the view that the motivation of entering the teaching profession does not solely depend upon the free will of an individual but is also driven by the wider national context (Lin, Shi, Wang, Zhang, & Hui, 2012; Moreau, 2015; Watt et al., 2012). Due to the economic depression, one teacher in this study was forced to choose another profession by transferring her expertise from another industry to education. This context-ladden view of career choice is usually more embodied in the high social status shared by teachers in Finland nowadays when people consider becomoing teachers. Hence, it is somewhat surprising that factors such as the national economy could also greatly affect a teacher's career choice.

Before turning to the discussion on SEN teachers' work lives, it is worth mentioning that the findings of the current study on SEN teachers' career choices do not support previous research in several respects. For instance, the gender difference mentioned by Brookhart and Freeman (1992) as well as Fox (1961) is not completely reflected in this study. They argue that male teachers consider teaching more out of their interest in a certain subject or because they view teaching as a stepping-stone to another career, whereas female teachers value the opportunity to work with young people more. Although the female teachers in the interviews did express their liking for serving youth, due to a lack of male participants, it is difficult to identify any gender differences regarding SEN teachers' career choices. However, the difficulty in recruiting male SEN teachers in this study may be explained by Purdy (2009) who mentioned that men are less likely to consider working as SEN teachers, which seems to reflect to a certain degree the gender difference in this inquiry.

It has also been suggested that some material/practical/extrinsic factors contribute to people's motivation to work as teachers, such as a longer summer holiday, a good preparation for family life, a satisfactory salary, social status, or an above-average second choice and relatively higher accessibility to study (Huberman & Grounauer, 1993; Richard & Watt, 2006, 2010, 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2008, 2012; Watt et al., 2012). This does not appear to be the case explicitly pointed out in this research. A possible explanation for this might be that teachers in Finland have already been reasonably paid, received various benefits (e.g. maternity/parental leave) and enjoyed a high social status for decades. Therefore, in contrast to earlier findings highlighting material/practical/extrinsic factors, SEN teachers in Finnish VET are more likely to choose this career path based on intrinsic and altruistic motivations.

10.2.2 SEN Teachers' Work Lives

Diversity Is the Norm
One of the most obvious and significant findings of the present study is the multifacetedness of SEN teachers' work in terms of roles, tasks, relationships and emotions. Consistent with the literature (Klang et al., 2017; Lavian, 2015; McCray at al., 2014; Slanda, 2017; Vlachou et al., 2015; Wasburn-Moses, 2009), this research found that SEN teachers have to play multiple roles entailing many tasks and problems to resolve simultaneously by interacting with multiple individuals. Moreover, their roles and tasks have evolved over time due to the changes within or outside schools. In other words, diversity is the norm and it manifests in each facet of today's SEN teachers' work, which can be attributed in part to the growing diverse needs of students within the inclusive educational settings (Gavish, 2017; Hirvonen, 2011; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013; Pirttimaa & Hirvonen, 2016; Slanda, 2017). As Honkanen and Nuutila (2013) and Pirttimaa and Hirvonen (2016) argued, in nowadays Finnish inclusive vocational schools, there are more and more students with mixed problems other than learning difficulties. This view is strongly supported by what the teachers perceived at work.

The complexity of the SEN teaching profession in IVET can be viewed as the two sides of the same coin. On the positive side, the variation of work brings much fun to SEN teachers and benefits considerably their lifelong learning. As some teachers mentioned in the interviews, they enjoyed their work because there was always something new to learn or participate in. In a sense, such workplace learning, which I will further elaborate in the later section concerning SEN teachers' informal learning, kept them up-to-date and reflective so that they could properly handle the increasingly perplexing challenges at work. Their experiences match those identified in earlier studies showing that intellectual challenge is one of the variables attracting people to work as teachers in the field of IVET (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012; Berger & Girardet, 2015; Gavish, 2017; Jarvis & Woodrow, 2005; Tigchelaar et al., 2010).

On the downside, the complexity of the SEN teaching profession in IVET is considered burdensome in several ways. First, variation manifests in the continuously and constantly changing working environment caused by the inclusion movement and educational reforms. When the interviews were being conducted, the teachers' work had been undergoing a series of transformations due to budget cuts, new reforms, and the growing number of students with SEN. These changes did not only increase their workload but also provoked contradictory emotions, such as uncertainty, ambiguity, strain, discrepancy and intricacy, which is in line with recent studies indicating that SEN teachers' work is profoundly intertwined with the broader educational system in terms of reforms and inclusion (Bell et al., 2014; Hirvonen, 2006, 2011a, b; Liasidou & Antoniou, 2013; Mackenzie, 2012b; Pearson et al., 2015; Pirttimaa & Hirvonen, 2016).

Furthermore, the variation of SEN teachers' work is embodied in its 4Ms (multiple relationships, multiple roles, multiple tasks and multiple problems). In this study, the teachers worked together with a variety of individuals within and outside the schools every day, meaning that a variety of expectations and needs had to be addressed and satisfied. In order to fulfil these diverse demands, the teachers needed to perform different roles, such as coordinator, caregiver, instructor, advisor, advocate and supervisor, to ensure that all the different tasks could be accomplished and the different problems could be solved. Unsurprisingly, the reality of the 4Ms has been confirmed by a great deal of previous studies regarding the work of SEN teachers (Devecchi et al., 2012; Hirvonen, 2011a; Kaff, 2014; Klang et al., 2017; Lavian, 2015; McCray et al., 2014). However, alarmingly, this aspect of complexity has also been a significant contributor to considerable stress and difficulties, especially whenever teachers lack access to sufficient resources and administrative support, and could thus be a risk factor leading to burnout and attrition, as concluded by Kaff (2004), "Multitasking is multitaxing".

One more dimension of the complexity of the SEN teaching profession I would like to bring up for discussion involves SEN teachers' emotions. Undoubtedly, SEN teachers' work is emotional labour. The teachers in this research experienced a variety of ups and downs either towards the work itself or those they interacted with. For example, teachers experienced happiness when students

made progress or the students' parents expressed gratitude, while the colleagues' negative attitudes towards inclusion or students' lack of motivation generated frustration. Confusing educational policies or the teacher herself facing a new challenge without having the corresponding SNE expertise caused uncertainty. Depreciation was experienced when the supervisors did not have a proper understanding of the significance of SNE. Last, the teachers felt lonely when no one else in the same school fought alongside them for the greater good. This is in agreement with Mackenzie's (2012b, 2013) findings, which showed that both positive and negative emotions are commonly shared by SEN teachers. In other words, a diverse emotional attachment to this career path is an integral part of SEN teachers' work lives. Apparently, positive emotions can be seen as psychic rewards which play an important role in SEN teachers' resilience and retention. Yet, the adverse side of the emotions SEN teachers experience at work is also closely related to their attrition, which is a critical issue worthy of further attention (Conley & You, 2017; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Lavian, 2012; Mackenzie, 2012b, 2013).

Intra- and Inter-Personal Connections Are a Must
Another significant finding is that intra- and inter-personal connections are essential in SEN teachers' daily teaching practices. Even though the work of SEN teachers has been considered to be relatively autonomous, diverse forms of daily inter- and intra-personal interactions are inevitable. This finding confirms Pirttimaa and Hirvonen's research (2016), which indicates that SEN teachers do not work alone. Many would argue that SNE in IVET is merely about handling learning difficulties and other disabilities, adjusting the evaluation system and assisting regular teachers. However, according to the interviews, various intra- and inter-personal connections made SNE possible. For instance, the primary task of SEN teachers was to take care of students with SEN. Without a good relationship with students, it was unlikely to truly understand each student's individuality and needs and to develop corresponding SNE approaches well. And if students were under 18 years old, their parents must be involved as well.

Moreover, working in inclusive educational settings implies close collaboration with regular teachers and other staff either by exchanging professional knowledge and skills or by teaching cooperatively. In the event that a student's needs were beyond the capabilities of SEN teachers and other colleagues, professionals or agencies outside the school system would be invited to join the team in response to the challenges facing students and teachers. To ensure a better transition of the students, SEN teachers needed to also work closely with comprehensive schools, the employment office and the labour market. The experiences shared by the teachers support the evidence from previous research in this area which emphasise that collaboration is integral to the work of SEN teachers within the inclusive context (Gavish, 2017; Hirvonen, 2006, 2011a; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013; Lavian, 2015). In other words, regardless of the roles and tasks SEN teachers need to perform, providing professional SNE services in today's inclusive IVET always requires a collaborative approach.

As for the intra-personal connection, in this study, it refers to the SEN teachers' self-dialogue (i.e., self-reflection) for the improvement of their work. Through constant self-dialogue about everything happening in the workplace, including the professional interactions presented above, the SEN teachers, as reflective practitioners, continually examined their expertise. Finland has always attributed its educational achievements to high-quality teachers and teacher education (Eteläpelto et al., 2015; Kontoniemi & Salo, 2011; OECD, 2011; Tirri, 2014). Society has a tremendous level of trust in the teaching profession, and there is no national inspection mechanism for teachers. This phenomenon is confirmed and explained by the findings of this study showing that the SEN teachers never stopped improving their work and reflection was embedded in their daily teaching practices.

All inter-personal connections inevitably require certain social skills and personality traits, which, surprisingly, have not been explored much in previous studies despite the fact that collaboration has always been highlighted as an integral part of the SEN teaching profession. In Holland and Hornby's (1992) study on the competences required for those who work in the field of SNE, it was found that SEN teachers should have the ability to properly maintain their professional relationships. Although this seminal article was published about three decades ago, their view on the significance of social skills remains consistent with what the teachers explicitly pointed out in the interviews. For many teachers, social skills seemed to be a prerequisite for any kind of collaboration. Social skills included various abilities, such as listening, postponing judgement, expressing respect, embracing individuality, showing appreciation or being present. On the other hand, a few personality traits were also highly valued and considered particularly desirable in the SEN teaching profession: calmness, flexibility, fairness and sociability. Conversely, this study supports the evidence from previous studies demonstrating that a lack of mutual respect and understanding is a challenge of collaboration (Allison, 2012; McCray et al., 2014; Strogilos et al., 2012; Vlachou et al., 2015; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003).

A Supportive Work Environment Matters a Great Deal
As previously mentioned, diversity is the norm in the work of SEN teachers and one aspect of diversity is embodied by the SEN teachers' daily intra- and inter-personal connections. Such an intricate nature of work inevitably accounts for the onerousness of the SEN teaching profession. More specifically, it is quite worrisome that internal workmates (including colleagues and leaders), as participants in one of the most significant professional relationships mentioned frequently in the interviews, greatly contributed to the SEN teachers' frustrations, stressors and difficulties at work. In other words, the SEN teachers' job satisfaction was adversely influenced by the unsupportive work environment, which strongly corroborates other studies in this area linking SEN teachers' stress, burnout and attrition with the school climate (Conley & You, 2017; Lavian, 2012; Major, 2012; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008).

In terms of colleagues, the SEN teachers in this study commented that they suffered badly from other teachers' negative attitudes towards students with SEN as well as from their depreciation towards SEN teachers' expertise. On the one hand, teachers of other disciplines were not always open to the idea of inclusive education. There are several possible explanations for such a negative attitude. According to the data, a possible cause may be that those teachers lacked an adequate understanding of learning or life difficulties due to either never having experienced disadvantageous situations or having insufficient knowledge of SNE/inclusion. On the other hand, although the SEN teachers' expertise was undeniably needed in practice and within the VET context, where vocational know-hows are relatively highly valued, SEN teachers were regarded more as 'jacks of all trades' (i.e., less professional). This finding is consistent with that of McCray et al. (2014), who observed that SEN teachers usually have a less profound knowledge of the subjectstaught in regular classrooms. Such a limitation puts SEN teachers in a belittled position at schools and causes them to not be considered as professional equals. Consequently, these negative outlooks that regular teachers held, as demonstrated in the literature (Allison, 2012; Conley & You, 2017; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Kaff, 2004; Mackenzie, 2012b; Vlachou et al., 2015), inevitably imperilled the quality of collaboration, the implementation of SNE and the self-efficacy and commitment of SEN teachers.

