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# Finnish teacher educators as a focus of empirical teacher education research: a scoping review

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## ABSTRACT

This scoping review provides an overview of the characteristics of empirical research on Finnish teacher educators published between 2012 and early 2025. Methodologically, small-scale interview studies with cross-sectional and often cross-national designs were the most prevalent among 90 identified studies. The findings highlight the lack of large-scale and longitudinal research. An increase in the types of research design could provide more generalisable insights into the long-term processes of professional development of these diverse professionals. The most represented professional roles in the studies were teacher of teachers and curriculum developer, while roles such as researcher, broker, and gatekeeper appeared only occasionally. This finding may reflect the specific features of the context or the methodological challenges of studying these roles. Addressing the gaps would support the advancement of teacher education, given the widely acknowledged vital role of teacher educators in its development.

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## KEYWORDS


Teacher educator; teacher education; scoping review; teacher education research methodology

## Introduction

Teacher educators are academic professionals with multiple roles, from providing research-based teacher education to designing and conducting research and maintaining and developing partnerships with societal impact (Hökkä et al., 2012). Recently, teacher educators and their professional development has become a topic of growing research interest (Dengerink et al., 2015), both internationally (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020; Kelchtermans et al., 2017; Tack et al., 2018; Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014) and in Finland (Byman et al., 2021; Maaranen et al., 2019). However, research on teacher educators remains fragmented across a multitude of themes, and a coherent understanding of the roles of this relatively diverse group is underdeveloped (Ping et al., 2018).

Teacher educators are a heterogeneous professional group (Tack et al., 2018) whose defining characteristics are related to the roles and identities of group representatives (Ataş et al., 2023). An inclusive definition by Czerniawski et al. (2017, p. 128) is applied here, encompassing all teacher educators who “are professionally engaged in the initial and ongoing education of teachers, including school-based teacher educators” – the latter typically working in university-affiliated teacher

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training schools supervising student teachers. A teacher educator contributes in a formal way to supporting the learning of teachers and student teachers (European Commission, 2013) and is at the “core of good teacher education” (Vloet & van Swet, 2010, p. 149).

Research on teacher educators has become established as a key area of teacher education research (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015b). International research interest has grown in how teacher educators conduct their work and how this relates to the teaching of future teachers (Cao et al., 2023; Ping et al., 2018). However, thus far, there has been no review of research trends concerning Finnish teacher educators. There is also a need to understand teacher education research in Finland to develop and support the research base of education structures and policymaking. The goal of this scoping review is to provide an overview of empirical teacher education studies involving Finnish teacher educators. Our aim is to examine the research volume and methodologies and to explore what the research landscape looks like through the lens of the professional roles defined for teacher educators (Lunenberg et al., 2014). Finland and its long tradition of government-funded academic teacher education in universities that grants high autonomy to teacher educators provides an interesting backdrop for examining the trends of research within a relatively homogeneous educational landscape.

## Roles of teacher educators

Teacher educators have multiple professional roles with critical responsibilities and associated professional behaviours. Lunenberg et al. (2014) presented a classification that includes the following six roles of teacher educators: teacher of teachers, researcher, coach, gatekeeper, curriculum developer and broker. According to Lunenberg et al. (2014, p. 6), a professional role can be seen as a “personal interpretation of a position based on expectations from the environment and on a systematically organised and transferable knowledge base”. Since teacher education is culturally and politically ingrained in national contexts (Swennen et al., 2010), educators’ roles can vary along with changes in society, education and the field (Vloet & van Swet, 2010).

The role of teacher of teachers emphasises the teacher educator’s task as an academic professional contributing to the development of future teachers, and it is seen as the most prominent facet of their identity (Klecka et al., 2008). The role requires a solid academic knowledge base, but those who perform it are often seen as a distinct group within higher education (Lunenberg et al., 2014), since teacher educators model teaching behaviours for student teachers (Loughran & Berry, 2005; Swennen et al., 2010). The knowledge and skills that Finnish teachers are expected to possess (Metsäpelto et al., 2022a) also apply to teacher educators, ranging from fostering positive teacher – student relationships to delivering high-quality instruction.

