FUTURE TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON CURRENT USES AND PROFESSIONAL PROJECTIONS

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ABSTRACT
The study investigates the perceptions of a thousand future support teachers towards Artificial Intelligence. Through a quantitative survey conducted by administering the *GAAIS* questionnaire, the balance between instrumental acceptance and the "Frankenstein complex" is analysed. The aim is to examine the tension between perceived usefulness of AI and resistance to its use. The research findings reveal a "critical trust" in AI: although recognized as a scaffolding tool for innovative teaching, it is perceived as a resource at the service of teaching professionalism. Participants reaffirm the centrality of professional autonomy and the educational relationship. The contribution emphasizes the need for training models capable of integrating AI as a support for teaching practice while maintaining the ethical and relational essence of the teaching function.

KEYWORDS
Artificial intelligence; Frankenstein complex; pre-service teachers; special education; educational relationship.

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1.Introduction

The contemporary educational horizon is faced with an unprecedented technological capillarization, marked by the rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems. This change is not limited to the adoption of new teaching aids, but invests in the deep structures of cognition and models of educational development. The mediation of advanced algorithmic systems fundamentally redefines both the ways in which knowledge is preserved and transmitted, as well as the relational and emotional fabric that characterizes the daily school experience. We find ourselves immersed in what Luciano Floridi describes as the onlife condition: an integrated ecosystem in which the historical dichotomies between real and virtual, or between analogue and digital, dissolve within a unitary and complex infosphere (Floridi, 2025). In this new framework, the subject experiences a real reconfiguration of his existential coordinates and cognitive habits, reshaping the very meaning of action and presence in the spaces of formation (Baldacci, 2024).

Within this ever-evolving ecosystem, the educational institution and specifically the teaching staff, faces a dual challenge: on the one hand, the technocratic demand pushing for the uncritical and pervasive adoption of automation as a panacea for optimizing learning; on the other, the emergence of profound resistance, rooted in what psych pedagogical and philosophical literature defines as the "Frankenstein complex." The latter manifests itself as the ancestral fear that the technological artifact created by man could escape the control of its creator, to the point of leading to a de-humanization of vital and interactional functions, including educational ones (McCauley, L. 2007, March).

Contemporary pedagogical debate cannot therefore fail to analyse how teachers, and in particular those responsible for protecting and promoting school inclusion, i.e., special education teachers, perceive, integrate or reject these technologies. The special education teacher embodies par excellence the ethical and relational function of teaching, where pedagogical care and empathy are elements that cannot be computed or reduced to predictive calculation. Consequently, understanding the attitude of future graduate teachers towards AI means shedding light on the school's future trajectories, moving in the dialectic between instrumental effectiveness and safeguarding the human essence of the teaching relationship. This paper aims to quantitatively and critically examine the responses provided by a sample of 1.000 future support teachers in university specialist training, in order to map the degree of technological acceptance, the nodes of scepticism and the emerging training challenges.

2. The Theoretical Framework: Between Algorithmic Pedagogy and the "Frankenstein Complex"

Reflection on the introduction of AI in schools finds a solid foundation in recent developments in so-called "algorithmic pedagogy". As highlighted by Panciroli and Rivoltella (2023), educational action in the AI era cannot be limited to technical training in the use of devices but requires an epistemological vigilance aimed at deconstructing the logics underlying the algorithms that govern information flows. AI presents itself as a powerful cognitive scaffolding tool (Vygotsky, 1978), capable of supporting path differentiation, automating routine management tasks and offering flexible teaching simulations. These potentials find a precise mapping in the current scientific literature (Chassignol et al., 2018), which highlights how generative and predictive systems can

effectively relieve teachers of bureaucratic or repetitive tasks. However, blind reliance on technology risks weakening students' critical thinking skills. Furthermore, learning would lose its concrete dimension, linked to physical presence in the classroom and real, human exchange between people.

