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THE IMPACT OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND POVERTY ON AFRICAN
AMERICAN STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

A MASTER'S THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY

ROYCE T. WINFORD

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

SEPTEMBER 2021

THE IMPACT OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND POVERTY ON AFRICAN
AMERICAN STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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APPROVED

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SEPTEMBER 2021

Abstract

Exploring the impact of socioeconomic status and poverty on African American students with special needs has shown that poverty is a global issue that has an impact on children's academic ability. In the United States, about one-quarter of all children are born into poverty. Poverty increases the likelihood of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders in children and adolescents. Stress affects children from low-income families, preventing their brains from completely developing. This thesis is a review of scholarly research on the impact of socioeconomic status on African American students with special needs and its relation to special education. Through this research, a theory can be offered that minority students are more likely to be poor, and being poor increases their exposure to risk factors that compromise human development and raise the need for special services, according to various studies. Students with disabilities have a poverty percentage that is more than double that of students without disabilities (27 percent vs. 12 percent). Disability and poverty have a complex relationship. People with disabilities are more likely to become impoverished, while poor people are more likely to have or develop a disability. People with disabilities are more likely to be excluded from employment, have restricted educational possibilities, or experience institutional barriers that limit their educational and career opportunities. For those with and without impairments, the poverty rate differs by race. Nearly 40% of African Americans with disabilities are poor, compared to 24% of non-Hispanic whites, 29% of Latinos, and 19% of Asians. People of color with disabilities appear to be disproportionately marginalized, discriminated against, and stigmatized, resulting in poor socioeconomic outcomes.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Having a disability includes many factors, but people often forget that being in a low socioeconomic situation puts children at a disadvantage compared to their peers, especially African American children. Any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for a person to do certain activities and interact with the world around them may cause a student to struggle. Research has shown that children who live in a low socioeconomic household have lower academic performance than those who live in higher socioeconomic homes. These children are already disadvantaged due to their surrounding environment because they do not have the same opportunities. In many cases, the schools they attend are under-sourced and underfunded and cannot provide the proper tools for their student's academic success (Velasquez, 2019).

Not only does socioeconomic status (SES) include income, but it also includes educational attainment, financial security, and subjective notions of social rank and social class. The quality-of-life features as well as the possibilities and benefits granted to people within society are all part of socioeconomic standing. Poverty, in particular, is characterized by various physical and psychosocial stressors and is not a single issue. Furthermore, SES is a constant and reliable predictor of a wide range of life outcomes, including physical and mental health. As a result, SES applies to many aspects of behavioral and social science, including study, practice, education, and advocacy (Caldas & Bankston, 2012). Young children's initial reading competency is connected with their home life and upbringing. Things such as literacy environment, number of books those students have access to, and at-home educational supplies all play a factor in that socioeconomic status at home and having a two or one-parent home. However, poor households have less access to learning materials and experiences, including

books, computers, stimulating toys, skill-building lessons, or tutors to create a positive literacy environment.

Unadjusted data significantly reflects more than educational methods; even if schools accept all students equally, special education recognition rates will most likely differ by racial and ethnic groups. Out-of-school factors such as poor nutrition, depression, and exposure to hazardous materials are frequently mentioned in the research about disproportionality. Vulnerable children and children of color are most affected by these effects. Quantification, sampling, and other frequent problems may disguise the unfortunate fact that these students have a higher proportion of disability (Gordon, 2017). These factors all play a role in the success rate for these students, not only in education but also later in life.

Socioeconomic status is essential to education because many students of color are mislabeled or because of socioeconomic status; they are not receiving the support early or later on in life. Literacy gaps in children from different socioeconomic backgrounds exist before formal schooling begins. "Children from low-SES families are less likely to have experiences that encourage the development of fundamental skills of reading acquisition, such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, and oral language" (Buckingham, 2013, p. 196). Special education services are disproportionately provided to children from certain demographic groups. It's unclear if this is due to genuine variations in academic needs or cultural selection/bias, due to methodological flaws in previous research (Kvande et al., 2017). Which then leads to the question, what is the impact of socioeconomic status and poverty on African American students with special needs?

Defining “Socioeconomic Status”

Socioeconomic status is the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often

measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. Examinations of socioeconomic status often reveal inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege and power. In addition to wealth, socioeconomic status (SES) includes educational attainment, occupational prestige, and subjective views of social position and social class. Socioeconomic status can refer to a person's quality of life as well as the possibilities and privileges they have in society. Poverty, in particular, is defined by several physical and psychosocial stressors rather than a single issue. Furthermore, SES is a constant and reliable predictor of a wide range of life outcomes, including physical and mental health. As a result, SES is applicable to all aspects of behavioral and social science, including research, practice, teaching, and advertising.

Disproportionality Through the Experiences of People of Color with Special Needs

Unjust practices in K-12 schools continue to plague African American students in US educational institutions. Racial disparities in special education have negative consequences. Disproportionality puts Black and Brown students in jeopardy on three levels: first, they are more likely to be misclassified as disabled, then they are more likely to be placed in the most restrictive settings (classrooms with little or no interaction with general education students), and finally, they are more likely to receive poor-quality services within those settings (Higuera, 2017). The number of students suspended in the transition from elementary/K-8 to middle schools increased threefold for both Black and Brown students. These negative academic experiences, as well as unequal disciplinary methods, intensify African American students in the K-12 experiences (Higuera, 2017).

Defining “Special Education”

The definition and identification of special needs students are inconsistent and subjective,

but is it based mainly on socioeconomic status rather than actual biological or neurological factors? Special education is specialized or modified instruction for students with unique learning needs, especially students with identified disabilities. Students with specific learning disabilities comprise the largest portion of special education enrollments of any classification under the Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

History of Special Education with the African American Population

The initial identification of the disproportionate representation of some groups, most notably African American students, in special education has some glaring issues but itself has far deeper red flags within its disproportion. It's hardly unexpected that in the 1960s and 1970s, pioneers in the growing profession of special education noticed racial inequities in service. The overrepresentation of ethnic and linguistic minorities in self-contained special education classrooms was said to raise serious civil rights and educational problems. African American students are typically found to be overrepresented in overall special education service and in the categories of mental retardation (MR) and emotional disturbance (ED), whereas American Indian/Alaska Native students have been overrepresented in the category of learning disabilities (LD). Data from the 26th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2006; see Table 1) indicated that American Indian/Alaska Native students received services under the category developmental delay at a higher rate than other groups (Skiba et al., 2008).