The role of a researcher is reflected in the term “teacher-researcher”, which is often applied to teacher educators (Cao et al., 2023), since most conduct research and many hold doctoral degrees. The scientific research base that lays the foundation for teacher education is highly valued by teacher educators, and this also applies to teacher educators in the Finnish context (Byman et al., 2021; Maaranen et al., 2019). Practitioner research (Geerdink et al., 2016) and collaborative research designs (Griffiths et al., 2014) are often used as strategies to improve teaching quality (Van Katwijk et al., 2023).

The role of a coach is connected to supporting student teachers’ learning by fostering and facilitating reflection and dialogue (Rakes et al., 2023). In Finland, reflection on one’s professional growth in supervised teaching practice is mostly carried out in partnership with teacher-training schools. The supervision of teaching practice aims for a reciprocal, safe and collaborative dialogue-based mentoring relationship with the goal of supporting students in professional development (Mouhu, 2021).

As curriculum developers, teacher educators are involved in national and international networks and discussions about teacher quality and curriculum change, while simultaneously being aware of contextual factors of teacher education (Bouckaert & Kools, 2018; Dengerink et al., 2015) and

competence- or research-based approaches to curricula (Dengerink et al., 2015). In Finland, teacher education units are autonomous and have responsibility for the curriculum, its design and the quality of the programme (Niemi, 2011; Tirri, 2014).

As gatekeepers, teacher educators guard the entrance to the teaching profession (Lunenberg et al., 2014). In Finland, admission to certain teacher education programmes is highly competitive, with only 10% of applicants accepted (Tirri, 2014) after a rigorous two-phase selection process. A national team of teacher educators designs the student selection methods, and the educators in each unit carry out the selection.

Teacher educators take on the role of broker, bridge builder, intermediary, or facilitator to shape partnerships between co-responsible schools and teacher education institutions (Lunenberg et al., 2014). Teacher educators can initiate interaction in the joint “third space” to facilitate shared culture, goals, and relationships (Martin et al., 2011). The parties share an interest in the learning process of future teachers (Carroll, 2005) and play an important role in modelling the collaboration expected of student teachers (Nevin et al., 2009).

Previous studies have recommended further research into the critical characteristics that determine the behaviour and effectiveness of teacher educators in these diverse and understudied roles (Lunenberg et al., 2014). A study of teacher educators in Finland and Turkey (Ataş et al., 2023) found that the participants saw themselves as teachers or lecturers, researchers, advisors, and active agents in society. However, active societal agency was emphasised only by Finnish teacher educators. This finding suggests that teacher educators develop identities within the teacher education community, but the availability of a sub-identity may depend on the context of teacher education. These identities are constructed simultaneously and at different career moments (Swennen et al., 2010.) The current study seeks to identify which professional roles are present and which are absent in Finnish teacher education research.

## Aims of the study

The goal of this study is to conduct a scoping review of teacher education research using empirical data collected from Finnish teacher educators. Our first aim is to describe existing research in terms of trends in the number of studies, countries of origin, types of methodology, research designs and characteristics of study samples. Our second aim is to analyse the thematic focus of the research using Lunenberg et al.’s categorisation of teacher educator roles. This exploration aims to understand which teacher educator roles have received the most attention from researchers and to identify gaps in existing research. Our research questions are as follows:

- (1) What are the trends in research on teacher educators in Finland in terms of the number of studies, countries of origin, methodological approaches, research designs and characteristics of study samples?
- (2) What is the thematic focus of research in relation to Lunenberg et al.’s (2014) categorisation of teacher educators’ professional roles?

## Methods

A scoping review was conducted on research on Finnish teacher educators published between 2012 and 2025 (March). We examined how research was conducted in this specific teacher education research area to identify and analyse methodological gaps and identify areas for further systematic review (Munn et al., 2018). Scoping reviews “map” the existing research on the topic of interest by presenting the breadth and depth of a field by synthesising the available research base (Levac et al., 2010).