In order to raise awareness and establish a common understanding of inclusive education, some teachers in this study suggested that a basic knowledge of SNE should be commonly taught in all preservice teacher education programmes so that every single teacher is better prepared to work in inclusive educational settings. This notion complies with other studies which found that regular teachers are more likely to develop the corresponding pedagogical competences and become familiar with inclusion awareness through either preservice training or in-service education. Such awareness is definitely required for the effective collaboration in today's inclusive schools (Allison, 2012; Brownell et al., 2010; McCray et al., 2014; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003).

School leaders (i.e., administrative support) were another main work environment factor antagonising the SEN teachers in this study. This may result from, again, a lack of understanding of SNE, leading to the depreciation of SEN teachers' expertise. A comparison with the findings of other studies confirms the impact of lacking administrative support on SEN teachers' stress, burnout and attrition (Berry, 2012; Conley & You, 2017; Lavian, 2012; Mackenzie, 2012a, 2013; Stephens & Fish, 2010). In other words, insufficient administrative support can negatively influence SEN teachers' commitment and efficacy. In this study, whenever school leaders did not use SNE funding suitably, failed to design the roles and tasks of SEN teachers properly or did not give the teachers more professional autonomy, it was seen as poor leadership. One teacher in this study even mentioned that she might consider leaving due to the unprofessional leadership at her workplace.

Conversely, appropriate administrative support can definitely boost SEN teachers' resilience and retention (Beltman et al., 2011; Gu & Day, 2013; Kyriacou,

2001; Lindqvist et al., 2014). For example, as Klang et al. (2017) and Layton (2005) pointed out, with shared leadership, SEN teachers can provide the relevant services and coordinate the necessary resources more promptly and efficiently. Moreover, several studies have shown that, with sufficient administrative support, collaboration with regular teachers can be better established and maintained (Allison, 2012; Mackenzie, 2012a; McCray et al., 2014; Strogilos et al., 2013). The evidence presented in the literature is supported by this study as well. Many of the teachers in the interviews pointed out that their work could be done more effectively and their job satisfaction could be improved within a properly functioning SNE administration system, in which they were granted more trust, autonomy, resources and job security.

Together, this study strongly confirms that a supportive work environment matters a great deal in SEN teachers' work within the inclusive IVET context. This refers not only to collaborative colleagues with whom SEN teachers can team up to optimise SNE services without conflicting values and ideologies but also to professional leadership that provides corresponding assistance and expresses genuine appreciation for the contributions of SEN teachers.

10.2.3 SEN Teachers' Formal Learning

In this study, the term 'formal learning' refers to preservice SEN teacher education, meaning the structured and purposeful learning experiences designed and provided by teacher education institutions that lead to officially recognised SEN teacher qualifications. Basically, according to the background information, the teachers pursued their preservice training in an either concurrent or consecutive manner, which indicates that they studied SNE either within a master's degree framework (5 years, 300 ECTS credits) or had extra SNE-related pedagogical training (1–2 years, 60 ECTS credits) at either the university of sciences or the university of applied sciences, where their SNE expertise was also instructed differently.

Regardless of the different approaches and focuses in preservice SEN teacher education, in the main, the SEN teachers in this study expressed their appreciation for what they learned from their preservice education. They found the SNE expertise developed through these training programmes very helpful in terms of SNE knowledge, SNE attitudes and pedagogical competences. Consistent with the literature (Brownell et al., 2010; Gavish, 2017; Levi et al., 2013), their experiences confirm the significance of preservice SEN teacher education in preparing SEN student teachers with essential SNE-related abilities and in cultivating the necessary personal dispositions for the SEN teaching profession. Also, the SEN teachers acknowledged the properly organised fieldwork that broadened their views on diverse educational settings and the quality mentorship that benefited the development of their professional identity. Previous studies have demonstrated that the field-based placement to visit, observe and practice is quite crucial in fostering teacher candidates' practical knowledge, skills and positive attitude towards diversity, which are required in inclusive education (Campbell et al., 2003; Lancaster & Bain, 2010; Rajap et al., 2017; Sharma et al., 2008) and that

the attrition of beginning/early career SEN teachers can be reduced with sufficient support through mentoring (Gehrke & Murri, 2006; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008; Payne, 2005; Whitaker, 2000). Therefore, it is encouraging that these findings corroborate what has been proven integral to preservice SEN teacher education.

Despite the positive influences the preservice SEN teacher education had on the in-service SEN teachers' practices, it is somehow worrying that, in a fundamental way, the preservice training fell short of the work realities being faced by these teachers. As mentioned earlier, within the inclusive context, SEN teachers nowadays must play multiple roles to deal with numerous tasks and problems and in collaboration with multiple individuals. However, such a complexity of the SEN teaching profession seemed to not be adequately reflected in the preservice SEN education programmes. For example, many teachers commented that their preservice trainings were too theoretical, especially those provided by the University of Sciences, to prepare them for the diversity they had to handle at work. More specifically, today's preservice SEN teacher education still has a major focus on learning difficulties, which the teachers found as no longer suitable for the challenges in inclusive schools because students had more complicated problems other than learning, such as life management issues, substance abuse, mental illness or even severe disabilities. To some degree, this finding is in agreement with Hausstätter and Takala (2008) and supports the evidence presented in the literature review concerning the preservice SEN teacher education programme designed by the University of Jyväskylä: The content of Finnish preservice SEN teacher education at the yniversity of sciences is more theory-driven and learning-difficulty-centric. Furthermore, for those who took the one-year preservice training programme at either the university of sciences or the university of applied sciences, the training was too short to cover enough SNE-related knowledge and skills required for today's inclusive IVET settings. In the interviews the teachers suggested certain reforms of preservice SEN teacher education to serve as a counter measure against the adversities they experienced at work.

Bell et al. (2014) and Hirvonen (2011a) argued that the competence requirements for the SEN teaching profession and the challenges and difficulties of school realities are changing concurrently. Although preservice SEN teacher education does provide teacher candidates with a general foundation for SNE expertise, it seems that, as several previous studies suggested, a wider training scope and a more diversified competence set have become increasingly imperative in order to better deal with the gap between preservice education and work reality (Gavish, 2017; Pugach, 2001; Robertson et al., 2017; Shepherd et al., 2016). Moreover, preservice SEN education needs to be timely updated through partnering with in-service teachers in response to contemporary inclusive practices (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Mason, 2013; Sigurdardóttir, 2010).

10.2.4 SEN Teachers' Informal Learning

In this study, the term 'informal learning', contrary to formal learning, indicates the unintentional and unstructured learning experiences that occur within the

context of personal daily work, family, leisure activities or routines and that sometimes serve simply as experiences. It has been proven by this study and other inquiries that preservice teacher education is no longer sufficient to meet the pressing needs of teachers in dealing with the growingly complex challenges caused by a fast-changing society, educational reforms, and the inclusive education movement (Grosemans et al., 2015; Hoekstra et al., 2009; Lohman, 2006; McCormack et al., 2006). While the majority of research studies on teachers' informal learning are focused on regular teachers or teachers in general (Grosemans et al., 2015; Jones & Dexter, 2014; Meirink et al., 2009), it has been inspiring to find in this study that SEN teachers have also substantially benefited from their various lived experiences gained from prior vocational careers, present workplaces or family incidents. In other words, informal learning plays a very significant role in the SEN teachers' professional development.

Broadly speaking, all the teachers in this study were career changers. Before working as SEN teachers in VET, they punched a clock in various walks of life. Hence, they joined the SEN teaching profession with a vast and varied professional knowledge and skills as well as a sophisticated understanding of people, abilities they developed in their previous work experiences. This finding is fascinatingly in accord with recent studies indicating expertise transferability (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2010; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014). More specifically, according to Defillippi and Arthur (1994), Mayotte (2003) and Tigchelaar et al. (2008), through prior professional work experiences, career changers established know-why, know-how and know-whom competences, which are transferrable to the teaching profession.

The know-why competences (professional qualities) pertain to an individual's maturity, intrinsic/altruistic motivation, and humanistic approach (Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014), which evidently manifest in the career choice motivations, commitments and individuality-focused values of the teachers in this study. The know-how competences (professional knowledge and skills) refer to the adaptation ability, discipline expertise, administration knowledge and skills and technical skills (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Tigchelaar et al., 2010; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014). Many teachers in this study used to work in other industries than education. Those experiences granted them a better understanding of the labour market, which was very helpful in preparing students with SEN for employment by offering them a wider perspective. Also, without a doubt, the teachers accrued a vast array of expertise in their disciplines from prior work experiences, which was critically integral and required within the VET context. Those teachers with managerial backgrounds even developed some managing/coaching abilities which they could use in their teaching careers. The know-whom competences (professional knowledge and skills) cover the abilities to create, develop, foster and maintain work-related networks (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Tigchelaar et al., 2010). In other words, second-career teachers have the potential to transfer the practical knowledge of people and communication skills obtained from previous work experiences to teaching, which matches what the teachers shared in

this study that their previous jobs gave they a better knowledge of people of different backgrounds and made them more patient, more flexible and better listeners in collaborations.

In terms of workplace learning, although the forms and activities of informal workplace learning were not major focuses of this study, it is undeniable that, based on the interviews, the teachers sharpened their expertise and improved their work constantly and continuously, which confirms the idea that the majority of teacher professional learning take place in daily teaching practices (Bound, 2011; Grosemans et al., 2015; Hoekstra et al., 2009; Jones & Dexter, 2014). By way of explanation, through various experiences at work, the teachers considered themselves more as lifelong learners, pedagogical specialists and reflective practitioners rather than simly instructors. They became humble and open to possibilities; they improved their ways of teaching and responding in order to better meet the diverse needs of students; they kept examining their own values and practices to acquire the deeper insight and greater awareness necessary for the work. The SEN teachers' workplace learning experiences corroborate the ideas of Schön (1983) and Van den Bossche and Beausaert (2011), who suggested that teachers make sense of their work and improve their professional competences by means of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action.

What the teachers learned at the schools did not only serve to improve their teaching practices but also greatly influenced their personal values. The interviews revealed that the teachers went through several conceptual and attitudinal changes because of their work. For example, they became more positive concerning disabilities, more interested in human beings and more cooperative within their personal social network. While it is difficult to find one single study focused on SEN teachers' workplace learning from this perspective, and most of studies of the 'teacher as a person' have paid more attention to how teachers' lived experiences and their demographic factors affect their professional expertise, these findings may offer another angle to explore the interplay and interweaving of teachers' personal lives and work.

As for the informal learning gained from educational or family experiences, the present work identified that negative incidents in the teachers' lives and the experiences of marriage and child raising had various influences on the SEN teachers' work. As mentioned in the literature review, teacher professionalism does not exist solely within the context of preservice teacher education or workplace; instead, to a great degree, it is inevitably intertwined with the teachers' personal life histories (Bukor, 2015; Gavish, 2017; Goodson, 1991; Smaller, 2005), which is further confirmed by this study focused on a group of SEN teachers working in inclusive vocational schools across Finland.

According to the teachers, there were three main contexts in their lives where a number of negative incidents took place: family, student and work life. They went through severe hardship due to, for example, the mocking of teachers, unfriendly colleagues or their own children with SEN. Nevertheless, these negative experiences were positively channelled to serving a significant role in the

teachers' SNE expertise in terms of career choice motivation, educational philosophy and teacher-student relationship. In other words, as Goodson (1991) and Tripp (1994) argued, these critical incidents had a long-term and profound impact upon the perceptions and practices of teachers.