Didactic interaction (Sibilio, 2020), understood as a complex transdisciplinary space in which the encounter between teacher and student requires corporeality and situated discernment, elements structurally foreign to algorithmic automation processes. Within this framework, sociology and philosophy of technology (Selwyn, 2019; Floridi, 2024) invite us to consider the ethical limits intrinsic to machines.

AI operates on a probabilistic basis, extrapolating patterns from massive datasets; it is by definition devoid of intentionality, empathy and phenomenal consciousness. When applied to the field of school inclusion and special education, this asymmetry emerges particularly clearly. Individualized design for students with disabilities or Special Educational Needs (SEN) is not reduced to the mechanical application of predefined strategies, but rather feeds on a continuous decoding of the unexpected, a situated pedagogical gaze and a welcoming posture that escape the binary categorization of digital systems (Gaspari, 2024).

Teachers' resistance, therefore, should not be interpreted as a neo-Luddite rejection or as an anti-technological prejudice. On the contrary, they often reflect a deep awareness of the complexity of the educational event. The reference to the "Frankenstein complex" allows us to frame the tension between the perceived usefulness of technology (understood as an operational facilitator) and the anguish of the loss of professional autonomy and the progressive marginalization of the role (Aliaño et al., 2024) and Selwyn (2024).

Teachers fear that instruction will be reduced to the individualized delivery of pre-established content and evaluation to automated monitoring. The challenge of teacher training therefore lies in building a "critical trust": an attitude capable of enhancing the machine's potential without delegating decision-making responsibility and the primacy of interpersonal relationships.

3. Methodology and research design

This study adopts a quantitative approach aimed at exploring the attitudes and beliefs of trainee teachers regarding Artificial Intelligence. We chose this methodology to collect data systematically on a large sample. In this way it was possible to bring out the general trends, points of agreement and doubts of the participants, photographing their opinions at a time of great technological change for the school. The research design is configured as a cross-sectional (cross-sectional) study with descriptive and exploratory purposes.

The process was divided into the following phases: analysis of the scientific literature and definition of the topics to be investigated; selection and digitization of the questionnaire; online administration to participants; and statistical analysis of the collected data. The entire process was conducted in full compliance with the ethical criteria of scientific research, ensuring the absolute anonymity of the teachers involved and the use of data exclusively in aggregate form.

3.1 Sample

The research involved a cross-sectional sample of 1.016 subjects (with physiological oscillations in response between 994 and 1.009 respondents depending on the item considered). The participants are future support teachers who attended the enabling courses for teaching support activities at

the Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples in the 2025-2026 academic year. The Gaais questionnaire was administered to the sample at different times according to the group to which it belonged (Kindergarten, Primary School, Secondary School) and of the thirty-six items, we took into consideration, for research purposes, the sixteen that seemed most interesting to us. Since we do not have some sample data available (gender, age, geographical origin, profession), we are aware that there are limits to the validity and generalizability of the results.

The participants are future special education teachers, enrolled in university qualification and specialization programs for teaching support activities for students with disabilities. This sample is particularly significant from a pedagogical perspective: these are school professionals whose training is intrinsically oriented towards personalization, empathy, listening, caring for and managing the most complex relational and inclusive dynamics.

3.2 The Detection Instrument

For data collection, the *GAAIS* (General Attitudes Towards Artificial Intelligence Scale) questionnaire was used, an international standardized instrument whose psychometric validity in the educational field has recently been confirmed by Cicero, Russo, Di Stefano et al. (2025). The instrument, structured on a three-point Likert scale (Disagreement, Neutral, Agree), was administered digitally and anonymously. Compared to the original formulation of Schepman and Rodway (2020) on a 5-point Likert scale, the present study used, for data collection, the General Attitudes Towards Artificial Intelligence Scale (GAAIS) in the version adapted and reduced by Alsudairy and Eltantawy (2024), subsequently translated and contextualized in Italian. The choice to adopt a three-point scale (Disagree, Neutral, Agree) comes from the adaptation by