To identify relevant studies, the following databases were searched: ERIC, Education Database, Education Collection, EBSCO, Teacher Reference Centre, ScienceDirect, Assia, Web of Science,

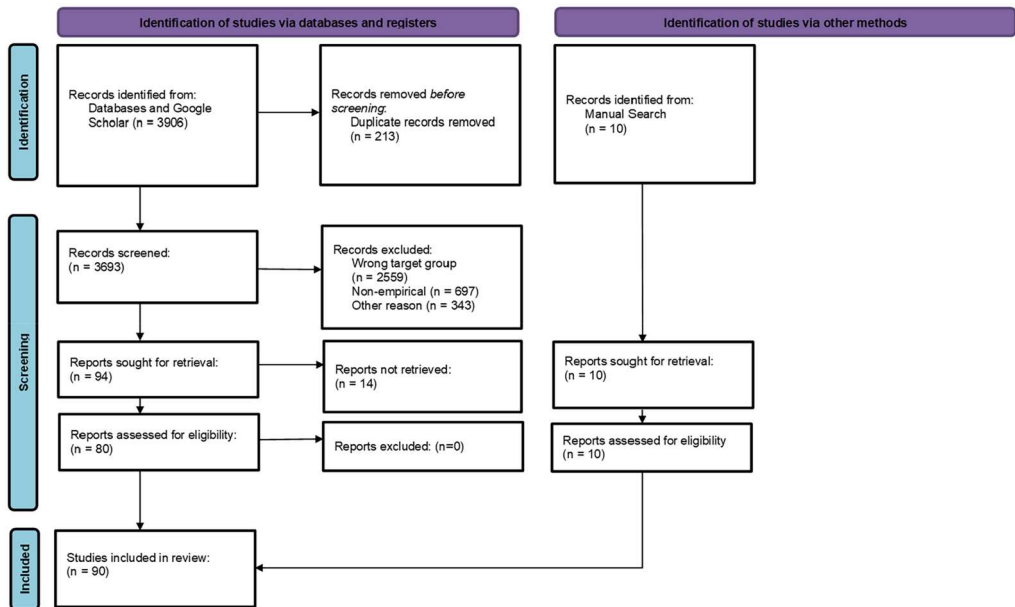
Taylor & Francis, Scopus and Sage. The original database searches were conducted in 2023. However, in response to peer-review suggestions, additional searches were carried out in March 2025 to include the most recent years (2022–2025 [March]), extending the original timeframe of 2012–2022. In addition, the first 300 hits from Google Scholar (Haddaway et al., 2015) supplemented the database searches. We used the following key words: “teacher education” or “teacher training” or “initial teacher education” and “teacher educator” or “teacher trainer” or “mentor teacher” and “Finnish” or “Finland”. We included available peer-reviewed research articles from scholarly journals to capture the substance of academic research on teacher educators in the Finnish context. We excluded grey literature, dissertations, and theoretical studies consistent with Peters et al. (2015, p. 142), who argued that researchers “may decide that certain study designs are not appropriate for consideration for their particular scoping review”. Previous reviews have taken a similar approach (e.g., Murray et al., 2008). Thus, we applied the following inclusion criteria: (1) empirical research articles, (2) written in English, Finnish or Swedish, (3) published in a peer-reviewed journal, (4) available as a full text, (5) published between 2012 and 2025 (March) and (6) including teacher educators as participants who were affiliated with Finnish universities or Finnish universities of applied sciences.

In total, the database searches and the supplemental search in Google Scholar produced 3906 potential records. After 213 duplicates were removed, the rest were screened for relevance. Some of the articles ( $n = 14$ ) were unavailable and were thus removed. Most items were excluded because they had a target group other than Finnish teacher educators ( $n = 2559$ ), such as student teachers. The second group of excluded items consisted of non-empirical ( $n = 697$ ) studies. The third group for exclusion was mixed ( $n = 343$ ); for example, the publication was an essay, an interview or a report. After this initial selection phase, 80 studies met the inclusion criteria.

In the second phase, we supplemented the database search with a manual search of Finnish peer-reviewed journals that publish articles in Finnish or Swedish (*Kasvatus*, *Kasvatus ja Aika*, *Aikuiskasvatus*, *Ainedidaktikka*, *Ammattikasvatuksen aikakauskirja*, *NMI-Bulletin* and *Puhe ja Kieli*). We utilised the previous inclusion criteria and screened the journals for potential items. In this manual search, we identified 10 studies that met the criteria.