Disability	American Indian/ Alaska/ Native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Black	Hispanic	White
Specific learning disabilities	1.53	0.39	1.34	1.10	0.86
Speech/language impairments	1.18	0.67	1.06	0.86	1.11
Mental retardation	1.10	0.45	3.04	0.60	0.61
Serious emotional disturbance (EBD)	1.30	0.23	2.25	0.52	0.86
Multiple disabilities	1.34	0.59	1.42	0.75	0.99
Hearing impairments	1.21	1.20	1.11	1.20	0.81
Orthopedic impairments	0.87	0.71	0.94	0.92	1.15
Other health impairments	1.08	0.35	1.05	0.44	1.63
Visual impairments	1.16	0.99	1.21	0.92	0.94
Autism	0.63	1.24	1.11	0.53	1.26
Deaf-blindness	1.93	0.94	0.84	1.04	1.03
Traumatic brain injury	1.29	0.59	1.22	0.62	1.21
Developmental delay	2.89	0.68	1.59	0.43	1.06
All disabilities	1.35	0.48	1.46	0.87	0.92

This chart is the Risk Ratios for All Disability Categories and Racial/Ethnic Categories from the 26th Annual Report to Congress.

Therefore, this thesis will focus on the impact of socioeconomic status and poverty on African American students with special needs. It will further and more specifically address a number of thesis questions. Finally, this thesis will attempt to suggest ways or changes to be made for more inclusive education for African American students in special education.

Thesis Questions

As the thesis writer is pursuing further research that will attempt or provide answers for the following questions.

1. What correlation do socioeconomic status and special education have with the African American community?
2. What are some key elements that could help identify students of low socioeconomic status to help?
3. What are some crucial factors that could significantly impact African American students in terms of socioeconomic status and the special education label?
4. What are some socio-demographic factors that influence a disproportionate rate of representation in special education among students of color?
5. What is the impact socioeconomic status has on special education students?
6. How does miss labeling affect African American students' academic achievement and receive a free appropriate education?
7. What are some of the causes of disproportionate special education representation?
8. How does social-economic status affect a student's classroom performance, leading to a special education label?

9. What changes need to be made for inclusive education for African American students special education?

Chapter II: Literature Review

Overview of Literature Reviewed

In this chapter, the researcher began by reviewing the impact of socioeconomic status of African American children on secondary students with special needs. After examining the impact, this thesis writer speaks on the history of mislabeling students of color in special education. The review of literature will also examine how a disproportionate rate of representation in special education among students of color are sociodemographic factors associated with economic disadvantage. This thesis will continue the discussion of the impact of socioeconomic status and the correlation between African American students and special education. The review of literature shall also examine what changes need to be made for inclusive education for African American students' special education.

This researcher used a wide variety of resources and references. To find literature and information for this thesis, searches of Education Journals, ERIC, and Google Scholar were conducted for studies and publications from 1995-2021. The key words that were used in these searches include "Poverty in the African American Community" "Teacher Bias and Ethnicity" "Disproportionality," "Overrepresentation," "Demographic Factors," "special needs students," "Disability labeling," "History of African American Students in Special Education," "Poverty Rate for Black Students," and "Risk Factors Based on Environment."

The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on African American Secondary Students with Special Needs

The goal is to determine how a student's social-economic status affects a student's classroom performance, leading to a special education label. Socioeconomic status is essential to education because many students of color are mislabeled or because of socioeconomic status;

they are not receiving the support early or later on in life. Literacy gaps in children from different socioeconomic backgrounds exist before formal schooling begins. Children from low-income homes are far less likely to have encounters that contribute to the development of basic reading abilities including phonological awareness, grammar, and oral language (Buckingham, 2013). Here are some statistics showing the effects of low socioeconomic status and how it can affect students at an early age, leading to more significant problems later on in life. Children from low-SES families enter high school with average literacy skills five years behind high-income students (Reardon, 2013). In 2014, the high school dropout rate among persons 16–24 years old was higher in low-income families (11.6%) than high-income families (2.8% National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). These factors point to either the mislabeling or less likely success rate for students who come from a low-income background. Disability labeling is a serious issue because it affects students' placement in different courses and may disadvantage some students unfairly. One proposed solution is to include educational specialists from various schools within a district to participate in the identification and classification process.

What are some socio-demographic factors that influence a disproportionate rate of representation in special education among students of color? Minority students are more likely to be exposed to poverty in American society (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). The risk factors associated with poverty will result in increased academic underachievement and emotional/behavioral problems among minority students, thus increasing the risk of minority referral to special education.

The History of African American Students in Special Education

The unequal participation of African American students in special education classes is a continuous and pervasive trend in public education. Overrepresentation of African Americans in

classrooms for students with mental retardation, specific learning disabilities, behavior disorders, physical impairments, visual impairments, and speech impairments has been documented in research during the past three decades. Young African American boys have been recognized as being disproportionately appropriate for resource referral in special education programs. The literature has documented racially biased referral and assessment systems for ethnic minority students (Watkins & Kurtz, 2001). Unfortunately, once the referral process is started, the chances of being placed in special education increase significantly. Psychological testing follows a recommendation and testing frequently leads to placement in special education classes. Therefore, to be young, African American, and male in school is to be a member of a high-risk group (Watkins & Kurtz, 2001). When African American students are unable to meet the norms of traditional school, they are at-risk of being placed in special education. Instead of using and building off of the child's primary discourse or culture, the school puts bans on the use of these which negatively impacts the student in a significant way.

The United States has become highly diverse, with cultures from all over the world blending together. Families enroll their children in schools with the expectation that they will receive a quality education and be treated fairly. Minority children are being classified as disabled and placed in special education programs, which is an issue. One of the key factors that lead to this labeling is poverty or socio-economic status (Jordan, 2005). Jordan (2005) claimed that poverty is the sole cause of academic and social failure. Poverty students have lower educational standards, safety concerns, overcrowding in classrooms, and limited resources.