Moreover, this finding is consistent with those of Gavish (2017), Goodson (1991) and Holt-Reynolds (1992), who found that what was learned from their primary family and in school greatly affected teachers' professionalism. The teachers' experiences in marriage and child raising also exerted dramatic influences on their work both constructively and unfavourably. Although it is difficult to locate enough literature in this field to specifically support these findings, constructively speaking, family life seemed to provide a platform for the teachers to alleviate their stress. This supports the evidence from previous studies highlighting that family support, as one dimension of relational resilience, is an influential factor in SEN teacher retention/attrition (Bataineh, 2009; Kaff, 2004; Mackenzie, 2012a; Williams & Dikes, 2015). More importantly, the teachers derived substantial benefits from the experiences of marriage and child raising for their professional relationships. However, being a female plus having very young children seemed to be unfavourable for the career development with respect to employability and promotion opportunity. This finding is somewhat unexpected and shocking because Finland has been considered a high gender equality nation (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2018). Although there was only one teacher in this study who explicitly pointed out the gender inequality issue, further exploration remains necessary to check whether other female teachers have similar experiences.

10.2.5 SEN Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Despite the various adversities at work, in general, the teachers in this study expressed a high level of job satisfaction. One major reason for this was the teachers' affective attachment to the work and students. That is, the significance of the SEN teaching profession and the quality connection with students with SEN greatly contributed to the teachers' intentions to stay. This finding remarkably matches the teachers' strong altruistic and intrinsic motivations to choose to work in this field. Although Huberman and Grounauer (1993) and Watt and Richardson (2008), in their studies on motivations to teach, mentioned that the initial motivations to enter the teaching profession do not guarantee job satisfaction nor sequential willingness to continue to teach, the findings of the current inquiry seem to paint an opposite picture. What motivated the teachers to pursue the SEN teaching career at first was, to a great extent, the drive that maintained and strengthened the teachers' enthusiasm and commitment throughout this career path.

While most of the participants decided to continue working as SEN teachers, it does not mean that they had never considered leaving. SEN teacher job satisfaction has been proven to be inversely correlated with burnout and the intention to leave (Berry, 2012; Conley & You, 2017; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Mackenzie, 2013), which indicates that the higher the level of job satisfaction SEN teachers

have, the less likely they experience burnout and attrition. In a negative sense, it also implies that SEN teachers might consider leaving whenever they experience increasing dissatisfaction at work. In addition to a few personal factors, such as the commuting issue or being open to other possibilities, the teachers in this study pointed out that stress, poor leadership and confusing educational policy at the national level, were the factors leading to their job dissatisfaction and eventually affected their motivations to stay. Their statements support previous research into SEN teacher attrition and retention. In both conceptual models for understanding teacher attrition and retention developed by Billingsley and Tech (1993) as well as Brownell and Smith (1993), the economy (macrosystem) serves in part as a contributing factor in teachers' career decisions, which corroborates what one teacher in this study had experienced. She considered leaving simply due to the uncertainty caused by the national educational budget cuts.

Furthermore, excessive and higher stress triggered by, for example, the low level of autonomy, unreasonable paperwork, unsupportive school climate or depreciation from colleagues, has been documented as a common experience shared by SEN teachers, which, if not well tackled, could lead to burnout symptoms and even a desire to quite the job (Conley & You, 2017; Gersten et al., 2001; Hopman et al., 2018; Kaff, 200; Kiel et al., 2016; Lavian, 2012). This is a fact also confirmed by the experiences of the teachers interviewed for this study. Last but not least, school leadership (i.e., administrative support), again, played a decisive role in the SEN teachers' attrition and retention. This is in agreement with earlier findings reporting that an insufficient administrative support has a profound impact on SEN teachers' intent to stay or to leave due to its close association with job satisfaction (Conley & You, 2017; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Mackenzie, 2012a; Stephens & Fish, 2010).

When it comes to the question of whether the SEN teaching profession is a recommended career path, the teachers connected their answers to two fundamental aspects: altruistic/intrinsic motivations and personality traits. On the one hand, as the teachers commented on their reasons to teach as SEN teachers, altruistic/intrinsic motivations should constitute the major priority for someone considering working as a SEN teacher. In other words, s/he is supposed to have shared values and perspectives with SNE and the SEN teaching profession. Matching values and perspective, as already proven by the teachers' experiences in this study, play a crucial role in sustaining SEN teachers to face and deal with the various hardships at work. On the other hand, some personality traits were also of great significance to work in this field, such as creativity, flexibility, patience and humour. These personality traits were desirable not just because they were helpful in handling the complexity of the SEN teaching profession but also because they served as contributing factors in dealing with stress and burnout, as reflected in the findings of Bianca (2011) and Platsidou (2010), who confirmed the association between personality traits and job satisfaction.

Taken together, these conclusions support the notion of 'the teacher as a person', which implies that we should adopt a more all-round and humanistic view on the SEN teaching profession. As presented in the very beginning of this

dissertation, there are three major dimensions of a 'teacher as a person'. First, this study confirms the dimension of the humanistic role which SEN teachers always play at work, which is consistent with the work of Glatthorn (1975) and Stonge (2007), who argued that it is the authentic nature of the teacher that makes a difference. Although overcoming student learning difficulties is certainly one major task for SEN teachers to handle using their SNE expertise, to a great extent, SEN teachers, as authentic individuals, express much more their concern towards the individuality of each student in terms of academic/social inclusion and other aspects of , which is well reflected in the deep appreciation of students and students' parents. This correlation also works the other way around: SEN teachers' work is strongly influenced by their close interaction with students. Students may contribute to the SEN teachers' frustration, but also to their resilience. The genuine nature of the teacher-student relationship highlights the authentic, affective, social, and emotional aspects of the SEN teaching profession.

The second dimension of the 'teacher as a person' concept focuses on the teachers' diverse inter-/intra-personal connections. The findings are in line with studies that underscore the significance of collaboration within an inclusive context (Stemler et al., 2006; Stonge, 2007). On the one hand, SEN teachers have to deal with various individuals (students, students' parents, internal workmates, external professionals, companies and different authorities/institutions concerned) on a daily basis. The quality of these connections, on the other hand, highly depends on and is examined and improved by always the SEN teachers' reflective practice, which is an integral part of the teacher professional competences, as confirmed by Schön (1983) and Van den Bossche and Beausaert (2011).

The last dimension emphasises the teachers' lived experiences and their demographic factors; that is, the interplay and interweaving between the teaching profession and teachers' private lives. The findings strongly support the contributions of other significant studies in this area linking teacher professionalism with a fundamental knowledge of aspects of teachers' lives other than work (Goodson, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Stonge, 2007). Throughout the SEN teaching career path, from the very beginning of choosing to work as SEN teachers until the point of considering staying or leaving, the SEN teachers in this study made their decisions and developed their expertise based not simply on what they learned during their preservice education but also according to what had happened in their lives in various circumstances and over different periods of time. Such a contextual understanding offers a more holistic view of the nature of SEN teachers' work.

10.3 Limitations

Although this study is the first of its kind to illustrate a much more comprehensive perspective on the SEN teaching profession within the Finnish inclusive IVET context, limitations are unavoidable. One of the major limitations concerns the recruitment of research participant. On the one hand, since this study was

limited to SEN teachers' work lives and professional learning within the Finnish inclusive IVET context, it is unknown if SEN teachers who work in special vocational schools share similar experiences. In 2018, there were only five special VET schools across Finland, yet the number of students studying in such segregated settings seemed to increase during the last decade. Despite the fact that a multi-professional network is usually considered stronger in special VET settings, whether the SEN teaching profession is less complicated and SEN teachers have a higher job satisfaction and feel more supported within that context requires further exploration. On the other hand, even though I tried to recruit male SEN teachers as well, the group of participants ended up consisting entirely of females, which clearly indicates the absence of a male perspective. Such an uncontrollable factor did not allow me to inquire into whether some gender differences exist in terms of SEN teachers' perceptions of their work lives and professional learning, especially, at least based on the interviews, when female SEN teachers seem to suffer more from gender inequality in employability and promotion.

Another limitation of this study is the interview language. Due to my limited command of Finnish, the interviews were carried out in English, which is not the mother tongue of the research participants. Using a foreign language for the interviews inevitably did not just limit the teachers from better expressing themselves but also hindered me from further investigating the hidden implications and ideologies behind the teachers' responses. Technically, this weakness was minimised with the validity check of the interview guidelines by providing the interview questions in both Finnish and English before the interviews and by giving the teachers enough time to articulate their answers during the interviews so that they could express themselves as fully and clearly as possible. Also, as mentioned in the data analysis procedure, considering the language issue, the data was analysed with a semantic approach. In other words, my analysis focused only on the explicit or surface meanings of the data instead of anything beyond what the teachers said. Nevertheless, given this language limitation, it is undeniable that this study cannot "make claims about language use, or the fine-grained functionality of talk", as Braun and Clarke (2006) argued.

Thirdly, the limitation of this research is the lack of an overarching theoretical framework or a specific methodological approach. This study explored the private and professional lived experiences of SEN teachers from various angles. Although a wider perspective of the SEN teachers' work lives and professional learning are gained, such an approach inevitably results in the lack of depth in further interpreting, for instance, how Finnish culture affects the teachers' perceptions or how one specific IVET context shapes a SEN teachers' professional identity. In addition, 'lived experience' is defined in a much more specific way in phenomenology. With a phenomenological focus, lived experiences can be reduced systematically and rigorously into an essence/essences (Patton, 2015). This implies that, without a specific methodological approach like phenomenology, the fundamental meanings of the teachers' experiences in this inquiry cannot be deciphered in a more intrinsic way than the factual status of particular instances.

A fourth limitation of this inquiry is the possibility of personal bias. Not only was the data collected, coded and analysed on my own, but the themes were also identified by myself under the supervision of experienced researchers. While such a process ensured the consistency in the method, it is unfortunate that additional perspectives and wider interpretations could not be offered. As pointed out previously, the qualitative approach is personal (Patton, 2015) and constructivist (Creswell, 2014; Metsämuuronen, 2017). In other words, the whole research process is very much influenced by the experiences, expectations and training of the researcher. Therefore, although I believe to a great degree that what the teachers mentioned in the interviews were commonly shared by the majority of SEN teachers working within the inclusive IVET context, the reality of the SEN teachers' work lives and professional learning remains limited in terms of the diversity of the insights.

Last, an issue that was not sufficiently addressed in this study was whether the two categories of SEN teaching professions, vocational SEN teachers (*ammatillinen erityisopettajat*) and comprehensive/general/academic SEN teachers (*laaja-alainen erityisopettajat*), have shared or different professional identities in terms of their work lives and professional learning. In this research, the similarities and differences between the two SEN teaching professions were simply presented as matter-of-fact to provide background information about Finnish inclusive IVET; that is, no further comparisons were drawn. Since certain fundamental background and task differences do exist between these two groups of SEN teachers, it is reasonable to assume that, to some degree, they may have different professional identities and experience different challenges and sources of stress. However, the present study is limited by the lack of relevant information due to the research design and, thus, not able to elaborate on this topic.

10.4 Suggestions

10.4.1 Implications for the SEN Teaching Profession

Notwithstanding the abovementioned limitations, the study certainly adds to our understanding of SEN teachers' work in today's Finnish inclusive vocational schools. The work lives and professional learning of the SEN teachers have fundamental and far-reaching implications for the SEN teaching profession both in shedding new light on present practices and suggesting comprehensive reforms in teacher education.

For School Leaders and Policy Makers

This study highlighted the complexity of the SEN teaching profession within the inclusive IVET context. Such a complexity has both positive and negative influences on SEN teachers. The variation of the SEN teaching profession is one of the main reasons people choose and stay in this career path. However, as Kaff (2004)

pointed out, "Multitasking is multitaxing". The 4Ms challenges (multiple roles, multiple tasks, multiple problems and multiple relationships) inevitably cause SEN teachers excessive stress. Previous research has established that, compared to other fields of education, SEN teachers experience higher levels of stress and more burnout symptoms, and the difficulties are particularly encountered by younger and novice SEN teachers (Lavian, 2012; Lazuras, 2006; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Moreover, teacher attrition may not be a "clear-cut" action but a "drawn-out process" (Towers & Maguire, 2017) which takes a few years, and an unavoidable gap between the harsh work reality and the idealistic expectations/sense of mission of teachers seems common (Lavian, 2012). Therefore, there is a definite need for helping SEN teachers deal better with the challenges at work and the stress they face, especially when they enter the SEN teaching profession with mostly strong altruistic and intrinsic motivations.