Thus, 90 studies were included in the scoping review. The identification process is shown in [Figure 1](#). A list of the included studies is provided in Supplementary File A. The following descriptive information was extracted from 90 articles: author(s), title and year of publication, name of the journal and abstract. Next, the articles were categorised according to the categories presented in [Table 1](#).

To interpret the role of teacher educators in line with Lunenberg et al.’s (2014) roles of teacher of teachers, researcher, coach, curriculum developer, gatekeeper and broker, a theory-driven content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) was conducted to examine the dataset. The first author summarised each study, including the title, keywords, abstract and research questions, and made an initial categorisation. Then, the data were sorted into predetermined categories (i.e., professional roles). None of the studies explicitly mentioned Lunenberg et al.’s (2014) taxonomy as the theoretical framework. Therefore, the categorisation required an interpretation of the role set for the teacher educator in each study. This was accomplished based on the research questions, although in most cases, information was sought to refine and confirm the categorisation holistically throughout the article. The second and third authors double coded the ambiguous studies selected by the first author. Any discrepancies were discussed until a consensus on the categorisation was reached. Six studies on professional journeys and development (regarding beliefs and concerns, developmental needs and preferences, professional relationships and reflexive decision-making in career development) and on social justice could not be categorised due to vague role descriptions or multiple roles mentioned (i.e., wanting to develop in coaching, research and teaching or listing multiple responsibilities); thus, they were not categorised by the analytical framework of this study.



From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. For more information, visit: <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>

**Figure 1.** PRISMA flow chart.

**Table 1.** Coding Scheme.

Basic information	Definition
Country of origin	The nationality of the first author's university of affiliation
Research method	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Qualitative study: Non-numerical data and analysis</li> <li>2. Quantitative study: Numerical data and statistical analysis</li> <li>3. Multimethod study: Both qualitative and quantitative approaches</li> </ol>
Research design	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Longitudinal study: Repeated data collections from the same individuals to examine changes in development over time.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Long-term longitudinal study: Time lag between data collections exceeding one year.</li> <li>2. Short-term longitudinal study: Time lag of one year or less</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Cross-sectional study: Data collection at a single point in time</li> </ol>
Participants	The number of participating teacher educators and their nationalities

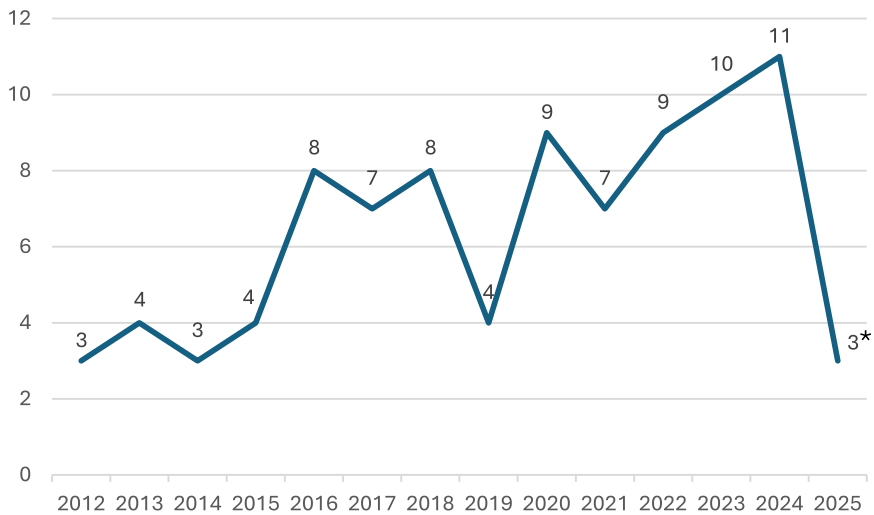
## Results

### *Research on teacher educators: a descriptive overview*

First, we provide an overview of the characteristics of the 90 articles included in this review. Supplementary File B describes the dataset in detail.