Alsudairy and Eltantawy (2024). This modification was introduced by the authors to reduce the cognitive load of compilers, avoid fragmentation of responses, and promote a clear polarization of attitudes (favorable, neutral, contrary) compared to an emerging and complex technology such as AI. The unmodified GAAIS items that assess the epistemic, ethical, and macro-social dimensions of AI are 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, and 12. The specific/additional items of didactic and special fields developed/integrated in the adaptation of Alsudairy and Eltantawy (2024) to measure the applicability of AI in special and inclusive teaching contexts (e.g. creation of simulated lessons, diversification of strategies, analysis of class context and plagiarism control are 14, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 33. The validity of the 3-point version adopted is based on the checks conducted by Alsudairy and Eltantawy (2024).The items analysed within the questionnaire were grouped and investigated according to well-defined theoretical macro-dimensions, useful for mapping the complexity of the construct. A first area of investigation is represented by the epistemic dimension, aimed at exploring how participants perceive the cognitive and problem-solving capabilities of Artificial Intelligence when faced with highly complex problems. This is accompanied by a macro-social dimension, focused on assessing future prospects and balancing the benefits and disadvantages for society as a whole. The most strictly value-based core is captured by the ethical dimension, which is responsible for determining the degree of acceptance or resistance of future teachers with respect to decision-making delegation to advanced algorithmic systems. Finally, the study tightens its focus on the operational context through two further declinations: on the one hand, the professional dimension assesses the willingness to use AI personally and the perception of its usefulness for career development; on the other, the didactic-

methodological dimension explores the practical applicability of the machine in the specific processes of design, strategic diversification, teaching simulation and plagiarism control/evaluation.

4. Results

The data collected highlight a nuanced interpretative landscape, confirming the hypothesis of a "critical trust" and a clear split between the recognition of the technical-functional value of AI and the need to safeguard the ethical-relational dimension of teaching. The following systematically reports the analyses of the most significant items of the questionnaire:

4.1 The epistemic and macro-social dimension of AI

Item 2: "Artificial intelligence can solve very complex problems" Answers (N = 1,016): Disagree: 19.5%; Neutral: 39.1%; Agree: 41.4%.

Item 4: "In the future, societies will benefit greatly from the use of artificial intelligence." Responses (N = 1,014): Disagree: 12%; Neutral: 38.0%; Agree: 50.0% (Fig. 1). The data confirms a moderate optimism at the social level: half of the sample (50.0%) sees AI as an engine of progress and innovation. However, 38.0% of neutral responses highlighted that these benefits are not considered automatic, but depend on precise ethical rules and an anthropocentric use of technology.

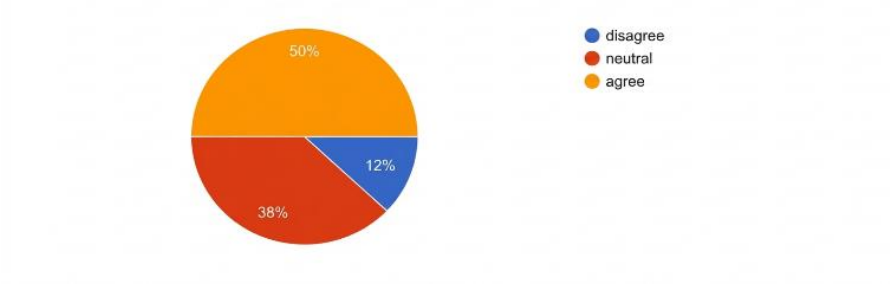


Chart 1. "In the future, societies will benefit greatly from the use of artificial intelligence."

Item 6: "I believe the benefits of artificial intelligence far outweigh its disadvantages." Responses (N = 1,014): Disagree: 22.8%; Neutral: 53.3%; Agree: 24%.

4.2 Ethical resistance and limitation of use

Item 5: "I believe highly complex decisions can be entrusted to artificial intelligence." Responses (N = 1,010): Disagree: 62.6%; Neutral: 28.7%; Agree: 8.7% (Fig. 2). Here we are witnessing a clear reversal of the trend with respect to technical trust: in fact, a strong rejection of decision-making delegation emerges on complex scenarios (62.6% disagreement). Teachers say that human judgment cannot be replaced by mathematical calculation. The very low percentage of agreement (8.7%) demonstrates that trust in AI collapses when moving from operational use of the tool to decision-making responsibility.