As presented in this study, stress resulted in part from the demanding and challenging nature of work, which was at times beyond the capabilities of SEN teachers. In this sense, at the individual level, a reasonable approach to tackle work-related stress could be through professional development, such as training in coping strategies, collaborative skills, advanced SNE knowledge or leadership. These have been confirmed to enhance SEN teacher self-efficacy and resilience (Berry et al., 2012; Conley & You, 2017; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Kiel et al., 2016; Mackenzie, 2012a, 2013).

One significant aspect of the complexity of SEN teachers' work in inclusive vocational schools is manifested in the multilayered interpersonal relationships which are absolutely necessary, yet also lead to considerable stress, frustration and difficulty. In the current study, poor leadership and the negative attitudes of colleagues were, alarmingly, pointed out so many times that they seemed like formidable barriers against inclusion, even though inclusive education has been a major educational policy in Finland for years. Hence, at the organisational level, greater efforts from school leaders are pressingly needed to ensure that a supportive work environment is created and maintained where SEN teachers' expertise is truly appreciated, and collaboration is encouraged and facilitated. More specifically, in terms of collaboration, the concern raised by this study is whether the job design of each SEN teacher allows him or her to efficiently build up and sustain professional relationships with students and with other staff. Some teachers mentioned in the interviews that they had too much paperwork and, sometimes, they did not even have time to interact with students to better understand them due to the heavy workload. The challenge being faced by SEN teachers now appears to be the hustle and bustle at work (i.e., lack of time), and this requires school leaders (i.e., administrative support) to re-evaluate and reorganise the school's inclusive practices, such as resource allocation and the work timetable arrangement. On the other hand, based on the findings of this study and previous research (Klang et al., 2017; Layton, 2005), I suggest that, strategically, more leadership should be made available to SEN teachers. This does not mean that every SEN teacher should take a leadership position, although enough autonomy and

a certain level of managerial authority is necessary so that they can avoid bureaucracy and make decisions more efficiently regarding how to deal better with the students' diverse needs.

The teachers in this study also commented that SNE practices in Finland greatly depend on the administration of each school. In other words, the quality of SNE varies from one school to another. When the school leader has more 'sense of SNE', the teachers' expertise is more valued and the students are supported better. Conversely, if the school leader does not appreciate much SEN teachers' work, SNE cannot be adequately implemented. Such an inconsistency of SNE quality does not only affect the right of those who need special support but also exacerbates the ambiguous and conflicting nature of SEN teachers' roles as each school has a high autonomy to decide how to provide SNE in practice but without a clear national standard. Hence, a key policy priority at the regional and national level should be planned to establish a regional/national framework for SEN teachers' work so that a certain level of uniformity can be adopted.

For Teacher Education

The present study appears to be the first study within the Finnish inclusive IVET context to compare the experiences of in-service SEN teachers with what they learned from their preservice training. Therefore, the findings of this inquiry raise important questions concerning the depth and width of preservice teacher education for those who will enter the SEN teaching profession within the inclusive IVET context: Is it possible to help student teachers feel more prepared to handle students' diverse special needs facing them in today's vocational schools since the inclusive education system seems to require SEN teachers with an 'all-inclusive' expertise? As collaboration across various disciplines/agents is a must in today's inclusive education practice, do contemporary teacher education programmes provide student teachers with the necessary know-hows and opportunities to practice teaching as well as improve their interpersonal skills?

In order to respond to these deep concerns, several courses of action for teacher education are definitely needed. First of all, the gap between the student teachers' perceptions about their future work and the practices in reality can be minimised by a variety of fieldwork experiences. An example is visiting diverse educational settings, which provides student teachers with great opportunities to familiarise themselves with the contemporary teaching and learning environment and to help confirm or disconfirm their choice of working as SEN teachers. Also, as suggested by previous empirical studies (Mason, 2013; Norwich & Nash, 2011; Purdy & Guckin, 2015; Sigurdardóttir, 2010), this gap can be better addressed through a partnership between teacher education institutions and IVET schools. The contributions in-service teachers can make consist not only in mentorship, which benefits the development of teacher candidates' professionalism, but also in bridging the gap between theory and practice, an issue frequently experienced by novice teachers and student teachers.

Second, continued efforts are required to further integrate communication and collaboration knowledge and skills practically, especially in terms of multidisciplinary teamwork, into preservice and in-service SEN teacher trainings. One of the most significant findings emerging from this study strengthens the idea that successful intra- and inter-personal relationships allow SEN teachers to better deliver SNE services in structurally complicated inclusive IVET schools. This clearly indicates that, as relationships play an integral role in education (Köpsén, 2014; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004), teachers' lifelong learning programmes should embrace the diverse interactions in their workplaces and encourage working across different disciplines.

Third, this study suggests that either pre- or in-service teacher education programmes need to help student teachers or in-service teachers identify and make the most of the knowledge and skills acquired in their previous vocational careers or life experiences which are relevant and beneficial to the SEN teaching profession. The SEN teachers in this study formally acknowledged the relevance of their previous work and personal lives to the SEN teaching profession. Moreover, they seemed capable of dealing with the complexities of the roles and tasks in inclusive vocational schools because of the competences acquired through informal learning. Hence, it is of considerable significance to guide student teachers and in-service teachers in making connections between their past lived experiences, present teacher education and future teaching career.

Finally, ensuring the appropriate understanding of SNE and inclusive education should be a priority for preservice and in-service training targeting regular teachers and school leaders. To some extent, the findings of this research are rather disappointing and worrisome due to two frequently mentioned issues: the negative attitudes of school staff towards inclusive education and the poor leadership which depreciates the expertise of SEN teachers. The evidence from both this study and literature highlight the importance of SNE being cultivated as common sense among school leaders and regular teachers. On the one hand, establishing a merged model of preservice teacher education for inclusion appears to be a reasonable approach to deal with these issues considering the current preservice teacher training system in Finland. Such a merged preservice training programme requires close and extensive collaboration between general teacher education and SEN teacher education so that the core professional competences of working effectively in inclusive educational settings can be shared (Blanton & Pugach, 2007; Fullerton et al., 2011; Oyler, 2011; Ryan, 2009; Young, 2011). On the other hand, the provision of an integrated model of preservice teacher education will also enhance the understanding of SNE of teachers at large and reduce the barriers against inclusive practices. With a basic knowledge of SNE, instructional strategies and the opportunity to have a close and direct interaction with students with SEN provided by such an integrated preservice education programme, more positive attitudes towards inclusion and a higher teaching efficacy can be fostered (Blanton & Pugach, 2007; Oswald & Swart, 2011; Sharma & Sokal, 2015).

Taken together, a transformed pre- and in-service teacher education programme appears opportune. The matches and mismatches revealed in the findings of this inquiry indicate that teacher education institutions should be more aware of and responsive to the challenges faced by SEN teachers in today's inclusive IVET settings. Although it is impossible for teacher education institutions to prepare student teachers for every conceivable role and task, they can be informed by paying careful attention to the voices of those they send into the SNE arena. Moreover, this study implies that the SNE expertise is the accumulation of continuous and constant conscious and unconscious learning, which involves a variety of contexts, relationships and individuals.

Further work is certainly required to build a more comprehensive competence set for SEN teachers. For this reason, based on the findings, I propose a conceptual model for teacher education to examine and organise the knowledge and skills required for the SEN teaching profession in Finnish inclusive vocational schools. As shown in Figure 28, there are three dimensions involved in SEN teachers' work: relationships, life history and expertise. Relationships refer to the interactions with various individuals who work with SEN teachers. Life history covers the incidents and experiences of SEN teachers in their personal and professional lives. Expertise indicates the competences and personality traits desirable for working in this field. Through the interplay between the factors of each dimension, a certain aspect of SEN teachers' work is explored. For example, the child raising experiences in private life can enhance a teacher's social skills in interacting with students and students' parents. This model will prove useful in not only understanding the complexity of SEN teachers' work but also in establishing a more holistic view of the SEN teaching profession.
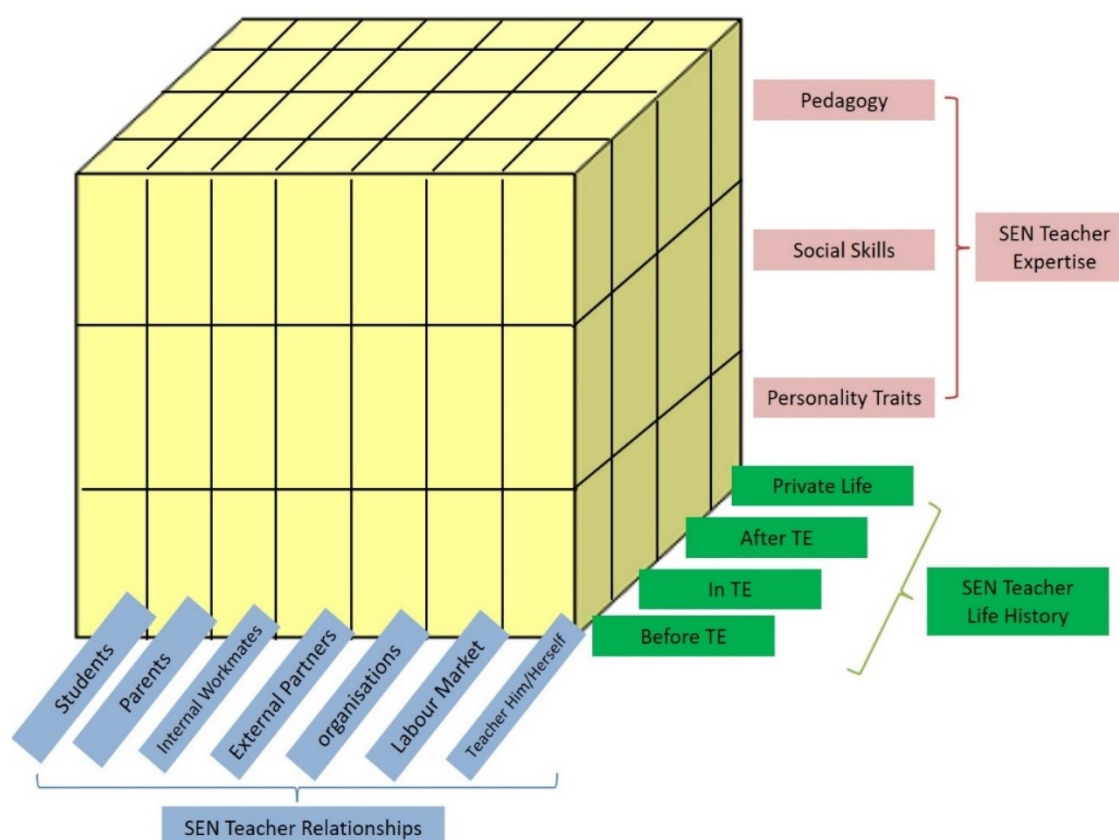
FIGURE 28   A conceptual model of SEN teachers' work

10.4.2 Suggestions for Further Research

This study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the complexity of SEN teachers' work and lays the groundwork for future research in this area. First, as pointed out earlier, all the teachers in this study were working within the inclusive IVET context and none of them were male. Moreover, among the 11 SEN teachers, only one had a background in IT, which is generally considered as more 'male-oriented'; she was also the only one in this study teaching 'hard science', whereas the other 10 teachers taught 'soft sciences' or general subjects, such as languages, catering and home economics. In a sense, the research participants in this study were all quite alike. Therefore, to develop a fuller picture of the SEN teaching profession, additional studies with research participants of more diverse backgrounds will be needed. The research participants should probably include, for instance, male SEN teachers, student teachers, SEN teachers who work in special vocational schools or SEN teachers who have a 'hard sciences' background or teach subjects which are stereotypically male (e.g. construction).