#### *Number of studies*

Between 2012 and 2025 (March), the number of published studies varied annually, from 3 to 11. The highest number of articles was in 2024, with 11 articles. As shown in Figure 2, an overall increasing trend was identified, although there were significant fluctuations. It is noteworthy that



\* until March 2025.

**Figure 2.** Annual Number of Publications (N = 90). \* until March 2025.

more than half of the studies were published after 2020, indicating steady research interest in recent years.

Ten studies were published in Finnish peer-reviewed journals and written in Finnish, while 80 studies were published in international journals and written in English. The most prevalent publishers were the *European Journal of Teacher Education*, with 11 studies, and *Kasvatus* (Finnish Journal of Education), with five studies.

### **Countries of origin**

Most studies were conducted by researchers affiliated only with Finnish universities (62%, n = 56). However, a notable number of cross-national studies (38%, n = 34) compared or parallelised elements of teacher education in different countries, sometimes co-written with Finnish researchers. Most commonly, the first author was from a Finnish university (n = 61, 68%). The first author was from Sweden in seven studies, from Norway in five, from the United States in four, from Turkey in three, and from the United Kingdom in two. Single studies were authored by researchers from countries such as Australia, Austria, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Thailand and South Africa.

### **Research methods and design**

A significant proportion of the studies (n = 76, 84%) utilised qualitative methods, while only nine studies applied quantitative analyses and four applied mixed or multiple methods. A majority of the studies (n = 52) used semi-structured individual interviews or focus group interviews. Surveys or questionnaires were used in approximately one-fifth of the studies (n = 19, 21%). The use of other types of data, such as audio and video recordings, observations, written responses or reflective texts, were much less frequent. Qualitative content analysis was the main method of analysis, and only five studies used statistical analysis (in association with questionnaire data). The study designs were mostly cross-sectional (n = 80). Seven studies consisted of short-term (n = 6) and long-term (n = 1) longitudinal studies. The designs of three studies could not be classified due to insufficient information.

### Study participants

Table 2 shows mostly small-scale studies, of which more than half had fewer than 20 participants ( $n = 56, 62\%$ ). Only five studies had over 100 participants. For studies that included other participants (e.g., student teachers), we recorded only the number of teacher educators. For studies that included teacher educators of different nationalities (e.g., Finnish and Swedish), we reported the total number.

### Research in light of teacher educators' roles

This section provides a detailed description of the studies categorised under each teacher educator role (see Table 3).

#### Teacher of teachers

A research focus on the teacher educator's role in teaching prospective teachers was identified in 37 studies. Teacher educators considered the "how" of teaching (see Loughran, 2014), describing classroom didactics (Andrews et al., 2014) and different methods, models and assessments that support learning, such as the influence of the language of instruction on pedagogical activities (Hahl et al., 2016). Studies also investigated instructional encounters, in which teacher educators model teaching practices for students during coursework (Hammerness et al., 2020). Teacher educators were also asked to share their views on good (Thorgersen et al., 2016) and effective teaching (Hemmi & Ryve, 2015) and quality teachers (Jons & Airey, 2024).

Some studies focusing on teaching interaction sought to enhance intercultural competencies in teaching (Miettinen, 2021) or support students' growth towards inclusive subject positioning and social justice (Hummelstedt et al., 2021). Teacher educators negotiated their professional well-being and identity in response to organisational practices and changes (Hökkä & Eteläpelto, 2014; Vähäsantanen et al., 2012) and to how social support and trust among teacher educators facilitate both institutional and individual goals for professional development (Hökkä et al., 2017) and manifest community engagement in dialogue and collaboration (Hökkä et al., 2017; Nissilä et al., 2022).

#### Researcher

Eight studies investigated teacher educators as researchers. These studies addressed motivations for research engagement and choices (McEvoy et al., 2018), research-based professional knowledge (Jegstad et al., 2022), the integration of research and teaching (Cao et al., 2023) and the role of

**Table 2.** Number of Study Participants.

Number of participants	Number of studies (N = 90)	Proportion (%)
1–5	15	17%
6–10	16	18%
11–20	25	28%
21–50	13	14%
51–100	7	8%
101–250	4	4%
350+	1	1%
N/A	9	10%