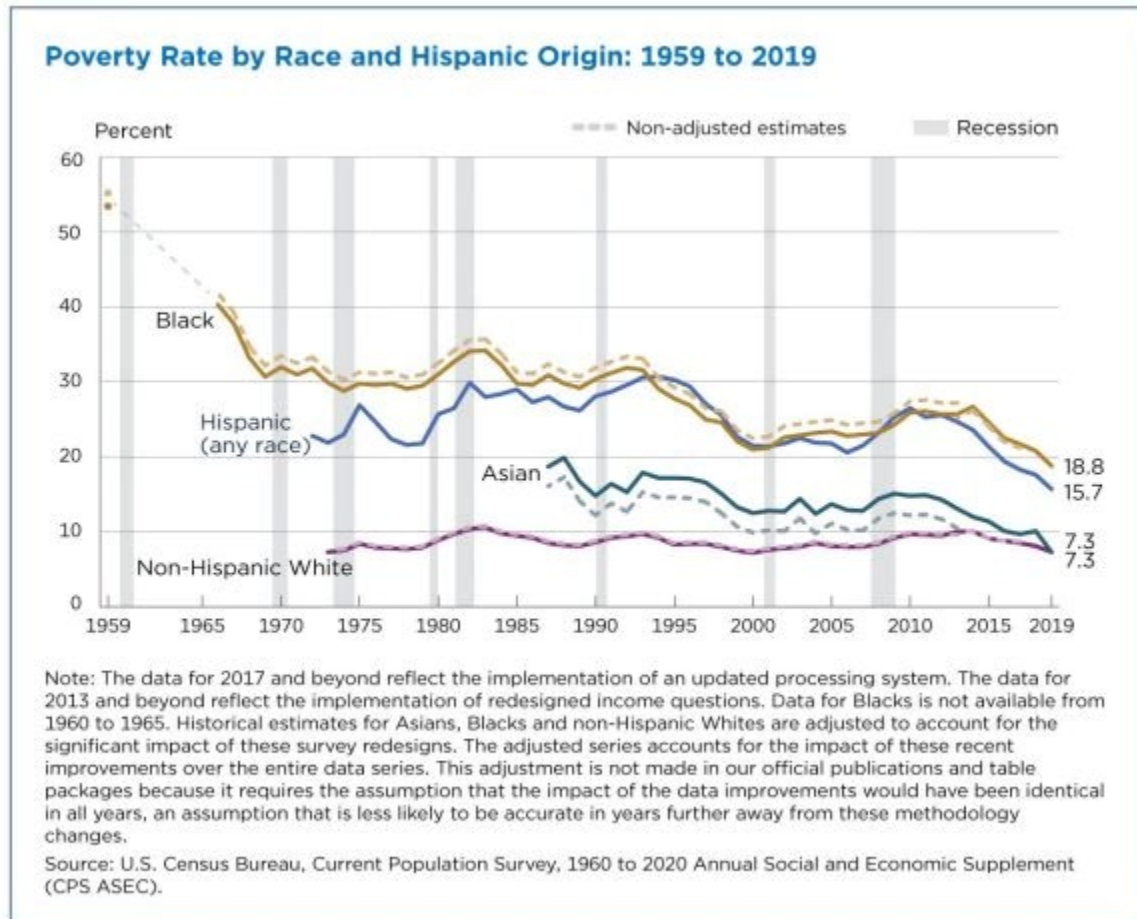
“Placement in special education has too often been a vehicle for segregating minority students” for many African American students (Losen, 2007, p. 274). In the American special education system, African American kids with disabilities have experienced a number of

negative experiences. The continuing problem of disproportionate participation of African American students in special education is one of the most commonly raised concerns by scholars. The practice of segregating African American students with impairments rather than placing them in inclusive or general education environments is a problem. In both general and special education, there is a shortage of culturally appropriate interventions and teaching techniques. When a certain group's representation in special education as a whole and/or in specific disability categories exceeds that of the general school population or the special education program, disproportionality exists (Harry & Anderson, 1995). When the researcher looked at the risk index for specific disability categories by race/ethnicity, it was discovered that African American students are 3.0 times more likely to be labeled as mentally retarded and 2.5 times more likely to receive special education services with an emotional disturbance behavior label.

Poverty in the African American Community

Poverty is defined as a lack of sufficient resources to meet basic needs. Poverty can limit a person's ability to get basic necessities such as food, clean water, shelter, and clothing. Access to health care, adequate education, and transportation are all important factors for many people. Each country evaluates poverty differently around the world. There is extreme poverty and moderate poverty which is measured by The World Bank. Those who live on \$1.90 or less per day are considered to be in the extreme poverty category. Those who live on \$1.90-\$3.90 a day are considered to be in the moderate poverty category. The World Bank calculates the figure by looking at the monetary worth of a person's consumption rather than just their income.

This Figure Represent the data for Poverty Rate by Race and Hispanic Origin from 1959 to 2019



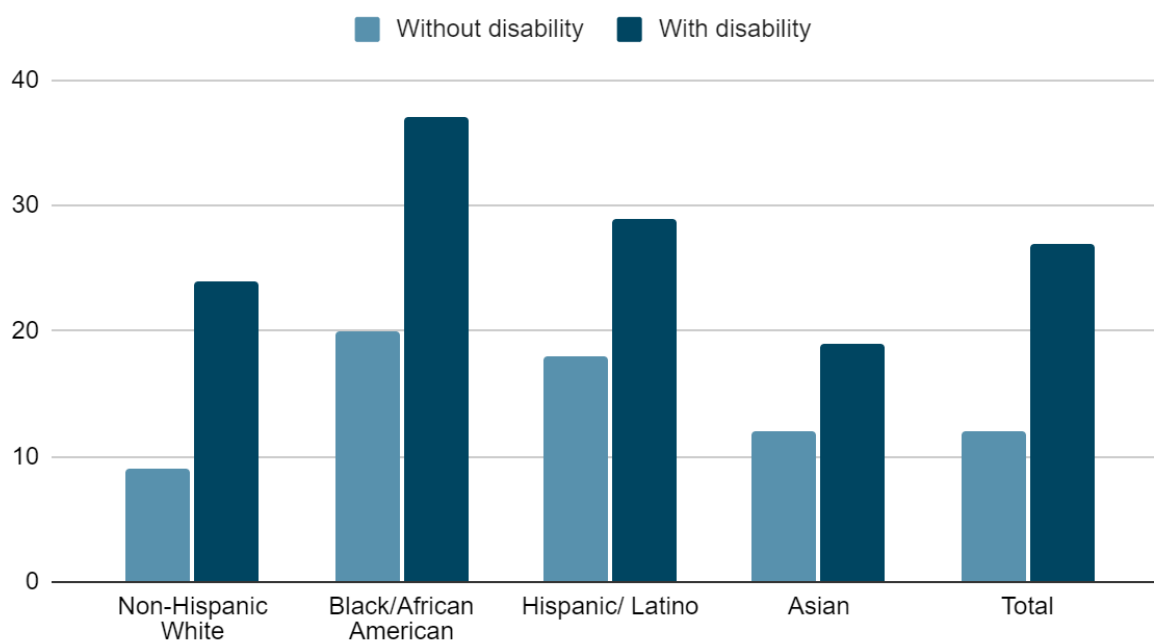
Source: (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021)

The Theory of Compromised Human Development states that minority students are more likely to be poor and that “being poor increases exposure to social risks that compromise early development and increase the need for special services” (O’Connor & DeLuca Fernandez, 2006, p. 6). O’Connor and DeLuca Fernandez (2006) proposed that this theory may oversimplify the concept of development, though. This approach ignores the fact that development is culturally distinctive and instead considers children's growth to be universal. The idea also compared minority students' growth to white middle-class norms and then compared minority students'

development to those norms. The Theory of Compromised Human Development blames poverty for minorities' overrepresentation in special education but fails to recognize that the theory further marginalized minority kids. Students who are poor and at-risk, according to this view, arrive at school with a disability. The school then becomes a place where the student gets diagnosed (O'Connor and DeLuca Fernandez, 2006). Most African Americans are currently living in intergenerational poverty. This means poverty, violence, and dysfunctional households are some of the key factors that have affected African Americans' lives, especially the youth. Similarly, MacMillian and Reschly (1998) felt that poverty reduces an individual's quality of life, which can affect his or her ability to learn. As a result of these circumstances, students are underexposed to the materials they need to be successful in reading and writing, as well as other areas in the classroom.