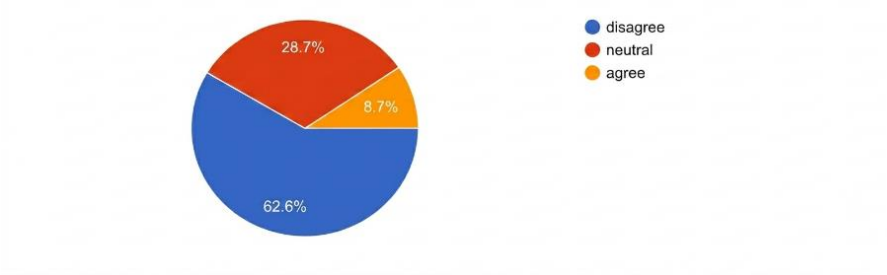


Chart 2. " I believe that highly complex decisions can be entrusted to artificial intelligence."

Item 10: "I want to use artificial intelligence in all my jobs and tasks." Responses (N = 1,012): Disagree: 66.9%; Neutral: 28.5%; Agree: 4.6% (Fig. 3).

The refusal is clear (66.9%): only 4.6% want to use AI in every daily activity. This data belies the idea of future teachers totally dependent on digital. Conversely, residents choose to limit the use of the machine to protect intellectual, evaluative, and relational activities that require the teacher's discernment and real presence."

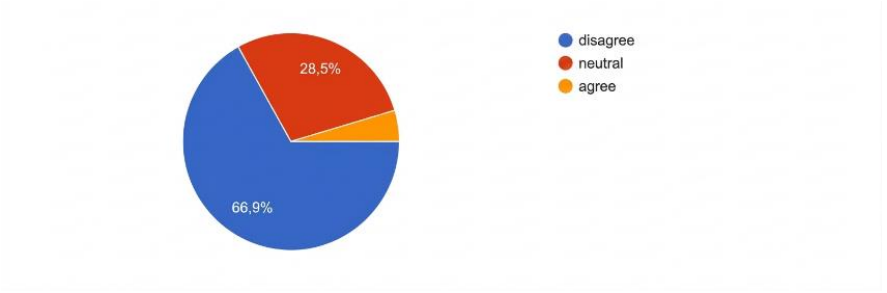


Chart 3. " I want to use artificial intelligence in all my jobs and tasks."

Item 12: "I believe learning artificial intelligence will benefit my teaching career." Responses (N = 1,014): Disagree: 19%; Neutral: 45.7%; Agree: 35.3% (Fig. 4).

Despite the rejection of algorithmic intrusiveness, 35.3% recognize the usefulness of AI for skills development and careers. The neutral majority (45.7%) highlights, however, that many teachers have not yet attended training courses on the use of AI in daily teaching practice.

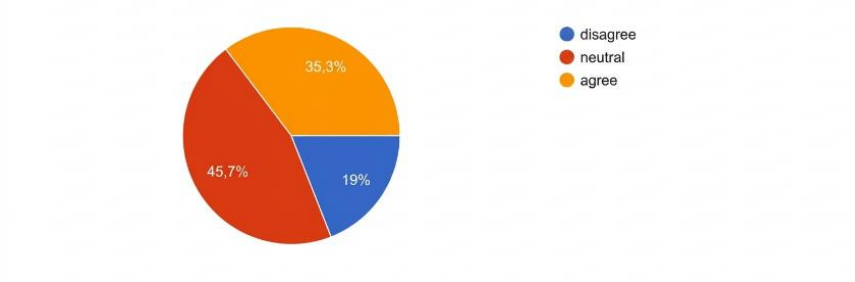


Chart 4. "I believe learning artificial intelligence will benefit my teaching career."

4.3 Educational and methodological applicability: Scaffolding vs. Control

When the sample is asked about its strictly didactic and methodological implications, the profile of AI as a potential scaffolding and diversification tool clearly emerges.

