

Perceived Challenges and Support Strategies for Migrant Students with Special Educational Needs: Insights from Future Special Education Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The Italian education system is witnessing a steady increase in the number of students with special educational needs, particularly those from migrant backgrounds for whom Italian is not the first language.

This study investigates the perceptions of 261 pre-service teachers specializing in special needs education regarding the challenges faced by students in mainstream Italian classrooms who are identified as having special educational needs arising from their limited or non-existent proficiency in Italian as a second language (L2).

Through a qualitative approach based on open-ended questionnaire responses, the analysis identifies linguistic barriers—especially in comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary—as the most significant challenges. Additional difficulties reported include limited peer interaction, social exclusion, and cultural dissonance. Participants proposed a range of strategies to support L2 learners, such as differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, the use of visual and digital tools, and culturally responsive methodologies. The findings also emphasize the importance of targeted teacher training that incorporates intercultural competence, inclusive practices, and effective communication strategies.

The results underscore the need to prepare future teachers not only with inclusive pedagogical tools, but also with a deep intercultural awareness, enabling them to support equitable learning pathways for all students in linguistically diverse contexts.

Keywords: L2 acquisition in education, inclusive pedagogy, classroom diversity, pre-service teachers, intercultural competence