Research, on the other hand, has discovered evidence to back up arguments that poverty isn't the only factor affecting overrepresentation. Jordan (2005) elaborated, African American males are about four times more likely than female African Americans to be diagnosed with special needs. As a result, socio-economic status and poverty are insufficient to explain disparities in identification rates between African males and girls, as well as discrepancies between minority groups. It only gives a handy excuse for educational failure, absolving the school of accountability (p. 136). When male and female minorities living in similar degrees of poverty have different identification rates, it shows that poverty cannot be the only factor to blame for overrepresentation.

Figure 6: Poverty Rate by Disability Status and Race



Source: American Community Survey, 2015

Disability Terminology

Many terms have been used to describe persons who require certain types of education, such as exceptional students, handicapped learners, and special education learners. These students have been recognized as having cognitive, psychological, physiological, or social impairments, necessitating the offer of extra assistance in order for them to receive an appropriate education. Students with disabilities should be educated on specialized terms, according to a recent study. It is also important to understand that there are negative connotations to the term "handicapped" when referring to a person who has a disability. Handicapped, Impairment, and Development Disorder have all been used as classifications in the past. The phrase "handicapped," for example, would establish a barrier in the world's perception of a disabled individual. A person with a disability may be perceived as being unable to do a task in

the same manner or time period as someone without a disability. Lower Intelligence, brain damage, blindness, deafness, or depression are all examples of "impairment," according to Harris (Harris, 2010).

The phrase "developmental disorder" refers to problems that interfere with a child's growth, either psychologically or physically, or as a functional impairment in key daily tasks. Individuals and their supporters may perceive this as degrading or demeaning. These phrases and meanings might make a person with a handicap feel as though the general population is demeaning and humiliating them as people. According to research, it is critical to recognize that disability is socially and ecologically defined, referring to how others understand the individual's impairment and make adjustments and adaptations to meet the person's requirements to effectively feel like part of the community. of society. The term "disability" usually forms a stigma for how and why society will react and treat a person with a disability.

In 1992, when Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was renewed and amended, one of the amendments was to correct terminology. Recognizing the negative impact of certain terms, the word "handicapped" was replaced with the phrase "persons with disabilities" (Zeller, 2013). Also in 1992, Federal agencies were directed to correct terminology in their regulations, policies, and other documents. When you participate in updating policies, the Forest Service Handbook or Manual, guidelines for the agency, direction to the field, or have input into other documents, please use the opportunity to correct the term "handicapped" and other references to persons with disabilities that do not place the person first.

A learner with special educational needs is a student who is having difficulty in school for a number of reasons, as well as a student who needs extra help. In other words, it relates to the extent to which academic institutions alter their curriculum, teaching techniques, and

organizational structures to assist these students in learning more efficiently and effectively. Listening, reading, counting, writing, written language, handwriting, and grammatical difficulties are all relevant impairments, according to this definition. Students with physical and/or behavioral restrictions and/or requirements should also be considered.

Disability Labeling

Disability labeling based on socioeconomic differences mainly happens when students are inappropriately placed in special education due to reasons that are unrelated to having a learning disability or special needs (Velasquez, 2019). Student placement in schools should appreciate the different factors that affect a child's socio-emotional development. According to Eunice Velasquez, San Jose State University Social Worker, observed performance and socio-emotional differences among students arise from biological, social, and economic factors. Biological factors affecting students' academic performance include low birth weight, inadequate nutrition, and health problems are all factors to consider. Social factors included poverty, single parenting, non-English speaking, living in high-risk areas, and low-achieving schools. Economic factors affect student's access to quality learning opportunities such as well-funded and resourced schools along with early and timely parental intervention. The goal is to determine how a student's social-economic status affects a student's classroom performance, leading to a special education label. Many studies have found that a student's socioeconomic status (SES) influences academic achievement, employment, and postsecondary education outcomes for individuals with and without disabilities. The amount to which SES influences the patterns for those outcomes, or the non-academic transition abilities identified as being predictive of those post-school outcomes, has been less widely examined, with mixed results. When controlling for economic issues, is there a link between demographic

demographics and the percentage of highly included students with disabilities in general education classrooms? The findings revealed a link between the economic variables of general education and special education spending, as well as the length of time students with disabilities spend in general education classes (Cosier & Causton-Theoharis, 2010).

Disability labeling is a serious issue because it affects students' placement in different courses and may disadvantage some students unfairly. One proposed solution is to include educational specialists from various schools within a district to participate in the identification and classification process. According to the Department of Education (2021, #1), children "from low-income households are more likely to have disabilities". This admission from the Department of Education implied that students of color deserve disproportionate placement because they come from low-income families. This assumption and justification from the Department of Education would only mean that the fight for equality and fairness in education is far from being realized. Schifter et al., (2019) identified that the main challenge to solving disproportionality is poor tracking and reporting as required under IDEA and Equity in IDEA.

Definition and Identification of Special Needs Students

The definition and identification of special needs students are inconsistent and subjective; but is it based mainly on socioeconomic status rather than actual biological or neurological factors? Students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) comprise the largest portion of special education enrollments of any classification under the Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Jacobson referred to a research finding published in the Journal Society and Mental Health by Dara Shifrer and Rachel Fish (2019). According to this professor, researchers, disability labeling and identification differ from institutions and individuals depending on the school's socioeconomic status and parents. For example, a low-performing student in a high-achieving

school will be labeled with a disability. Still, the same student will not qualify the definition or labeling if they attend a low-achieving school.

These researchers argued that the identification and classification of disability among students should accept the influence of social and economic differences because they have a strong bearing on individual student's performance. The professors also argued that racial identity and status also affect disability labeling. For instance, Black students in schools with a low Black student population are more likely to be neurologically deficient than other white students, yet the main cause is not a neurological or biological disability but a social and economic disadvantage. This again brings us back to the impact of socioeconomic status and how it is essential to education. Many students of color are mislabeled or because of socioeconomic status; they are not receiving the support early or later on in life. It is suggested that racial disproportionality is not attributable to racial differences in income and indicates a need for further investigation of the mechanisms by which the longstanding racial disparities in special education emerge and are maintained (Kincaid & Sullivan, 2017).