Item 14: "Artificial intelligence helps diversify the teaching strategies used." Responses (N = 1,010): Disagreement: 12.6%; Neutral: 38.8%; Agree: 48.6% (Fig. 5). Nearly half of the sample (48.6%) sees AI as a methodological enrichment factor, a generator of strategic alternatives useful for overcoming the rigidity of traditional lectures and promoting inclusion through differentiated communication channels.

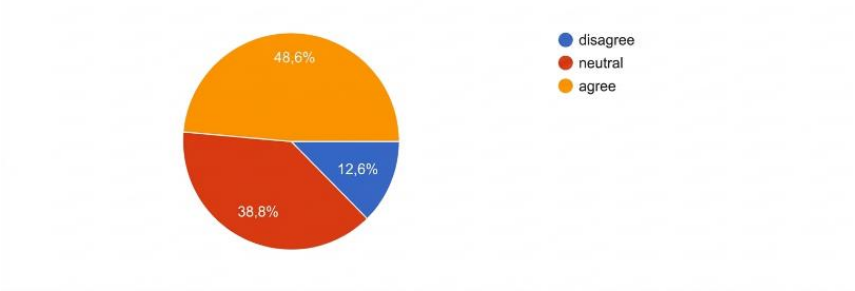


Chart 5. " Artificial intelligence helps diversify the teaching strategies used."

Item 18: "Artificial intelligence can be used to create simulated lessons" Answers (N = 1,011): Disagree: 8.7%; Neutral: 28.8%; Agree: 62.5% (Fig. 6).

This is the highest consensus peak of the survey (62.5%). AI is considered an excellent tool for training and design, especially for creating simulated lessons, protected learning environments, and role-playing scenarios.

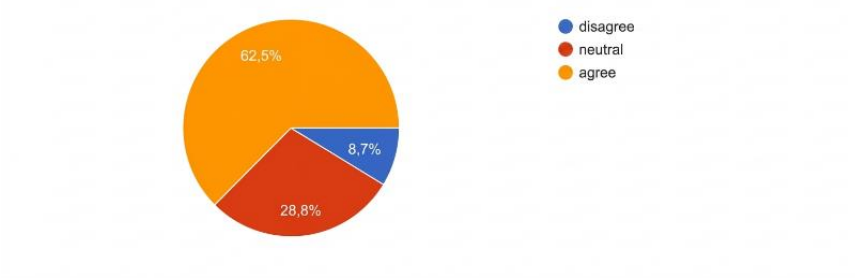


Chart 6. " Artificial intelligence can be used to create simulated lessons"

Item 24: "Artificial intelligence can facilitate many concepts that the instructor finds difficult to clarify during explanation." Responses (N = 1,011): Disagreement: 11.8%; Neutral: 32.6%; Agree: 55.6%. (Fig. 7).

55.6% of the sample recognized the effectiveness of AI as a teaching mediator. Technology is considered a valuable assistant capable of simplifying complex concepts, translating them into images, metaphors, or texts suited to the specific needs of students.

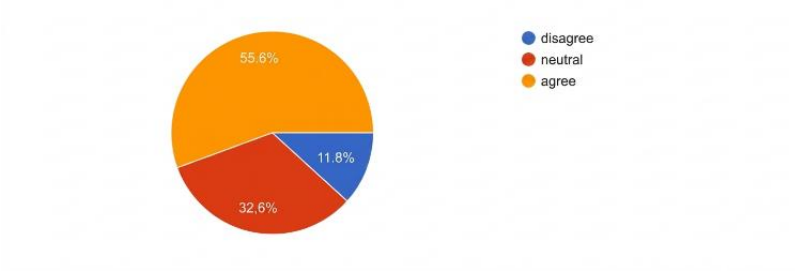


Chart 7. " Artificial intelligence can facilitate many concepts that the instructor finds difficult to clarify during explanation."