**Table 3.** Role Categorisation.

Role	Proportion (n = 84)
Teacher of teachers	37 (44%)
Researcher	8 (9.5%)
Coach	13 (15%)
Curriculum developer	18 (21%)
Gatekeeper	4 (4.8%)
Broker	4 (4.8%)

research in professional development (Maaranen et al., 2020). Studies examined processes of constructing professional identities, for example, the researcher role required negotiation of professional identity in the academic context. In contrast to teacher identity, researcher identity was portrayed as subjugated, complex and lacking resources. (Hökkä et al., 2012.) Both challenges (i.e., time constraints) and facilitators (i.e., collaboration) were examined (McEvoy et al., 2018). The studies noted that the research activity of teacher educators is integral for their professional development (Maaranen et al., 2020). They perceived benefits from research integration and enquiry-oriented methods in terms of developing their teaching (Cao et al., 2023).

### ***Coach***

Thirteen studies investigated teacher educators in the role of coach. Typically, these studies investigated teacher educators' support for students' reflective learning and professional development during their teaching practice. Various forms of support for learning were explored, including applications fostering students' professional development (e.g., video applications to elicit student reflection [Körkkö et al., 2019]). Teacher educators' perceptions and interpretations of the process and content of supervision and mentoring were explored (Kupila et al., 2017; Puroila et al., 2021), including reflections on the underlying assumptions associated with this role (Puroila et al., 2021).

### ***Curriculum developer***

Eighteen studies investigated teacher educators as curriculum developers. These included national collaborative efforts in which teacher educators were consulted to draw up a design for strategic competency objectives in the national teacher education development programme (Lavonen et al., 2020). They shared future-orientated views on societal trends and issues related to content, objectives, curriculum and delivery of teacher education programmes. They shared their expert insights into educational needs and challenges related to programme competences, such as the diversifying student population (Miettinen et al., 2018). International comparative studies sought to find common ground for international development and debate. Teacher educators were involved as national representatives to compare or share competencies in teacher education programmes (Thompson et al., 2018; Vibulphol et al., 2015).

### ***Gatekeeper***

Four studies examined teacher educators as gatekeepers of the profession. These studies investigated selection criteria (Mankki et al., 2018; Mankki & Rähä, 2019), the reliability and usability of selection tools (Metsäpelto et al., 2022b) and assessor/interviewer tasks (Mankki et al., 2020; Metsäpelto et al., 2022b). Other topics involved the predictability of students' study progress (Mankki et al., 2020), the differences between them (Mankki & Rähä, 2019) and the conceptions of suitable candidates (Mankki et al., 2018) as perceived by teacher educators. These studies reflected the national context of Finland, where initial access to teacher education is competitive and teacher educators in the departments act as gatekeepers.

### ***Broker***

Four studies investigated teacher educators in the role of broker. These studies emphasised collaborative learning and practicum development between pre-service and in-service teachers and university teacher educators. All these stakeholders were actively involved in the implementation of collaborative models, such as in planning lessons and materials for the pedagogical model implemented in the schools (Kervinen et al., 2016), in co-teaching practices between pre-service and in-service teachers (Kervinen et al., 2022), in collaborative planning of technology integration in practicum teaching (Väättäjä & Korte, 2023) and in co-development of digital pedagogy (Väättäjä, 2023). The teacher educators guided, facilitated and supported teams with knowledge, ideas, materials and resources from their universities. Collaboration and co-teaching supported professional development, student learning and the development of new practices in teacher education practicums.

## Discussion

The purpose of this scoping review was to examine empirical research on Finnish teacher educators published between 2012 and 2025 (March). Our results showed an increase in research over the 13-year period. By the end of this period, the body of research had tripled compared to 2012. This growth may partly be attributed to funding provided by the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education between 2017 and 2020 for targeted projects focusing, for instance, on teacher educator development (Byman et al., 2021). Contextual features of the academic profession, such as a growing commitment to self-study among teacher educators or the influence of a “publish or perish” culture, where publication volume holds significant value for professional progress, may explain the increase in research (Tijdink et al., 2016). In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2023 could have provided researchers with more time to conduct research. Overall, the growth in research should be considered in relation to the situated and contextual nature of teacher education research (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015a), while also reflecting broader exponential growth in academic publishing (Hanson et al., 2024).