Since students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds perform relatively poorly than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds when placed in the learning facility, teachers have created a predetermined judgment that students from low socioeconomic statuses are academically poor. Thus, students need special attention. Another problem exists when racial minority students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are academically compared with high-performing white students who have the advantage of exposure to resources at young ages. Identifying and classifying student disabilities based on their socioeconomic backgrounds is wrong and it can cause serious educational ramifications in the future. These situations are likely to remain unchanged if students determine a standard child's academic performance with

better opportunities, different skin color, and more access to services (Shaheen & Gul, 2014). One possible solution is the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) which demands that schools evaluate students fairly to avoid disproportionate and incorrect placement if IDEA fails to mitigate successfully.

Individuals with Special Needs Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was established in 1975 in the United States. The attempt was to implement additional policies, as it had in the past, but the policies that were in place when then adopted to what had already been in place. In the United States, reforms began with the introduction of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975 (IDEA). IDEA's goal was to ensure that all students with disabilities in all states received an adequate education. Students with disabilities were granted a free, suitable public education (FAPE) under the legislation. This legislation serves four purposes:

- Ensure that all children with disabilities receive free, adequate education, with a focus on special education and accompanying services to fulfill their needs.
- Ensure that the rights of the children with disabilities and their parents are protected.
- Assist and localities to provide for the education of all children with disabilities
- Assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate all children with disabilities (Achieved-Thirty-Five, 2016, p.1).

Despite the fact that there is still a significant gap in terms of being responsive to the educational needs of students with disabilities, today more students with disabilities are educated in general education classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers and attend more postsecondary institutions than at any other time in American history. Furthermore, students with disabilities are significantly more likely to live in communities and participate in

competitive employment. According to many parents, particularly those from the African-American community, the thought of the IDEA act meant that both their children and children with disabilities would have access to integrated schools that were inclusive and reflected the larger society in terms of race/ethnicity. Which would and should provide affordable, free, and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. These limitations and restrictions continue to be setbacks for African American students.

Many children with disabilities have benefited greatly from special education, but the advantages have not been equally distributed based on race and social status (Losen & Orfield, 2002). As a result of the adoption of IDEA, special education service delivery has undergone major modifications (Losen & Orfield, 2002). African American children with disabilities have not received the same schooling opportunities comparable with those experienced by their white peers in the US. Unfortunately, it is still common to see segregation on the basis of race, poverty, disabilities, or perceived disabilities, as well as the interaction of race with both disabilities and perceived disabilities as well as poverty. History would later confirm that segregation would continue after the Brown Vs Board decision and the implementation of the IDEA act. There would be no integrated schools for their children, and those with disabilities would not be able to access the general education curriculum and their contemporaries without impairments, as African American parents hoped for.

Inadequate Professional Development & Cultural Differences

In low-incidence disorders like cerebral palsy or deaf blindness, overrepresentation is uncommon. These classifications are based on a medical definition that makes diagnosis easier. Overrepresentation is more common in disabilities with a high incidence rate. "High incidence disabilities demand a substantial degree of 'professional judgment' to get to an agreement

regarding the assessment of disability” (Arnold & Lassmann, 2003, p. 231). Furthermore, studies revealed that high-incidence disorders such as mental retardation, learning disabilities, and emotional problems account for more than 63 percent of pupils qualified for special education (Sullivan, et al., 2009). These "judgmental" disability categories have ambiguous federal and state disability definitions, resulting in minority students being evaluated using white middle-class standards. Schools decide who is more likely to be recognized as disabled, explain O'Connor and DeLuca Fernandez (2006) (p. 6). Many schools in the United States are set up in such a way that white students are given an unfair advantage. Certain culture-specific criteria or aspirations for growth should not be extended or generalized to other populations, according to O'Connor and DeLuca Fernandez (2006). When grading students, it is critical that schools take cultural diversity into account.

Professional development is a key factor in helping educate teachers on how to better prepare for their African American students. Without proper training, teachers in schools will not be educated on the fact that African American English (AAE) is actually a language with rules for grammar and pronunciations (Redd & Webb, 2005). Teachers merely hear phrases pronounced "incorrectly" and presume African American students are unable to communicate in Standard English. If the student continues to mispronounce words or terms it may result in "severe educational injustices," as AAE speakers are placed in special education or speech therapy classrooms since they do not speak Standard English like white children (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 25). If African American English became the dominant language in schools and or on standardized tests, African American students would flourish and be recognized as skilled speakers, whereas white middle-class students would fall behind and be seen as inept (O'Connor & DeLuca Fernandez, 2006). Jordan (2005) spoke to how teacher

judgment has a significant role in special education placement. She showed that identifying disability is closely linked to instructors' beliefs about cultural backgrounds. The assumptions stem from the deficit mindset that is all too common in classrooms. These ideas come from the perception that minority scholars "lack motivation, have a limited academic aptitude, and come from poor home settings" (Jordan, 2005, p. 130). According to Tatum (2009), the belief that African American boys do not want to be educated must be refuted. When it comes to making sense of their conduct, these beliefs also show the disadvantaged minority children have in schools. When it comes to behavior, research reveals that Black students are referred for more subjective violations.

Developing culturally relevant instruction is crucial for the success of minority students. "Successful teachers examine and use the knowledge that students bring to school in order to help them accomplish academically and help students appreciate their value and worth," says one teacher Ford, 2012, p. 142). Likewise, Ford claimed that becoming culturally competent is no longer a choice. Building interactions with children that go beyond the classroom and include experiencing their neighborhood can help to foster a solid bond and show them that they are valued.

Demographic Factors

Several demographic characteristics, such as geographic location and socioeconomic status, have been linked to student educational attainment and early cognitive development. Neighborhood and housing stability (Ainsworth, 2002); the student's home environment (Caldas & Bankston, 1999); family health care (Kramer et al., 1995); and geographical location (Kramer et al., 1995). It is important to know that there are demographic factors that impact African Americans in special education, but one question that can be asked is: What are some

of the factors that contribute to racial disproportionality in special education? It can be proven that failure to recognize and accommodate cultural differences among minority groups is usually a result of not understanding one's demographic impact and how it plays a role in how students view education. Another factor is a lack of responsiveness to cultural and socioeconomic differences among children and their families.