In terms of methodology, firstly, this study is limited by the lack of a specific methodological approach. Further inquiries adopting, for instance, phenomeno-

logical approach, could be conducted to examine more closely SEN teachers' private and professional lived experiences. Secondly, this study is limited by the lack of information from different sources. To gain more all-round evidence on the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers, the use of multiple researchers, various data sources/informants and data collection methods is suggested. Take the data collection as an example. This study was (inevitably) focused on in-service female SEN teachers. How about the perceptions of the SEN teaching profession held by others, such as student teachers who are undergoing the preservice teacher training programmes or school leaders/colleagues who work closely with SEN teachers? Further studies need to be carried out by adopting perspectives from the different agents involved to validate what SEN teachers perceive. Thirdly, while this study provided deeper insight into this career path through semi-structured interviews, further research in this field with a quantitative approach or an overarching theoretical framework by using, for instance, FIT-Choice Scale, would be worthwhile and shed more light on SEN teachers' career choice motivations. On the other hand, given the fact that the interviews were carried out when the teachers were experiencing the ongoing VET reforms, longitudinal investigations following the teachers interviewed in this research would be of great significance. By examining whether the teachers perceive their work lives and professional learning in a different way, a better understanding of the effectiveness and impacts of the reforms can be gained.

As presented in the findings and limitations, two kinds of SEN teachers were identified. Whilst this study did not confirm the similarities or differences between vocational SEN teachers (*ammatillinen erityisopettajat*) and comprehensive/general/academic SEN teachers (*laaja-alainen erityisopettajat*), it did partially substantiate the possibility that these two categories of SEN teachers might have their own specific identities, in terms of work lives and professional learning, by combining several previous inquires (Hirvonen, 2006, 2011a, b; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2013; Kaikkonen, 2010; Pirttimaa & Hirvonen, 2016). An additional focus on the similarities and differences between these two groups of SEN teachers could not only challenge whether such a preliminary understanding is valid but also produce intriguing findings that account more for the complexity of SEN teachers' work within Finnish inclusive IVET.

Last, another possible area of future research would be to investigate how the work lives and professional learning of SEN teachers differ from one country to another. Inquiries about SEN teachers working in inclusive vocational schools are still new and scarce in the European regions, and this study has focused mainly on the Finnish context. What is now needed is a cross-national study using the same qualitative approach to compare the experiences and perceptions of the two abovementioned types of SEN teachers within the same inclusive context.

YHTEENVETO

Ammatillisiin perustutkintoihin johtava toisen asteen koulutus on kahden viime vuosikymmenen aikana ollut suosittu vaihtoehto peruskoulun yhdeksännen luokan päättävien oppilaiden valitessa jatko-opintojaan. Myös erityistä tukea tarvitsevat nuoret suosivat toisen asteen ammatillista koulutusta, varsinkin inklusiivista opetusta järjestävissä oppilaitoksissa. Tässä tutkimuksessa käytetyllä termillä "Inklusiivinen ammatillinen koulutus" tarkoitetaan yleisiä, kaikille tarkoitettuja ammatillisia oppilaitoksia. Aineistoon eivät sisälly ammatilliset erityisoppilaitokset. Aineisto on kerätty ennen ammatillisen koulutuksen uudistunutta lainsäädäntöä. Erityisopettajilla on keskeinen rooli osana sitä moniammatillista verkostoa, joka myötävaikuttaa näiden opiskelijoiden hyvinvointiin. Tässä ympäristössä työskenteleviin erityisopettajiin on kuitenkin kiinnitetty aivan liian vähän huomiota. Tämän laadullisen tutkimuksen ensisijainen tavoite on tuoda julki suomalaisessa inklusiivisessa toisen asteen ammatillisessa koulutuksessa työskentelevien erityisopettajien kokemuksia sekä lisätä ymmärrystä heidän ammattinsa monitahoisuudesta.

Tutkimustavoitteeseen tartuttiin tarkastelemalla viittä erityisopettajan työelämään ja ammatilliseen oppimiseen liittyvää teemaa: I. uravalinta; II. työn realiteetit; III. formaali oppiminen; IV. informaali oppiminen; V. työtyytyväisyys. Aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoiduilla syvähaastatteluilla 11:ltä eri puolilla Suomea työskentelevältä erityisopettajalta. Aineiston analyysissä käytettiin temaattista lähestymistapaa.

Erityisopettajien työelämää ja ammatillista oppimista tarkasteltaessa hyödynnettiin 'opettaja persoonana' -käsitettä. Erityisopettajat eivät toimi luokassa tai koulussa tyhjiössä vaan elävät eräänlaisessa ajallisessa ja paikallisessa jatkumossa, jossa heidän ammatilliset käytänteensä ovat – joko tietoisesti tai alitajuisesti – vuorovaikutuksessa heidän henkilökohtaisten universumiensa kanssa. 'Opettaja persoonana' -käsitteellä on kolme pääasiallista ulottuvuutta. Näistä ensimmäinen on opettajan humanistinen rooli, joka on keskeinen opiskelijoiden oppimiselle (Glatthorn, 1975; Läänemets, Kalamees-Ruubel, & Sepp, 2012; Stonge, 2007). Toinen ulottuvuus liittyy opettajan inter- ja intrapersoonallisiin suhteisiin (Ball & Goodson, 1985b; Korthagen; Stonge, 2007). Kolmannessa ulottuvuudessa on keskeistä, kuinka opettajien elämänkokemus ja demografiset tekijät vaikuttavat heidän ammatilliseen osaamiseensa, tietoihinsa ja asenteisiinsa (Hargreaves, 1994; Kenyon, 2017; Stonge, 2007). Näistä lähtökohdista tämä laadullinen tutkimus pyrki kartoittamaan erityisopettajien työelämää ja ammatillista oppimista kokonaisvaltaisesti.

I. Uravalinta

Tärkeimmät uravalintaa koskevat tulokset osoittavat, että erityisopettajaksi inklusiivisiin ammattikouluihin hakeutumiseen vaikutti kolme eri tekijää: henkilökohtaiset, työhön liittyvät ja kontekstuaaliset tekijät. Henkilökohtaisia tekijöitä

olivat halu työskennellä nuorten parissa ja yhteiskunnallinen vastuuntunto. Lisäksi opettajat valitsivat tämän alan, koska halusivat pyyteettömästi auttaa erityistä tukea tarvitsevia, olivat kiinnostuneita tietämään oppimisvaikeuksista ja samastuivat erityisopetuksen arvoihin.

Työhön liittyviä tekijöitä oli opettajien mukaan erityisopetuksen läheinen opettajan ja opiskelijan välinen suhde. Nimenomaan toisen asteen ammatillisen koulutuksen valitsemiseen vaikutti työn monitahoinen luonne, joka tarjosi jännittäviä älyllisiä haasteita.

Erityisopetuksen hyvät työllistymisnäkymät kannustivat osaltaan suorittamaan alan tutkinto. Taloudellinen lama näytti olevan keskeinen uravalintaan vaikuttava kontekstuaalinen tekijä. Sattuma yllättävien työmahdollisuuksien muodossa johti myös työllistymiseen toisen asteen ammatillisissa oppilaitoksissa.

II. Työn realiteetit

Työn realiteetteihin liittyvät tulokset tuovat esiin erityisopettajan työn monitahoisuuden inklusiivisissa ammattikouluissa. Seuraavat kolme näkökulmaa ilmentävät tätä monitahoisuutta: 1) erityisopettajan ammatin erityispiirteet ja kompetenssit; 2) ammattiin liittyvät emootiot ja resilienssi; 3) opettajan peruskoulutuksen ja työn realiteettien välinen kuilu.

Ensimmäisestä näkökulmasta ammattia luonnehditaan hyödylliseksi mutta myös raskaaksi. Työssä koettu epävarmuus osoittaa, että jotkin persoonallisuuden piirteet ovat toivottavia tasapainottamaan työn ristiriitaista luonnetta. Toinen ammatin erityispiirre on, että erityisopettajan arkeen kuuluu sekä ammatillinen että hoivaava rooli. Ammattiin toisin sanoen kuuluu ammatillisen työn lisäksi emotionaalista työtä. Kolmanneksi erityisopetukselle on tyypillistä moniammatillinen tiimityö. Erityisopettajan päivittäiseen työhön kuuluu näin ollen olennaisesti yhteistyö sekä työtovereiden että ulkopuolisten ammattilaisten kanssa, jotta hän voi vastata opiskelijoiden moninaisiin tarpeisiin.

Ammatin viimeinen tärkeä ominaisuus liittyy sen varjopuoliin: monitahoisuus saattaa aiheuttaa uusille erityisopettajille kohtuutonta stressiä. Työn monitahoisuus ilmenee myös roolien ja tehtävien epäyhtenäisyytenä. Toisin sanoen opettajien peruskoulutuksen yhtenäisestä laadusta ja samoista opetussuunnitelmista huolimatta se, mitä erityisopettajat tosiasiassa tekevät, vaihtelee huomattavasti eri koulujen välillä ja riippuu paljon siitä, arvostaako koulun johto aidosti erityisopetusta. Toinen ammatin varjopuoliin liittyvä hälyttävä viesti on työllistymisen epävarmuus: hallituksen budjettileikkauksista johtuen tarjolla on vain osa-aikaisia työsopimuksia.

Erityisopettajan työn ominaispiirteiden lisäksi tutkimuksessa keskitytään myös siihen, mikä tekee erityisopettajasta pätevän (tai epäpätevän) työssään. Seuraavat kolme ammatillista kompetenssia määriteltiin ratkaisevan tärkeiksi erityisopettajan ammatissa: erityisopetusta koskevat tiedot, taidot ja etiikka; persoonallisuuden piirteet; sosiaaliset taidot.

Työn realiteettien toiseen näkökulmaan (emootiot ja resilienssi) liittyen voidaan todeta, että erityisopettajan ammatti väistämättä herättää tunteita. Opet-

tajat kokivat monenlaisia mielialan vaihteluita työssään. Heidän työtyytyväisyyteensä vaikutti kolme pääasiallista tekijää: opiskelijat, opiskelijoiden vanhemmat ja päivittäiset tapahtumat. Opettajat kertoivat myös turhautumisesta ja stressistä, joka johtui opiskelijoista, työtovereista, työstä itsestään, koulutuspolitiikasta ja itsereflektiosta. Tämä osoittaa, kuinka tärkeitä erityisopettajalle ovat turhautumisen ja stressin sietokyky sekä kyky säilyttää ammatillinen innostus. Tutkimus toi esille viisi tekijää, jotka auttoivat opettajia jaksamaan työssään: opiskelijat, opiskelijoiden vanhemmat, työtoverit, työ itsessään ja erityisopetuksen hallinnollinen tuki. Negatiivisia tunnereaktioita aiheuttivat lisäksi työssä päivittäin kohdatut vaikeudet, jotka liittyivät riittämättömään erityisopetuksen asiantuntemukseen, rajallisiin resursseihin, työtovereiden kielteisiin asenteisiin ja epäammattimaiseen johtamiseen.

Työn realiteettien kolmannen näkökulman suhteen opettajat olivat vahvasti sitä mieltä, että erityisopettajan ammatissa tapahtuu asteittaista kehitystä. Päteviä erityisopettajia tarvitaan entistä enemmän johtuen erityisopetusta tarvitsevien opiskelijoiden kasvavasta määrästä inklusiivisissa ammattikouluissa, ja tämän mukana myös ammatin arvostus nousee. Lisäksi erityisopettajan työ on muuttumassa monipuolisemmaksi ja haastavammaksi, jolloin se vaatii enemmän tiimityötä sen sijaan, että keskittyisi pelkästään oppimisvaikeuksia omaavaan opiskelijaan. Tämä tarkoittaa, että ammatissa tarvitaan laaja-alaisempaa osaamista, ei pelkästään erityisopetuksen erityistietoja ja taitoja.