In addressing how research on Finnish teacher educators was conducted, we found that researchers typically applied qualitative methods, and most designs involved small-scale interview studies. The emergence of research of a similar nature has been identified in previous reviews. For example, Cochran-Smith et al. (2015b) documented a similar preponderance of small, single-site studies in which teacher educators used their own courses and programmes as strategic research sites, commonly referred to as practitioner research or self-studies.

The absence of longitudinal and large-scale studies, now identified with Finnish samples, reflects a gap similar to that identified in previous research (e.g., Menter et al., 2010; Nuttall et al., 2006). This gap suggests a relevant future research focus, given the potential of longitudinal designs to capture change, development and professional learning over time. Teacher educators often enter the profession through varied pathways, including roles in classroom teaching, academic research and administration. Such diversity brings a rich range of perspectives, pedagogical approaches and interpretations concerning professional goals and crafting of one’s career as a teacher educator. Longitudinal studies could offer a valuable lens for exploring this complexity, tracing the evolution of teacher educators’ professional identities (Izadinia, 2014) and gaining deeper insights into factors affecting their professional development (St. Clair et al., 2020).

While carefully targeted case or action studies can allow for a deep analysis of experiential and contextual factors, the use of larger samples could provide opportunities to analyse and understand the impact of variation in teacher educators’ work and the role of mediating factors and enhance the generalisability of findings. Large-scale quantitative studies focusing on teacher educators, especially in a national context involving several universities in Finland, have been called for (Maaranen et al., 2020). The current study identified a trend towards international collaboration in teacher education research, such as through multi-country samples. Since teacher education research has been criticised for to being “somewhat parochial” (Mayer & Oancea, 2021, p. 2) and universities for being expert silos that inhibit collaboration and learning (Davidson & Goldberg, 2010), the current findings are positive. Collaborating with colleagues beyond one’s own university can be seen as a critical stepping stone in teacher educators’ professional development (Maaranen et al., 2020).

Overall, our findings imply that more information in the form of reviews is needed to develop a deeper understanding of the field. Based on the present findings, a conclusion can be drawn on diversifying the approaches to teacher education research in line with the recommendation of Mayer and Oancea (2021), who called for investment in diverse research designs and methodologies, including small- and large-scale studies, practice and theory-driven research and intensive single-case studies along with comparative and multi-site research. However, research on Finnish teacher educators does not yet appear to fully reflect this recommended diversity.

In addressing which roles of teacher educators are evident in the research, the role of the teacher of teachers was the most common. While this role has often been reductively viewed as merely the

“doing” of teaching (Loughran & Menter, 2023), in this review, it was portrayed multifacetedly, including but not restricted to describing and understanding conditions for effective teaching and modelling of teaching practice. Further research on this role is needed, such as clarifying the related concepts and terms (Kaasila et al., 2025). Recently, Loughran and Menter (2023) called on teacher educators to articulate the “why” of teaching.

Findings concerning the role of curriculum developer suggested that many Finnish teacher educators are actively engaged in strategy work at the national level (Lavonen et al., 2020). Finnish teacher educators also share effective practices with colleagues abroad. However, there remains a paucity of research exploring the involvement of Finnish teacher educators in internationally strategic roles that are comparable to their domestic influence. Such roles could include involvement in thinktanks or networks aimed at addressing global challenges.

We identified a relatively small proportion of studies (approximately 20%) connected to the roles of teacher educators as coaches and brokers. Given that all student teachers in Finland undertake supervised teaching practicums as part of their studies, responsibilities related to mentoring student teachers and acting as intermediaries between universities and schools are key roles of teacher educators. The fostering of connections between school-based mentor teachers and teacher educators placed in university units is central to the coherence of teacher education programmes (Metsäpelto et al., 2024). As collaborative actors across institutional boundaries, teacher educators are important resources for the professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers within teacher training schools.