According to a report from The Brookings Institution:

- Black children were three times as likely to live in poor families as white children in 2015. 12 percent of white and Asian children lived in poor families, compared with 36 percent of black children, 30 percent of Hispanic children, 33 percent of American Indian children, and 19 percent of others.
- Food insecurity affects 23 percent of Black-headed households and 19 percent of Hispanic-headed households, compared with 9 percent of households headed by whites.
- Black children are over twice as likely to have elevated blood lead levels as whites, and low-income children over three times as likely as others.
- The poor are more likely to live near hazardous waste sites. (Gordon, 2017, p. 4)

Overrepresentation

Since the integration of Black and white students during the Civil Rights movement, the issue of overrepresentation of African American students, males in particular in special education, has plagued the public school system (Shealey & Lue, 2006). Despite the fact that there has been research into this unequal positioning, there is little data to suggest how to address the rising problem. Some experts claim that it is a societal problem caused by disparities in socioeconomic status as well as poverty and urban deterioration. It is critical to

conduct research on the most obvious factors that contribute to the incorrect placement of African American children in special education programs (Shealey & Lue, 2006). Research results revealed that, by 4th grade, the disability rate among Black students is 13 percent lower than it would have been if they were identified at the same rate as white students born into similar economic and health circumstances. For Hispanics, the overall identification rate is 8 percent lower than what we would predict for similarly situated white students (Elder, 2021). Depending on the racial makeup of the school, these disparities manifest themselves in different ways. In schools with a majority of white students, Black and Hispanic kids are more likely to be put in special education than their peers. When accompanied by other non-white kids in mostly minority schools, however, Black and Hispanic students are less likely to be put in special education. In fourth grade, a Black student who attends a school where more than 90% of the students are minorities is about 9 percentage points less likely to be classified as handicapped than a Black student who attends a school where fewer than 10% of the students are minorities (Elder, 2021).

Since the 1950s, racial segregation in U.S. schools has been prohibited, yet school enrollments are still unknowingly and knowingly segregated today. Close to 70 percent of all Black students attend schools where more than half of the students are not white. Only 13 percent of white children attend schools with a majority of non-white classmates. Such disparities in enrollment reflect long-standing disparities in educational and economic results across racial groupings, including inequalities in educational attainment, earnings, and economic mobility between the Black and white populations. Again, providing evidence that socioeconomic status plays a crucial role in the overrepresentation of African American students in special education.

Teachers should be at the forefront of overrepresentation as well. Teachers wield a lot of power when it comes to the placement of our African American students. Teachers are looked upon as change agents and people who are put in a place to help students succeed. Teachers are thought to have a significant influence on young people, therefore it is reasonable to predict that they will have a significant impact on student's academic progress and determine some levels of academic achievement and status. As the researchers dive deeper into this topic of poverty and socioeconomic status and how it impacts African American students with special needs, it is imperative to look at many teacher demographics. For example, teacher ethnicity, age, gender, degree level, and/or experience as they pertain to the selection process are all factors to consider. Finally, the concerns surrounding overrepresentation and its cultural consequences should be evaluated in order to understand how this epidemic is affecting our society and what can be done to address it (Shealey & Lue, 2006).

When considering the topic of African American students and how overrepresentation or disproportionality has impacted special education, it's crucial to remember that it is critical that African American students' views be heard in order to effectively address the challenges that may be affecting them in the academic setting. To put it another way, as educators, we cannot merely supply antidotes to a problem facing African American students; we must also include them in our attempts to improve their situations. To understand the African American experience, you need to understand that race, disability, and class are all intertwined with each other which have a direct impact on labeling and overrepresentation in special education.

Theories of Disproportionality

This researcher reviewed an article on how sociological theories and learning disabilities are connected. As a result of the disproportionate participation of minority students

in special education programs, Anyon (2009) proposed three possibilities - Social Constructionism, Interactional Theory, and Institutional Theory are the theories he considered. The concept of social action can be found in the Social Constructionism theory. Social action is concerned with the idea that words play a critical role in the formation of identities and relationships. Within the field of special education, for example, there are words that reflect notions of separatism and feelings of otherness (Anyon, 2009). This implies that students are separated from their peers and, as a result, have feelings of being excluded and unable to achieve academic success.

Anyon (2009) further investigated the role of Interactional Theory in identifying students for special education. According to this idea, learning difficulties are caused by neurological problems in students' brains. In most situations, however, children are given assessment exams to prove their level of learning disability rather than neurological tests to establish their learning disability. This attempt to prove a disability is inherently flawed and teachers and administrators are left to determine a child's ability to succeed. As a result, these decisions are subjective and are frequently based on the student's behavior and inability to meet the teacher's expectations (Anyon, 2009).

Finally, Institutional Theory is concerned with our school's need to categorize behaviors in order to manage them. Educators apply evaluation tools, intervention models, and the referral process to respond to a school's specific interests based on this approach. According to this idea, public schools frequently manipulate evidence to maintain or improve performance levels in order to receive funding. As a result, lower functioning kids are frequently placed in special education classrooms in order to protect the institution that serves them from harm (Anyon, 2009).

Teacher Bias and Ethnicity

The ethnicity of the teacher is very important in the relationship that he or she has with his or her students. Kunjufu (2005) indicated that African American children rarely interact with teachers of their own race. Furthermore, African American students make up only 17% of the public-school population, and African American men make up only 1% of the teaching force. Currently, 80% to 90% of the teacher population in the United States are white middle class, despite the fact that the diversity of the student population is increasing, and little is being done to address the growing problem. As a result, an African American student can progress from kindergarten to sixth grade without encountering a Black male teacher (Kunjufu, 2005).

The teacher is one of the most important people in the decision to refer a student to special education (Kunjufu, 2005). On a daily basis, the teacher is responsible for instructing, facilitating, observing, and evaluating students. When a teacher recognizes a student or student as having learning difficulties, the teacher must develop and implement the necessary interventions to help the child. The teacher's ability to comprehend and connect to a student's cultural background can help him improve the student's academic performance. Several factors influence teachers' abilities to understand their students. One critical factor is the connection and effort that a teacher has with his or her students. Building positive working relationships is one of the most important skills to bring to the classroom.

Based on these statistics, you can see how African American students have been impacted by not having teachers of color. Not being able to have the cultural perspective of an African American teacher is at issue. The percentages of African American students classified as "special" are higher in areas with the highest number of Caucasian teachers (Kunjufu, 2005).

According to Artiles et al., (2002), most districts with Caucasian teachers have a higher number of minority students enrolled in special education. When a student's cultural background differs from that of the teacher, this can be interpreted as deviant behavior and leading to recommendations for special education. In fact, teachers' biases and racial bias influence minority students' referral decisions (Artiles & Trent, 1994).

For European American female or male teachers, certain behaviors in the classroom can be unsettling. According to Kunjufu (2005), the ideal school student generally resembles the White female model. She is a calm student who is obedient, pleasant, attentive, and capable of sitting quietly for long periods of time. The African American student, on the other hand, does not live up to these standards. He or she fidgets, has a lot of energy, is physically active, and has a lot of facial and body expressions. When a student exhibits all of these characteristics, the teacher is likely to identify him or her as a behaviorally delinquent (Kunjufu, 2005).