Erityisopettajan muuttuvat roolit ja tehtävät ovat avanneet kuilun opettajankoulutuksessa hankitun osaamisen ja työelämän todellisuuden välille. Tutkimuksen osallistujat mainitsivat, että nykyiset opettajankoulutusohjelmat ovat liian teoreettisia ja keskittyvät pääasiassa oppimisvaikeuksiin. Heitä myös huoletti opettajankoulutuksen aikana esiteltyjen kouluympäristöjen rajallinen määrä. Heidän mielestään ennen työelämään siirtymistä suoritettu opettajankoulutus on liian lyhyt valmentamaan erityisopettajat niihin monipuolisiin tehtäviin ja rooleihin, jotka he työpaikalla kohtaavat.

III. Formaali (muodollinen) oppiminen

Useimmat tutkimukseen osallistuneet erityisopettajat osoittivat arvostavansa aidosti opettajankoulutuksen formaalissa opetuksessa oppimiaan asioita. Koulutukseen sisältyi erilaisia teorioita, näkökulmia ja toimenpiteitä, jotka muodostavat erityisopetuksen asiantuntemuksen perustan. Niiden pohjalta määriteltiin kolme keskeistä erityisopetuksen osaamisaluetta: erityisopetuksen tietoperusta, erityisopetukseen liittyvät asenteet sekä pedagogiset tiedot ja taidot. Varsinaisen opetuksen lisäksi arvostettiin myös kenttätyöstä saatujen kokemusten hyötyjä. Erityisesti mainittiin kaksi kenttätyön osa-aluetta, jotka kehittivät osaamista: käytännön työn seuraaminen ja mentorointi.

Joka tapauksessa erityisopettajat tunsivat, että koulutus oli valmistanut heitä riittämättömästi työhön seuraavalla kolmella osa-alueella: psyykkiset ongelmat, sosiaaliset/elämänhallinnan ongelmat ja vaikeavammaisuus. Opettajat itse esittivät useita rakentavia ehdotuksia, jotka parantaisivat opettajankoulutuk-

sen laatua siten, että erityisopettajien olisi helpompi vastata opiskelijoiden tarpeisiin. Opettajankoulutuksessa tulisi paneutua enemmän nuorten psyykkisiin ja sosiaalisiin/elämänhallinnan ongelmiin. Kansalliset opetussuunnitelman perusteet mainittiin myös, koska ne ovat yksi tärkeimmistä viitekehyksistä, joiden pohjalta opettajat arvioivat opiskelijoiden osaamista ja määrittelevät opetuksen tavoitteet. Osallistujat huomauttivat, että erityisopettajiksi opiskelevien tulisi tutustua opetussuunnitelman perusteisiin syvällisemmin.

Kenttätyöhön ehdotettiin mentoroinnin ja opetuksen seuraamisen monipuolistamista ja korostamista. Tämä antaisi kokonaisvaltaisemman kuvan opetuskäytänteistä eri ympäristöissä ja edistäisi ammatti-identiteetin kehittymistä. Koska erityisopettajan työn haasteet ovat moninaistuneet eivätkä enää liity vain oppimisvaikeuksiin, nykyisen opettajankoulutuksen uudistamista pidettiin kaiken kaikkiaan aiheellisena. Rajalliseen ja lyhytkestoiseen koulutukseen tulisi sisällyttää tarkoituksenmukaisempia opintoja, jotka tuottaisivat kokonaisvaltaista erityisopetuksen asiantuntemusta.

IV. Informaali oppiminen (arkioppiminen)

Tutkimuksessa selvitettiin myös arkioppimisen merkitystä ammatilliselle kehittymiselle. Opettajat kertoivat, kuinka heidän kokemuksensa aiemman uran varrelta ja nykyisistä työpaikoista, samoin kuin avioliitto ja lasten kasvatus sekä kielteisetkin elämäntapahtumat, ovat hyödyksi ammatissa. Aiempien työurien aikana opettajille oli kertynyt laajaa ja monipuolista ammatillista osaamista ja omakohtaisia taitoja. He kertoivat näiden taitojen vaikuttaneen merkittävästi ja syvällisesti heidän opetuskäytänteisiinsä seuraavilla kolmella alueella: pedagoginen, interpersoonallinen ja kontekstuaalinen osaaminen.

Toinen näkökulma opettajan arkioppimiseen on nykyinen työpaikka. Työssäoppiminen eli päivittäisessä opetuksessa hankittu käytännön kokemus vaikutti opettajiin monin tavoin. Ensinnäkin heistä tuli elinikäisiä oppijoita. Lisäksi heistä tuli pedagogisia asiantuntijoita sekä reflektiivisempiä ammatinharjoittajia. Monet opettajista näkivät selvästi näiden henkilökohtaisissa arvoissaan ja elämässään tapahtuneiden käsitteellisten ja asennemuutosten olevan osa erityisopettajan ammattia.

Opettajan henkilökohtainen elämä ja siihen sisältyvät negatiiviset tapahtumat sekä kokemukset avioliitosta ja lasten kasvatuksesta muodostavat kolmannen näkökulman arkioppimiseen. Opettajien elämässä tunnistettiin kolme pääasiallista kontekstia, joissa he kohtasivat tiettyjä kielteisiä tapahtumia: perhe, opinnot ja työelämä. Vaikka kielteiset tapahtumat jättivät opettajiin henkisiä "arpia", on innostavaa, kuinka he kanavoivat nämä kokemukset myönteiseksi voimavaraksi työhönsä. Avioliitosta ja lasten kasvatuksesta saaduilla kokemuksilla oli sekä positiivisia että negatiivisia vaikutuksia erityisopettajan työhön. Urakehitykseen vaikutti valitettavan kielteisesti se, että oli pienten lasten äiti. Sen voitiin nähdä olevan yhteydessä huonompiin työnsaantimahdollisuuksiin, työsuorituksen aliarvioimiseen ja rajallisiin ylenemismahdollisuuksiin. Toisaalta kokemus avioliitosta ja omien lasten kasvatuksesta vaikutti myönteisesti useilla osa-

alueilla: varsinaisessa työssä sekä suhteessa opiskelijoihin, opiskelijoiden vanhempiin ja työtovereihin.

V. Työtyytyväisyys

Tutkimuksen erityisopettajat kertoivat olevansa keskimäärin hyvin tyytyväisiä työhönsä huolimatta sen aiheuttamasta turhautumisesta, stressistä ja kohdatuista vaikeuksista. Kahden pääasiallisen tekijän, eli ulkoisten syiden ja tunnereaktioiden, havaittiin myötävaikuttavan ammatissa pysymiseen. Ulkoisia syitä olivat alan ammattipätevyys ja palkka. Useimmat opettajista ilmaisivat kuitenkin myös luontaisempaa motivaatiota jatkaa ammatissa; heidän myönteiset tunteensa työtä itseään ja opiskelijoita kohtaan vaikuttivat jatkamispäätökseen.

Vaikka useimmat päättivät jatkaa, se ei kuitenkaan tarkoita, etteivät he koskaan olisi ajatelleet vaihtaa alaa. Alanvaihdon harkitseminen ei johtunut siitä, ettei ammatista pidettäisi, vaan syynä näyttivät olevan henkilökohtaiset tekijät, koulun ilmapiiri ja lama. Kaksi muuta indikaattoria, joilla mittasin opettajien työtyytyväisyyttä, kiteytyvät kysymyksiin "valitsisitko saman ammatin uudelleen, jos voisit palata ajassa taaksepäin" ja "suosittelisitko ammattiasi toisille".

Ammattiin sisältyvistä valtavista haasteista huolimatta vastaajat pitivät erityisopetusta itselleen parhaana uravaihtoehtona, koska he samastuivat alalla tarvittaviin persoonallisuuden piirteisiin ja sen opetusfilosofiaan. Lisäksi he nauttivat erityisopetuksen monipuolisista, kiinnostavista, palkitsevista ja merkityksellisistä ulottuvuuksista. Useimmat opettajista suosittelisivat omaa urapolkuaan, vaikkakin osa heistä ehdollisesti. Ottaen huomioon työn kaikki hyvät ja huonot puolet, opettajat esittivät, että tietyt persoonallisuuden piirteet ja arvot ovat sekä toivottavia että välttämättömiä, jos aikoo erityisopettajaksi.

Kaiken kaikkiaan tulokset tukevat käsitystä opettajasta persoonana, eli erityisopettajan ammatti tulisi nähdä kokonaisvaltaisemmasta ja humanistisemmasta näkökulmasta. Ensinnäkin tutkimus osoittaa erityisopettajan työn ihmisläheisen luonteen. Tällä viitataan opettajan autenttisuuden suureen merkitykseen. Opiskelijoiden oppimisvaikeuksien ammattitaitoinen käsittely on varmasti yksi erityisopettajan tärkeimmistä tehtävistä. Erityisopettajat autenttisina yksilöinä osoittavat kuitenkin myös vahvaa kiinnostusta opiskelijoihin yksilöinä, mikä heijastuu opiskelijoiden ja heidän vanhempiensa arvostukseen. Tämä korrelaatio toimii molempiin suuntiin: tiivis vuorovaikutus opiskelijoiden kanssa vaikuttaa suuresti erityisopettajan työhön. Opiskelijat voivat myötävaikuttaa opettajan turhautumiseen, mutta myös heidän resilienssiinsä. Opettajan ja opiskelijan välisen suhteen aitous tuo esille erityisopettajan ammatin autenttiset, affektiiviset, sosiaaliset ja emotionaaliset puolet.

'Opettaja persoonana' -käsitteen toinen ulottuvuus koskee opettajan inter-/intrapersoonallisia yhteyksiä. Väitöskirjan havainnot ovat yhtäpitäviä niiden tutkimustulosten kanssa, joissa korostetaan yhteistyön merkitystä inklusiivisessa kontekstissa. Yhtäältä erityisopettaja toimii päivittäisessä vuorovaikutuksessa erilaisten ihmisten kanssa (opiskelijat ja heidän vanhempansa, työtoverit, ulkopuoliset asiantuntijat, yritykset ja viranomaiset/laitokset). Toisaalta erityisopettajan reflektiiviset käytännöt sekä määrittävät näiden yhteyksien laatua että alati

tarkastelevat ja parantavat sitä. Nämä reflektiiviset käytännöt ovat olennainen osa opettajan ammatillista osaamista.

Viimeisessä ulottuvuudessa korostuvat opettajan elämänkokemukset ja demografiset tekijät, eli opettajan ammatin ja yksityiselämän välinen vuorovaikutus ja niiden yhteen kietoutuminen. Tulokset tukevat aiempia tutkimuksia, joiden mukaan opettajan ammattitaito on yhteydessä myös hänen yksityiselämäänsä. Koko erityisopettajan uransa – aina ammatin valinnasta sen jatkamis- tai lopetuspäätökseen asti – tutkimukseen osallistuneiden opettajien päätöksiin ja ammattitaidon kehittämiseen ovat vaikuttaneet opettajankoulutuksessa opitun lisäksi myös heidän yksityisessä ja ammatillisessa elämässään tapahtuneet asiat. Tämän kontekstin ymmärtäminen tarjoaa kokonaisvaltaisemman kuvan erityisopettajien työn luonteesta.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1

Interview Information Sheet

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Faculty of Education
Cheng-Yu (Peter) Pan
chepan@student.jyu.fi

Information Sheet

A Comparative Study on Special Education in Finnish and Taiwanese Vocational Education and Training Settings

9.2012 – 9.2015

Information for **OOO**
Please will you help with my research?

My name is Cheng-Yu (Peter) Pan.
I am a PhD student in the Faculty of Education, University of Jyväskylä.

This information sheet tells you about my research.
I hope the leaflet will also be useful,
and I would be pleased to answer any questions you have.

Why is this research being done?

This research is mainly for my PhD dissertation, and it aims to make a thorough inquiry from historical and cultural perspective into today's vocational special education, teacher education, and teacher's professional identity. This research will contribute not only to planning vocational special education and teacher education, but also to improving the exchange of the knowledge and practical experiences between Finland and Taiwan.