The finding that a relatively small proportion of the reviewed studies focused on teacher educators in the role of researcher or gatekeeper does not mean that these roles are perceived as less important. Instead, this finding may reflect contextual and methodological challenges. In other educational contexts, summative assessments, in which teacher educators evaluate prospective teachers against established teacher competence standards and profiles, are central to the gatekeeping role (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008). In Finland, these kinds of assessments are not used in teacher education, and gatekeeping is primarily concentrated in the selection phase. Teacher educator research on admissions can be challenging not only because student selection takes place only once a year but also because the processes related to student selection are confidential. The admission research relies on large-scale national data, to which the perspectives of teacher educators have limited access. The lack of studies focusing on teacher educators as researchers and brokers is surprising, given the strong emphasis on research-based teacher education in Finland (Sitomaniemi-San, 2015) and the central role of teaching practices in teacher education.

Overall, all the roles presented by Lunenberg et al. (2014) could be identified in the reviewed studies of Finnish teacher educators, and almost all the studies could be categorised into one of the categories of Lunenberg’s taxonomy. Thus, this study provides support for the taxonomy as a useful framework for analysing the diverse professional roles of teacher educators and contributes to strengthening the empirical basis of the taxonomy, as has been recommended (Lunenberg et al., 2014). However, in our findings, strands emerged in Finnish teacher educator research that the taxonomy does not fully capture. The role of teacher educator encompasses not only providing high-quality training for future pedagogical practitioners but also fostering the professional growth of future teachers in areas related to societal and global challenges, such as issues related to sustainability, social justice and security – in short, a key role in the education of the next generation of active citizens and democratic participation (Seland & Kjøstvedt, 2025). In the absence of a separate category for addressing the societal relevance of teacher educators’ work, the studies were categorised in the role of teacher of teachers or, when teacher educators’ social and transformative agency was linked to the teacher education curriculum (Parmigiani et al., 2022), to the role of curriculum developer. Taken together, Lunenberg’s taxonomy was largely feasible and provided a valid starting point for delineating the multiple and likely overlapping roles of teacher educators, but we also identified some contextual and local features in the roles of teacher educators that challenged its full validity and suggested the need for further development.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the research was limited to peer-reviewed empirical research on Finnish teacher educators. The situated and contextual nature of the study should be recognised when reflecting on the findings (see Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015a). Second, in addition to empirical papers, scoping reviews often include theoretical and review articles as well as grey literature. Thus, our decision to focus only on empirical research may have limited our opportunities to gain a comprehensive understanding of the existing research on Finnish teacher educators. However, the narrower scope of this study made it possible to manage and examine individual studies in more detail. Third, the role descriptions in the framework selected for this study have occasionally been regarded as vague (Lunenberg et al., 2014) and overlaps between them can be observed. These issues led to challenges for the analysis, as we could have categorised individual studies into multiple role categories. Although we discussed challenging classifications and reached a shared understanding, it is still possible that re-categorisation could lead to slightly different interpretations in a small number of cases. Adopting inductive forms of analysis could have provided an opportunity to extend the existing framework and illustrate contextual features in more detail.

## Conclusions

Teacher educators maintain the quality of teacher education (Ataş et al., 2023) by directly influencing the quality of student teachers and indirectly contributing to pupils' learning (Ping et al., 2018). This scoping review provides an overview of the characteristics of empirical research on Finnish teacher education and explores the range of professional roles examined in the 90 articles included. Methodologically, small-scale interview studies were the most common and often used cross-sectional and cross-national designs. The review revealed a notable lack of large-scale and longitudinal research designs, which could provide valuable insights into the long-term processes of professional development. Expanding the use of these designs would enhance the generalisability of findings related to the diverse trajectories of teacher educators' professional development over time.

When viewed through the lens of professional roles, the work of teacher educators emerges as diverse and multifaceted. This is consistent with the broader understanding that their work encompasses multiple foci rather than a single, well-defined set of responsibilities. The roles most frequently explored in the literature were those of teacher of teachers and curriculum developer, while roles such as researcher, facilitator and gatekeeper to the teaching profession were less frequently addressed. This uneven focus may be due to contextual factors or methodological challenges inherent in the study of teacher educators' work. Addressing these research gaps would not only enhance the breadth and depth of future research but also support the ongoing development of teacher education, given the widely recognised importance of teacher educators in shaping the field and fostering the growth of future generations of teachers.

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