Furthermore, minority students' disproportionate representation in special education suggests that cultural differences between European American female or male teachers and students from culturally diverse backgrounds result in interpersonal misunderstandings and frequent referrals to special education (Artiles et al., 2002).

Disability Classification in Education

Classification may or may not be educationally beneficial, according to this description of it. Due to the fact that special education students require resources, the idea of special educational needs hasn't eliminated division from the educational system. When defining a problem, identifying the cause, and projecting the long-term future, correct categorization has been proven to be beneficial. Therefore, it is likely that not only African American learners, but all learners will continue to be labeled as having developmental impairments, mental and

behavioral issues, or some other type of labeling. Increasing identifying students with disabilities and special educational requirements, on the other hand, might be a sign of a failing general education system and rising diversity among today's students. As more money is spent on particular student services, the whole system is put under increasing strain. As more children are identified as having special needs, the likelihood of those children being placed in settings other than general education classrooms increases, depriving them of the opportunity to learn the same challenging subject matter or achieve the same important educational outcomes as their peer's increases.

Disability classifications both reflect and symbolize the difficulties that come with achieving equality of opportunity. Race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic position have all had a significant effect on IDEA classifications. In both 1997 and 2004, Congress stated its intention to revise IDEA in order to address issues emerging from misclassifications caused by reasons other than disability. Although statistical patterns of probable misrepresentation have altered significantly, misclassification into special education is still a common problem linked to race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic position (Rose, 2009). In 17 years, a lot of those same disability classifications still both reflect and symbolize the difficulties that come with accessing equality of opportunity. For the African American community, classification has always been viewed from a different perspective, so this helps put into perspective how mislabeling has significantly impacted African Americans.

The Intent of SPED vs SPED for African American students

Special education was created to give children with disabilities some much-needed educational help that was not available in regular education. Special education was not a place or site in its initial and later notions, but rather a service delivery method to and for students. On the

basis of an objective referral, assessment, and evaluation, eligibility decision, placement, and departure procedure, this service delivery system was meant to give personalized instruction to students who were recognized as having disabilities (Blanchett & Shealey, 2005). Students would be incorporated into regular education settings after their requirements were fulfilled or suitable techniques or adjustments were made. In fact, special education has not gone as planned in some terms of special education. Special education has become a kind of isolation from the mainstream for many African American and impoverished kids. Special education has become a tool to combat many African American students in regular education from obtaining an equitable education. As a result, some have labeled special education as a new sanctioned form of systemic racism and segregation.

Inappropriate and Culturally Unresponsive Curriculum

It is important to understand that learning is a social process that occurs through interactions and relationships with other people. Students from culturally diverse backgrounds can achieve academic success when their culture, language, history, and experiences are recognized and used to enhance their learning. Culturally responsive educational systems are built on the principle that all minority ethnic students can achieve academic success when they have access to high-quality teachers, programs, as well as resources. When talking about inappropriate and culturally unresponsive teaching, RTI comes to the forefront. RTI stands for Response to Intervention. RTI is defined as "an inadequate change in target behaviors as a function of intervention" (Gresham, 2005, p. 331).

Initially, the RTI movement was marketed as an alternative to diagnosing Specific Learning Disabilities. The use of standardized assessment methods to determine a child's eligibility for Special Education under such a category formerly depended on proof of a

"substantial gap" between ability and accomplishment. The adoption of this IQ discrepancy approach for determining adds to the disproportionate presence of culturally and linguistically diverse kids in special education, according to research (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The benefits of using the RTI eligibility determination methodology in IDEA evaluations are now being extended to other eligibility categories, such as Emotional Disturbance (Gresham, 2005; Kavala et al., 2005).

In spite of the fact that RTI has been extensively studied as a tool for intervention and evaluation of children with learning impairments, little attention has been paid to the possibility of such a model for use with students who have emotional and/or behavioral challenges. Although the subjective aspect of SPED determination hasn't changed, the adoption of an RTI approach may be able to address it. All kids who have emotional, behavioral, or social issues are targeted by the approach. As part of the RTI problem-solving approach, Gresham (2005) outlined strategies to operationalize students' responses to emotional/behavioral A child's reaction to intervention is the most important factor to consider when evaluating eligibility for special education. There may be benefits to using RTI for students with these types of special needs.

Disability and Poverty Factors

The relationship between poverty and disability has been well documented. Human rights, freedom, and justice are frequently used as justifications for integrating kids with disabilities into mainstream schools. There is, nevertheless, a solid economic rationale for teaching people with disabilities. A lack of adequate education is a key risk factor for inequality and prejudice for all learners, impaired and non-impaired. It may be more likely to experience poverty as a result of a lack of education rather than a non-disabled student. Students with

disabilities who are not educated in the proper environment are nearly certain to be disadvantaged for the rest of their life, living in poverty and working in low-wage occupations. This isn't a fact but the lack of support and access to educational tools due to socioeconomic status increased the risk factors. While data indicates that a sizable proportion of disabled students live in low-income areas, there is a significant lack of observational research connecting known disability-causing factors to the rate of impairment among specific human populations within these locations. Identifying disabled children is the first step in developing guidelines and implementing preventative measures. Additionally, it is necessary to establish the frequency, incidence, causes, and risk factors for impairments.

While larger households may be beneficial in terms of child care, they may also increase the demand for resources, which is particularly problematic in areas where such resources are limited. Consequently, children from families with a large number of siblings, particularly those under the age of five, are less likely to get excellent care due to mothers' conflicting demands for time, physical, and emotional resources to care for each child. This may result in the development of disabilities as a result of a lack of attention or an increase in the severity of problems already present. There is evidence to support the link between poverty and a wide spectrum of disabilities, according to the research. Childhood obesity is more likely among children from low-income households, who are less likely to have visited a doctor in the previous year, less likely to have had vaccinations, and more likely to smoke. Children from low-income homes are more likely to show signs of impairment (Pamuk et al., 2001). Lower family income was linked to poorer health, more psychological distress, higher rates of obesity, uncontrolled blood pressure, poor mental and physical health, and more medical diagnoses, according to Fiscella (1999). Poverty has an impact on the degree of functioning of people with chronic

illnesses (Kington & Smith, 1997). Finally, poverty is linked to mental disease as well as physical problems such as a lack of food, health care, and housing (Iceland, 2003).

Risk Factors Based on Environment

Many environmental risk factors are connected with poverty for African American children, increasing the probability that an individual may develop a disability or chronic health issue. Individuals who are impoverished, for example, are more likely to reside in neighborhoods with high crime rates, inadequate schools, and restricted social networks and that is a substantial increase for African American students. Although there are a variety of potential environmental risk factors that might influence the chance of chronic health issues and impairment, this section will continue to inform the reader why these environmental factors are more severe.