Item 33: "Artificial intelligence reduces the use of traditional teaching methodologies" Responses (N = 1,010): Disagree: 24.7%; Neutral: 34.6%; Agree: 40.8% (Fig. 8). 40.8% of the sample believe that AI is innovating traditional teaching methods, pushing towards more active and digital learning. However, there remains a 34.6% neutrality rate among those waiting to verify its real impact in the classroom in the long term.

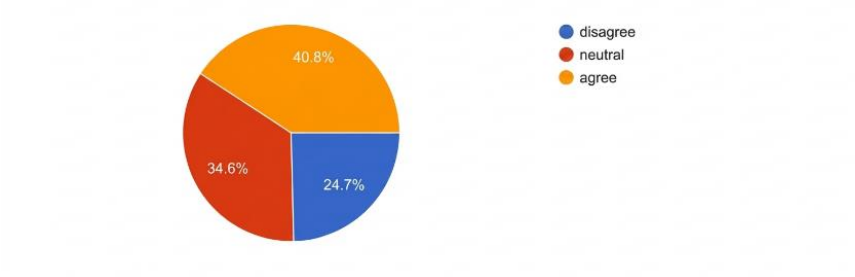


Chart 8. " Artificial intelligence reduces the use of traditional teaching methodologies"

4.4 The critical nodes of customization and flexibility

Despite strong enthusiasm for explanation and simulation support functions, there is a marked contraction in consensus when the algorithm touches on the vital ganglia of custom design and flexibility:

Item 22: "Artificial intelligence helps design teaching activities based on the learning abilities and pace of all students." Responses (N = 1,011): Disagreement: 28.7%; Neutral: 41.9%; Agree: 29.4%.

Item 32: "Artificial intelligence allows for greater flexibility in teaching-learning processes" Responses (N = 1,007): Disagreement: 17.6%; Neutral: 46.5%; Agree: 35.9%.

Item 23: "Artificial intelligence helps in choosing the most effective teaching strategies through the analysis of contextual characteristics" Responses (N = 1,013): Disagreement: 21.1%; Neutral: 41.3%; Agree: 37.6% (Fig. 9)

The prevalence of neutral data (41.3%) reiterates the scepticism regarding the machine's interpretative capacity with respect to the ecological and background variables of the class context (the relational climate, the history of the group, the submerged tensions, the socio-affective unexpected).

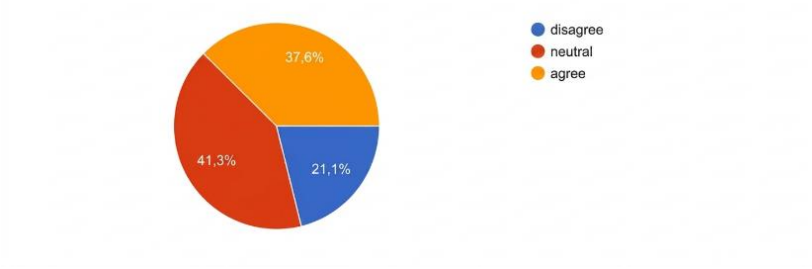


Chart 9. " Artificial intelligence helps in choosing the most effective teaching strategies through the analysis of contextual characteristics"

Item 25: "I believe artificial intelligence supports students' educational environment." Responses (N = 1,012): Disagree: 26.6%; Neutral: 45.4%; Agree: 28.1%.

Item 26: "I believe artificial intelligence can offer me unique insights and perspectives that I have never considered before." Responses (N = 1,012): Disagree: 17.8%; Neutral: 41.4%; Agree: 40.8%.

Item 16: "Artificial intelligence can be used to check whether children have copied in a written exam." Answers (N = 1,013): Disagree: 21.7%; Neutral: 35.7%; Agree: 42.5% (Fig. 10). A large portion of respondents (42.5%) approved of the use of AI to control plagiarism, considering it an effective verification tool. However, the remaining part of the sample (between neutrals and opponents) expresses reservations, fearing that the technology will transform the evaluation into a police-type control.