Who will be the interviewees?

Prospective Interviewees (professional identity & commitment)	FINLAND: Southern Finland*(n=2) (1♂,1♀) Eastern Finland(n=2) (1♂,1♀) Western Finland(n=2) (1♂,1♀) Northern Finland(n=2) (1♂,1♀)	Taiwan: Southern Taiwan(n=2) (1♂,1♀) Eastern Taiwan (n=2) (1♂,1♀) Western Taiwan(n=2) (1♂,1♀) Northern Taiwan*(n=2) (1♂,1♀)
	N=8	N=8

*=capital

The current stage of my research is to collect the "voices" of in-service SEN-teachers working in VET about their professional identity and commitment.

As an international student, due to lower availability to Finnish teachers, all the contact information is given by OOO and OOO[1].

What will happen during the research?

The interview will be done via Skype or face-to-face meeting. Because of longer interview guidelines, the interview will be divided into two sessions, 2 hours for per session. And if there appears to be something unclear in interview, I would like to email you or phone you to check these details.

Interview transcripts will be used for my PhD dissertation and articles writing, which will be published in international journals.

What questions will be asked?

There are 6 themes during interview; they are about: 1) **Personal Identity**, 2) **Job Involvement**, 3) **Professional Ethics**, 4) **Professional Development**, 5) **Professional Relationship**, and 6) **Retaining Tendency**. There are 60 questions in total.

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[1] Both are experienced teacher educators who know this field well.

What will happen to you if you take part?

If you agree, I will tape record whole sessions of interview and type them up later. I am not looking for right or wrong answers, only for what everyone really thinks.

Could there be problems for you if you take part?

I hope you will enjoy talking to me, but if you want to stop talking, we will stop. Besides consuming a little more time for interview, there would be no any risks, harms or costs for this research.

If you have any problems with this research, please tell me.

Will doing the research help you?

I hope you will enjoy helping me. The research will mainly collect ideas to improve special education in VET in future.

Who will know that you have been in the research?

Because all the contact information of Finnish teachers is given by OOO and OOO. Only they both will know you have been in the research.

I will keep the audio records and notes in a safe place and will change all the names in my reports – and the name of your working place – so that no one else knows who said what.

Do you have to take part?

You decide if you want to take part and, even if you say "yes," you can drop out at any time or say that you don't want to answer some questions.

You can tell me that you will take part by signing the consent form.

Will you know about the research results?

I will send you the transcript after about one-month transcribing and the published article(s).

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Appendix 2 Interview Consent Form

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Faculty of Education
Cheng-Yu (Peter) Pan
chepan@studnet.jyu.fi

Informed Consent Form

A Comparative Study on Special Education in Finnish and Taiwanese
Vocational Education and Training Settings

9.2011-9.2015

I have read the information sheet and understand the nature of the research.

I would like to agree to participate by answering the questions in paper form.

I understand that the information may be published, but my name will **not** be disclosed.

I understand that I am free to deny any answer to specific questions during the interviews.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate my participation at any time.

I understand that my notes of interview guidelines will be read only by the researcher and his supervisors.

I understand that the interview transcripts will be read only by the researcher and his supervisors.

Participant's Name (please PRINT) _____

Signed _____   Date _____

Researcher's Name _____

Signed _____   Date _____

Appendix 3
Interview Guidelines

Interviewee's Information

1. Gender (Sukupuoli)： □ Male (Mies)　□ Female (Nainen)

2. Age (Ikä)：　　　　　□ under 25 (alle25)　　□ 46–55

　　　　　　　　　　　□ 25–35　　　　　　　□ 56–65

　　　　　　　　　　　□ 36–45　　　　　　　□ over 65 (yli 65)

3. Number of Years as SEN-Teacher：

　　Kuinka monta vuotta olet työskennellyt erityisopettajana?

4. Number of Years as Regular Teacher：

　　Kuinka monta vuotta olet työskennellyt luokan opettajana tai aineen

　　opettajana?

5. Number of Years as Other Employee

　　Kuinka monta vuotta olet tehnyt muita töitä?

6. Marital Status　　　　□ Married (Naimisissa) □ Single (Naimaton)

　　(Siviilisääty)：　　　□ Other (Muu)

7. Professional Background (Ammatillinen Koulutus)：

　　□ University of Applied Science: Vocational SEN Teacher Education
　　　Programme (60 ECTS) (Ammattikorkeakoulu)

　　□ Research-led University: One-year SEN Programme (60 ECTS) after
　　　becoming qualified as a regular teacher or after master's degree
　　　(Yliopisto)

　　□ Research-led University: Two-year Master's Degree Programme (300
　　　ECTS) of Special Education as a major (Yliopisto)

　　□ Other (Muu):

8. Current Position (Tämänhetkinen Työ)：

1. Professional Identity (Ammatillinen Identiteetti)
- *means how teachers value their profession.*
- *tarkoittaa sitä, miten opettajat arvottavat työtään*

1.1   What motivated you to be a SEN teacher in vocational education and training (VET)?

Mikä sai sinut haluamaan erityisopettajaksi ammattiopistossa?

1.2   Could you describe your progress in becoming a SEN teacher in VET?

Kuvaile omaa kehitystäsi opettajaksi?

1.3   Have you had any frustrating experiences during your studies or teaching times?

Does this kind of experience have any influence on your carrying out of the profession?

Onko sinulla ollut negatiivisia kokemuksia opiskelijana tai opettajana oman opiskelu- tai työhistoriasi aikana?

Ovatko nämä kokemukset vaikuttaneet jollain tavalla omaan tapaasi työskennellä?

1.4   Which self-adaptation measures did you adopt to work competently in this profession?

Miten sinä olet muuttanut itseäsi (tai ajattelutapaasi) ollaksesi parempi opettaja?

1.5   How do you describe your work as a SEN teacher in VET?

Miten kuvailisit työtäsi erityisopettajana?

1.6   Do you think the preservice education greatly/obviously benefitted your subsequent practical tasks?

If not, is there anything needed to be emphasized more or to be added in the preservice education programme?

Onko saamasi koulutus mielestäsi auttanut sinua oleellisesti/selvästi nykyisessä työssäsi? Jos ei ole, mitä sinun mielestäsi pitäisi painottaa koulutuksessa enemmän tai sisällyttää koulutukseen.

1.7 Did you have other work experiences before?

If yes, what kind of job did you do before?

How did those experiences influence your current profession?

Oletko tehnyt jotain muuta työtä ennen työtäsi opettajana? Jos olet, mitä työtä teit ennen? Miten nämä työkokemukset ovat vaikuttaneet nykyiseen työhösi?

1.8 Does this profession influence your personal values or private life?

Vaikuttaako erityisopettajan ammatti sinun henkilökohtaisiin arvoihisi tai elämääsi?

1.9 What is the most important professional competency of a SEN teacher in VET?

Mikä on tärkein ammatillinen kompetenssi erityisopettajana?

1.10 How do you define the profession of SEN teacher in VET?

Miten määrittelisit erityisopettajan työn ammattiopistossa?

1.11 Do you think that getting married or not or having kids or not has influenced your profession?

If yes, could you describe this influence?

Onko perhe-elämäsi (avioliitto, lapset jne.) vaikuttanut jollain tavalla omaan työhösi? Jos on, voisitko kuvailla tarkemmin näiden vaikutusta?

1.12 Have you ever doubted your own profession? If yes, why? If not, why not?

Have you conquered the problem yet? If yes, how? If not, what does still make you feel in doubt?

Oletko koskaan epäillyt omia kykyjäsi tai sopivuuttasi erityisopettajaksi? Jos olet, miksi? Jos et ole, miksi et?

Oletko jo selvittänyt ongelman? Jos olet, miten? Jos et, mikä saa sinut edelleen epäröimään?

1.13 As a professional helper, what is the difference between SEN teachers in VET and other helping professionals?

Miten erityisopettajan työ eroaa mielestäsi muista 'helping profession'sta?

1.14 Do you think it would be better if every SEN teacher in VET had a second specialty/other qualified professional certificate?

Olisiko sinusta parempi, jos ammattiopiston erityisopettajalla on koulutus myös johonkin muuhun ammattiin?

1.15 What do you think the role of SEN-teacher in VET is?

Mikä on mielestäsi erityisopettajan rooli ammattiopistossa?

1.16 Do you find any differences/contradictions between this professional role and your personal character?

If yes, could you describe the difference/contradiction?

Eroaako sinun ammattipersoonasi jollain tavalla siitä, millainen olet muussa elämässä? Jos eroaa, voisitko kuvailla tarkemmin näitä eroavaisuuksia tai ristiriitoja?

1.17 Is there any gap between your prior understanding about the profession and the real situation in the profession?

Eroaako aikaisempi ymmärryksesi ja ideasi erityisopettajan työstä jollain tavalla todellisesta työstäsi?

1.18 Do you perceive any different expectations from your school, students' parents or yourself?

If yes, is it possibly connected to your gender? How?

Eroaako koulun, oppilaiden tai vanhempien odotukset tai toiveet sinulta jollain tavalla omista odotuksistasi? Luuletko, että omalla sukupuolellasi voisi olla vaikutusta näihin odotuksiin?

1.19 Does the professional role you play now meet the social expectation?

Vastaako oma ammatillinen roolisi mielestäsi koulun, oppilaiden ja vanhempien odotuksia?

1.20 What are the expectations of SEN teachers from other staff and leaders in your school?

Mitä odotuksia muilla opettajilla, henkilökunnalla ja rehtorilla on erityisopettajilta?

1.21   What are others' first responses when they learn your profession is SEN teacher in VET?

Minkälaisia reaktioita toisilla (ystävillä, sukulaisilla, tutuilla) on, kun he saavat tietää, että olet erityisopettaja ammattiopistossa?

1.22   According to your experience, how does society view your profession?

Kuinka yhteiskunta näkee ammattisi kokemuksesi mukaan?

1.23   Has the SEN teachers' role in VET transformed during the past decade? If yes, how?

Do you think this professional role will change/develop further in the coming 10 years? If yes, how?

Onko erityisopettajan asema ammattiopistossa muuttunut viime vuosikymmenen aikana? Jos on, niin miten? Luuletko, että tämä ammatillinen asema tulee muuttumaan tai kehittymään entisestään seuraavan 10 vuoden aikana? Jos kyllä, miten?

1.24   Do you think that the role of SEN teachers in VET could be replaced with other regular 'SNE-know-how' teachers? If yes, why?

Luuletko, että erityisopettajat ammattiopistossa voitaisiin korvata tavallisilla opettajilla, joilla on erityisopetustietämystä ja -taitoja? Perustele.

1.25   Do you think today's screening system can really identify future professional SEN teachers in VET?

If not, how can we improve it?

Luuletko, että nykyinen valintajärjestelmä kykenee tunnistamaan kyvykkäät tulevaisuuden erityisopettajat ammattiopistoon? Jos ei, kuinka voimme parantaa järjestelmää?

1.26   Do you think today's preservice education can really meet the practical needs of educational settings?

Luuletko, että nykyinen opettajankoulutus todella vastaa eri koulutusympäristöjen käytännöllisiä tarpeita?

1.27 Have you ever heard of the term 'inefficient teacher?'

Under what kind of circumstances/conditions would you think a SEN teacher in VET would be identified as being 'inefficient'?

Oletko koskaan kuullut ilmaisua 'inkompetentti opettaja'?

Minkälaisissa olosuhteissa ajattelisit, että ammattikoulun erityisopettaja voisi olla 'inkompetentti'?

1.28 If you could change one thing, what would you want to change most? (e.g. vocational education, professional duties, teacher education)

Jos sinulla olisi valta muuttaa yksi asia, mitä tahtoisit muuttaa eniten? (esimerkiksi ammattiopetus? ammatilliset velvollisuudet? opettajankoulutus? jne)

2. Job Involvement (Työhön Osallistuminen)
- means how teachers get involved in their job as a vocational SEN educator.
- tarkoittaa sitä, kuinka opettajat sitoutuvat työhönsä erityisopettajana ammattiopistossa

2.1 What is the most wonderful experience you have ever had as a SEN teacher in VET?

Mikä on parhain kokemuksesi, joka sinulla on koskaan ollut erityisopettajana ammattiopistossa?