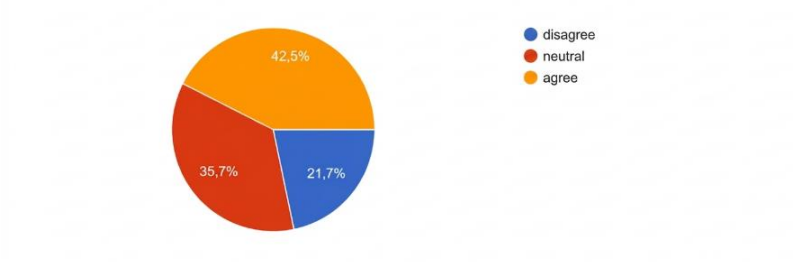


Chart 10. " Artificial intelligence can be used to check whether children have copied in a written exam."

A summary of the findings is presented in the table below (Table. 1)

Table 1. Summary table of results

Analysis Dimension	Prevalent Trend	Pedagogical Meaning
Operational Effectiveness & Scaffolding	Strong Agreement	AI is fully accepted as a methodological assistant subordinate to the autonomy of the teacher.
Decision Delegation & Autonomy	Strong Disagreement	Clear rejection of technological replacement. Strict protection of human professional responsibility.
Personalization & Flexibility	Strong Neutrality / Uncertainty	Awareness that inclusion requires empathy and caring for relationships that an algorithm does not possess.

5. Discussion

The data analysis suggests that future special education teachers adopt a stance of *pedagogical discernment* toward Artificial Intelligence (AI). Rather than expressing either unconditional acceptance or outright rejection of the technology, participants draw a clear distinction between AI's technical-operational capabilities and those dimensions of educational practice that require professional judgment, ethical responsibility, and human relationships (Gallese & Morelli, 2024). This interpretative framework, summarized in Table 1, outlines a form of *critical trust*, whereby AI is recognized as a valuable educational resource, provided that it remains subordinate to teachers' professional decision-making.

Analysis of the different dimensions investigated reveals widespread agreement regarding AI's operational effectiveness and its role as a tool for *instructional scaffolding* (Vygotsky, 1978). High levels of agreement on items concerning the creation of simulated lessons (62.5%), support in explaining complex concepts (55.6%), and the diversification of teaching strategies (48.6%) indicate that future teachers perceive AI as a valuable methodological resource capable of facilitating instructional planning, expanding pedagogical opportunities, and promoting differentiated educational interventions. These findings are consistent with the perspective advanced by Calvani and Menichetti (2023), who argue that Artificial Intelligence can serve as an infrastructure supporting educational practice by reducing teachers' operational workload without replacing their professional role.

However, this openness toward AI's supportive functions is accompanied by a marked resistance to *delegating professional decision-making*.

The strong disagreement with entrusting highly complex decisions to AI (62.6%) and the rejection of using AI for all professional tasks (66.9%) reflect participants' determination to preserve teachers' professional autonomy and educational responsibility. The findings demonstrate that pre-service special education teachers clearly distinguish between employing AI as an operational tool and assigning evaluative, interpretative, or decision-making functions to machines, which they consider intrinsically linked to human judgment. From this perspective, teacher professionalism is understood as a competence integrating cognitive, ethical, and relational dimensions that cannot be reduced to purely algorithmic processes (Carlomagno et al., 2026).

The most noteworthy finding emerges in the domain of *personalized learning* and *instructional flexibility*, where neutral responses consistently prevail. Items concerning AI's ability to design personalized learning activities (41.9% neutral

responses), support educational contexts (45.4%), enhance the flexibility of teaching-learning processes (46.5%), and identify the most effective instructional strategies based on classroom characteristics (41.3%) reveal an attitude of cautious appraisal. Rather than indicating a lack of interest or knowledge, this neutrality appears to reflect an awareness of the limitations of algorithms in interpreting the complexity of educational contexts.

Indeed, future teachers recognize that authentic personalization of instruction cannot rely solely on data analysis or the automatic adaptation of learning materials. Instead, it emerges from an understanding of relational dynamics, students' emotional dimensions, individual histories, and the continuous changes that characterize classroom communities. Within this perspective, inclusion is conceived as a process grounded in empathy, pedagogical observation, and educational care, dimensions that cannot be replicated by computational models (Fedeli, 2023).

Overall, future special education teachers appear to adopt a *critical approach* toward AI. They welcome the technology as a source of methodological innovation and as a valuable support for instructional planning, while maintaining that it must remain subordinate to teachers' professional responsibility. AI can contribute to the development of instructional materials, facilitate the explanation of complex concepts, simulate teaching scenarios, and support organizational tasks; however, it cannot replace the educational relationship, professional judgment, or ethical responsibility that define the teaching profession.

This interpretative framework represents a response to what the literature has described as the *Frankenstein complex*: technological artefacts are perceived neither as threats to be rejected nor as substitutes for human beings, but rather

as tools capable of enhancing teachers' professional capacities. Their use must therefore remain consistently guided by pedagogical expertise, critical reflection, and educational responsibility.

6. Conclusions and Training Implications

Our quantitative study demonstrates that future special education teachers do not blindly reject innovation, but forcefully reaffirm the centrality of the human being in the face of the pervasiveness of algorithms. The residents show a posture marked by a 'technological humanism': AI is stripped of any substitute claims and brought back to its true nature as methodological scaffolding(Cambi, F., & Minerva, F. P. 2023).

The resistance that has emerged regarding decision-making delegation to AI is not a limitation, but a resource for the ethical stability of schools.

They demonstrate that teachers have internalized the irreplaceable value of the relational gaze, empathy and human contact (Rivoltella, 2025). Participants thus reaffirm their autonomy: the algorithm can support the diversification of strategies or the creation of simulated lessons, but the ultimate decision on the emotional management of the classroom must remain firmly anchored in human responsibility. These findings have some implications for the design of university training models aimed at teachers. It is no longer enough to propose isolated "digital literacy" modules or simply teach prompting techniques (how to formulate effective AI commands). Instead, it becomes necessary to establish laboratories for "critical AI pedagogy" and applied ethics (Fedeli, 2023). In these action research spaces, future teachers must be able to work along three fundamental lines: experimenting with the machine as an assistant to diversify teaching materials, testing its structural limitations and discovering

how to use it to translate complex concepts into metaphors and visual aids suitable for all students; and learning to integrate technologies without ever replacing the body, emotion, and physical presence in the classroom.

AI must move within broader pedagogical frameworks, where human interaction, eye contact, and real-world inclusion remain the core of classroom activity; developing a vigilant view of the algorithms' outputs. Teachers must be able to intercept biases (the automatic biases of software) and counter the risk of disguised standardization by preventing a student's educational needs from being reduced to a simple statistical or predictive calculation.

In conclusion, the entry of Artificial Intelligence into special education must not usher in an era of dehumanization, but represent an opportunity for professional emancipation. Thanks to algorithmic support for bureaucratic burdens, teachers can restore full value to the core of their educational mandate: the exercise of relational care, deep dialogue, ethical discernment, and the co-construction of authentic bonds within the school community (Panciroli & Rivoltella, 2023)

7. Limits and future prospects

AI systems are calibrated to large amounts of data that tend to describe the "norm." In special education, this carries the risk of the algorithm proposing standardized solutions for disability, ignoring the nuances and exceptional nature of the student's individual functioning profile. Although the sample exhibits critical resistance ("technological humanism"), in the daily reality of school, special education teachers are often overwhelmed by bureaucratic formalities. The real risk is that, due to lack of time, critical posture will give way to a passive and uncritical use of AI to speed up work.

As we have already stated in paragraph 3.1, since we do not have some data that make up the sample (gender, age, geographical origin, profession), we are aware of the limits to the validity and generalizability of the results.

Furthermore the sample is composed of future special education teachers undergoing training, reflects an ideal and design posture. It remains to be seen how this attitude will guide their choices when they encounter the real dynamics and limitations of the school context. To overcome the limitations of the current "photographic" data, it might be interesting to follow this sample of teachers during their first years of fieldwork. This would allow us to monitor the evolution of their relationship with AI in the transition from university theory to classroom practice.

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