2.2 1 means no pressure at all, 10 means extremely stressful. How do you feel about your job?

Kuinka arvioisit stressin määrän työssäsi viime työvuonna asteikolla 1:stä 10:en?

1 tarkoittaa ei stressiä laisinkaan, 10 tarkoittaa erittäin stressaavaa?

2.3 What is the main source of pressure for a SEN teacher in the VET area?

Mikä on stressin suurin lähde erityisopettajalla ammattiopistolla?

2.4 What is the most frustrating experience you have ever had as a SEN teacher in VET?

Mikä on kaikista turhauttavin kokemuksesi erityisopettajana ammattiopistossa?

2.5   What difficulties have you experienced whilst working as a SEN teacher in VET?

Mitä vaikeuksia olet kokenut työskennellessäsi erityisopettaja ammattiopistossa?

2.6   Do you have high autonomy in your profession?

If not, could you describe what autonomy you have so far?

Onko sinulla suuri autonomia työssäsi? Jos ei, voisitko kuvailla, minkälainen autonomia sinulla on?

2.7   Which factors could improve your enthusiasm for this profession?

Mitkä tekijät voivat kohentaa motivaatiotasi työhösi?

2.8   If needed, would you like to spend your private time teaching or would you take on other educational tasks after work?

Voisitko tarvittaessa käyttää vapaa-aikaasi opettamiseen tai voisitko ottaa vastaan muita koulutuksellisia tehtäviä työajan jälkeen?

3. Professional Ethics (Ammatillinen Etiikka)
- means how teachers perceive/value/obey professional/organizational code of ethic.
- tarkoittaa sitä, kuinka opettajat ymmärtävät, arvioivat tai tottelevat ammatillista tai organisaatiollista ammattietiikkaa

3.1   Which is the most important professional code of ethics that you follow?

Mikä on sinulle kaikista tärkein ammatillinen eettinen periaate?

3.2   Is there any law/regulation in Finland concerning the professional code of ethics of SEN teachers in VET?

If yes, is it already enough to regulate teachers' professional ethics?

If no, do you think it is necessary to establish such a set of ethics standards?

Onko Suomessa olemassa lakia tai säännöstöä erityisopettajien ammattietiikasta ammattiopistossa? Jos on, onko se tarpeeksi säädelläkseen opettajien ammattietiikkaa? Jos ei, tarvitaanko mielestäsi tällaisia eettisiä standardeja?

3.3   How do you abide by your professional ethics?

Kuinka noudatat ammattietiikkaasi?

4. Professional Development/In-service Education

(Ammatillinen Kehittyminen ja Henkilöstökoulutus)

- means how teachers maintain their profession.
- tarkoittaa sitä, kuinka opettajat säilyttävät työtaitonsa ja –tietonsa

4.1　Is there any formal or informal teacher evaluation system in your school?

Do you think the criteria of the evaluation system for SEN teachers should be the same as that for regular teachers?

Arvioiko koulusi työtäsi millään tavalla?

Jos koululla on arviointijärjestelmä, tulisiko erityisopettajille ja tavallisille opettajille olla erilliset järjestelmät?

4.2　Should a master's degree really matter for someone planning to be a SEN teacher in VET?

According to your experience, does your master's degree offer any real benefit for your latter teaching career?

Onko maisterintutkinto mielestäsi todella tarpeellinen erityisopettajalle ammattiopistossa? Onko maisterintutkinto todella hyödyttänyt sinua opettajanurallasi oman kokemuksesi mukaan?

4.3　Do you want to pursue further degrees or in-service studies for your profession? Why?

Haluaisitko opiskella lisää tai osallistua henkilöstökoulutukseen ammattitaitosi tähden? Miksi?

4.4　What is your way to maintain/improve your profession?

Miten ylläpidät tai kehität ammattitaitoasi?

4.5　In what kind of in-service education/training would you like to participate?

Minkälaiseen henkilöstökoulutukseen haluaisit osallistua?

4.6　Does your school provide any in-service education/training for SEN teachers' lifelong learning?

If yes, in what activities have you participated?

Tarjoaako koulusi minkäänlaista henkilöstökoulutusta? Jos kyllä, minkälaisiin aktiviteetteihin olet osallistunut?

4.7 Do you think there is sufficient access to further study for professional growth in Finland? Why?

Onko Suomessa mielestäsi riittäviä resursseja opiskella ammattitaitonsa kehittämiseksi?

5. Professional Relationship (Ammatilliset Ihmissuhteet)
- means how teachers interact with others in their professional field.
- kuinka opettaja on vuorovaikutuksessa toisten kanssa omalla ammatillisella kentällään

5.1 Do you also work with mainstream students (non-SEN students) now? According to your observation, is there any difference in the student-teacher relation between SNE and non-SNE?

Työskenteletkö myös tavallisten opiskelijoiden (ei-erityisopiskelijoiden) kanssa?

Onko erityisopetuksen opettaja-opiskelija -suhteella mielestäsi eroa tavallisen opetuksen vastaavaan suhteeseen?

5.2 According to your observations, how do regular teachers and students perceive SEN students?

Kuinka tavalliset opettajat ja opiskelijat näkevät erityisopiskelijat oman näkemyksesi mukaan?

5.3 Are there bullying problems (among SEN students or between SEN students and non-SEN students) in your school?
If yes, how did you solve this problem?

Onko koulussasi ollut ongelmia kiusaamisen kanssa (erityisopiskelijoiden keskuudessa tai erityisopiskelijoiden ja tavallisten opiskelijoiden välillä)? Jos kyllä, kuinka ongelma ratkaistiin?

5.4 How do you improve others' understanding of SEN students on campus?
Kuinka edistät ymmärrystä erityisopiskelijoita kohtaan kampuksella?

5.5 How do you interact with your students' parents? How do they get themselves involved in school activities?

Kuinka olet vuorovaikutuksessa opiskelijoittesi vanhempien kanssa? Kuinka he ottavat osaa koulun aktiviteetteihin?

5.6   Have you interacted or cooperated with non-SEN teachers?

Oletko ollut vuorovaikutuksessa tai yhteistyössä tavallisten opettajien kanssa?

5.7   Do you think SEN teachers have their own 'sub-culture'?

If yes, what creates this difference?

Onko erityisopettajilla mielestäsi oma 'alakulttuurinsa'? Jos kyllä, voisitko kuvailla tätä alakulttuuria?

5.8   How do you arrange your students' working practice or job application process?

Have you encountered any problems?

Kuinka järjestät opiskelijoittesi työharjoittelun tai työnhakuprosessin?

Oletko kohdannut ongelmia?

5.9   Do you have sufficient support (material or mental) from your school?

How do they support you? If not, why?

Onko sinulla koulusi riittävä (materiaalinen tai mentaalinen) tuki?

Kuinka he tukevat sinua? Jos ei, miksi?

5.10   Is there a SEN teacher professional association/group in Finland?

If yes, how do SEN teachers think about/get themselves involved in this organisation?

If not, do you think it is necessary/good for SEN teachers to have such a professional organisation?

Onko erityisopettajilla omaa ammatillista yhdistystä Suomessa? Jos kyllä, mitä ajattelet tästä yhdistyksestä ja otatko osaa sen toimintaan? Jos kyllä, miten?

Jos ei, onko mielestäsi tärkeää, että erityisopettajilla olisi oma ammatillinen yhdistys?

6. Retaining Tendency (Töissä Jatkaminen)
- means how teachers are willing to retain/leave the current job.
- opettajien tahto jatkaa tai lopettaa nykyinen työnsä

6.1   What is the reason for you to remain a SEN teacher in VET?

Mikä on syysi jatkaa erityisopettajan työssä ammattiopistossa?

6.2   Has it ever occurred to you that it would be better if you changed your career?

If yes, when? Why?

Oletko koskaan ajatellut, että olisi parempi, jos vaihtaisit työpaikkaa? Jos kyllä, milloin? Miksi?

6.3   If you had a second career choice, would you still be willing to be a SEN teacher?

Jos voisit valita uudestaan, haluaisitko silti erityisopettajaksi?

6.4   Would you recommend others to join this career?

Suosittelisitko toisillekin tätä uraa?

Appendix 4

Selected Interview Transcripts

Chapter 8

When you have small children, it's always more difficult to … first of all, find a job, because in the interviews they ask you 'do you have kids', and then they ask you like 'what age are they'? And I have seen that it has an influence on whether you are going to be chosen or not. […] It's very obvious. […] At least once I was said it directly that you have … your kids are so small that we are not going to choose you … and then once I just saw it in his face because … for the whole interview, he was smiling, and when I told him that my kids are 3 and 5, and he went a 'Ho'. […] The reason is very simple, because then … small kids are quite often sick, and then you have to be with them and take care of them, and you can't be at work, so it's very expensive for the employer. […] It's actually being [discussed]in the media lately, not in the big media, but like in woman's magazines. […] Quite many people are telling their stories, and it's obvious why they have not got the job, or they have lost the job, or their job duties have been changed … because of the kids. […] Actually, people are now thinking that … first of all, when … when the baby is born, and then the mother can stay at home for 10 months with quite good money. […]But the employer has to pay for that period, so it's kind of like … if you are thinking about small business, it's very very expensive for that small business, and sometimes they go down because somebody is having a kid and they have to pay the money. […] Quite many employers actually say it straight that I can't … I can't employ a woman … young woman who doesn't have any kids because she is going to have a kid soon. […] In the school where I work, most of the women are nearly 50, so they don't have that kind of problems because … and they are always working, so the supervisor might be thinking that why … why she is always off because of the kids, because there is … there is only few young women in there who has kids.

[…] Even though you wouldn't have kids, it's … well, I have seen it, and I have talked to my colleagues that it has … importance whether you are man or woman, it does affect. […] In my school when that happened that I just talked about, people kind of realize it, and there would lot of … lots of complaints about this, and everybody is talking like it's because of he is man … because the woman was more educated, and she actually had the education unique to … to be able to work very well in that job, and she had EU experience, and that man didn't have experience at all, so … nobody really could understand why he was chosen. (Sofia)

Chapter 9

They are [cutting] down this student numbers in our vocational school … here in
City L, and also in [this region], and this … these are more to south, where are
more people, and now … just this … this stream has been stressive and very …
confusing in vocational school in [this region], because government has made
this decision to cut down these student places, and we have to … supistaa[reduce]
our … we have to reduce our … our vocational school here … and always …
when something is cutting down, those who are poorer or weakest or who have
special needs, they are the … not the first thinking, but they are the least … the
last ones who are thinking … so I am afraid what happen in next year? Is there …
they are taking places … students places from here … perhaps cut downs are …
we become also for this special needs things, and also … government have cut-
ting down financing … vocational financing, and moving this very … very hardly,
and also this … valintajärjestelmä … selection system will be moved … for … in
two next years … big changes have really become. … I don't know … perhaps
money … government have no money … and this is … so confusing because now
we have … low … recession … lama … do you know recession? Not good time
in … in Finland with financial meanings, and usually during this time govern-
ment has put more money to education, but now government makes just differ-
ent way, and this is very confusing … what happens in the future? I don't
know … not perhaps we are not … we are not in the future first in PISA scales or
other things … I am afraid about that. … Whole Finland, and mostly these cuts-
down things are … made in … in [this region] and Eastern part of Finland … and
as main reason, why here, is that … ikäluokka[age group/age class] … amount
of age classes are going down, there are … less and less children here in [this
region], people move to south, or they have less children in families, so … we
don't need so much schools or vocational schools here, but now … govern-
ment … forecast … the … is not … wise, I think, they are making more cuts
down …like … is wise … and many many big changes has made in the same time,
this financial cuts down, and … those studying places is cutting down, and also
this selection system is changing in these … in these years … so we may see …
what happens. (Linda)