Children living in low-income areas are more likely to be victims of neighborhood crime (Evans, 2004; Frenn et al., 2005), which increases their risk of injury and physical inactivity (Saegert & Evans, 2003). For example, inadequate plumbing and heating, poor indoor air quality, unsafe street traffic, and a lack of city services are more common in low-income areas, as are apartments with too many people living in them and residents who don't feel like they have control over their living environment (Evans, 2004; Saegert & Evans, 2003). As a result, the chance of suffering emotional stress and developing a disability or chronic health condition is increased. To provide just a few examples, lead exposure has been linked to learning difficulties, smoking exposure has been linked to asthma, and unsafe street traffic. Poverty has a disproportionately negative influence on African American children. African Americans face higher levels of violence and divorce rates in their house homes compared to their middle-class peers. They are also twice as likely to move within a year and five times more likely to be evicted (Evans, 2004). Significantly higher birth risks and a larger chance of not having

healthcare requirements addressed are connected with higher levels of violence and frequent changes in the family (Fairbrother et al., 2005; Wu, 1996). Those who live in poverty have a 40 percent greater chance of having a kid (Meyers et al., 1998). Unhealthy neighborhoods where they are exposed to higher environmental hazards, insufficient maternal nutrition, and health care, and inadequate early nutrition and health care all contribute to an increased risk of low birth weight.

Lastly, low-income households have fewer social circles, which has an adverse effect on an individual's capacity to find and keep jobs (Evans, 2004). The workforce nowadays communicates via social media and social networks which consist of family, friends, and relatives, which are crucial in allowing access to employment information (Ferguson, 2002). Strong social networks are an essential source of an individual's capacity to effectively enter the workforce since about 50% of employees know someone at their place of employment when they are employed (Durlauf, 2001). If a job seeker has a small social circle, as is common in low-income areas, he or she is less likely to receive essential employment information needed to match the individual with a job (Durlauf, 2001). In addition to aiding an individual in finding job vacancies and obtaining employment, social media has an impact on an employee's ability to keep their job (Ferguson, 2002). Social media sites, for example, may help a worker become familiar with a supervisor's management style, which can help them grasp what is expected on the job.

Testing and Referral Bias

When a recommendation for a special education evaluation is made, the likelihood of placement in special education is very common (Mamlin & Harris, 2000). A need for special education has been established, the referred student is less likely to return to general education

classes. Bias and misidentification have been highlighted as a result of high referral-to-placement rates (Mamlin & Harris, 2000). Some norm-referenced assessment tools used to evaluate whether an individual has a disability may be prone to ethnic and gender prejudice (Sattler, 2001). Several arguments have been raised against the usage of these assessment tools (Sattler, 2001). The validity of utilizing such instruments with multilingual students, for example, there have been questions due to test items that may be new to those types of ethnic background students (Lopez, 1995). Several scholars feel that ethnic and gender biases are inherent in IQ testing with African Americans (Helms, 1997; Hilliard, 1997); nevertheless, the most commonly held belief is that ethnic and gender biases are not variables in most norm-referenced instruments (Reschly & Grimes, 2002).

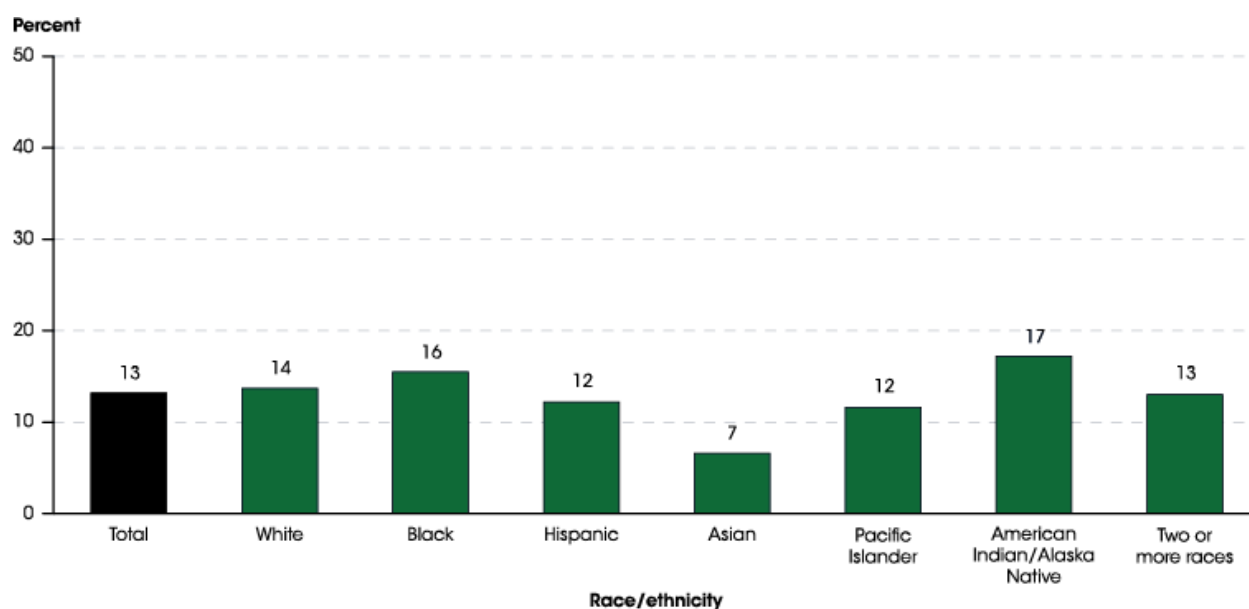
Biased teacher recommendations and family pressure to enroll a child in special education were thought to have the least impact on unequal representation. According to studies, some instructors show racial bias and might treat their students differently, resulting in low academic outcomes and referral bias (Mamlin & Harris, 2000). As long as African American families are burdened by poverty and limited opportunity, issues such as inadequate representation would continue to plague the community. As a result, poverty was portrayed as a burden that forced matters that were not directly related to basic survival to go to the bottom of the priority list. However, according to studies, African American parents who live in poverty continue to place a high value on education because they want their children to be more successful than they were. It should be highlighted that parental income has a slight influence on children's educational success.

It appears that a variety of factors may be identified as contributing to the disproportionate representation of African American kids in special education. Numerous

alternatives, in the same way, may be applied. Cross-cultural competency is seen to have an impact on the sort of solution that is selected and executed, according to some researchers. Cross-cultural competency, on the other hand, was not found to be linked with opinions regarding whether African American children were overrepresented in special education programs. As a result, there was no correlation between the quantity of connection competency and the inability to come up with realistic solutions to the problem of disproportionate representation. In contrast, it has been demonstrated that the degree of cross-cultural competency a person has is associated with the likelihood that solutions would be implemented.

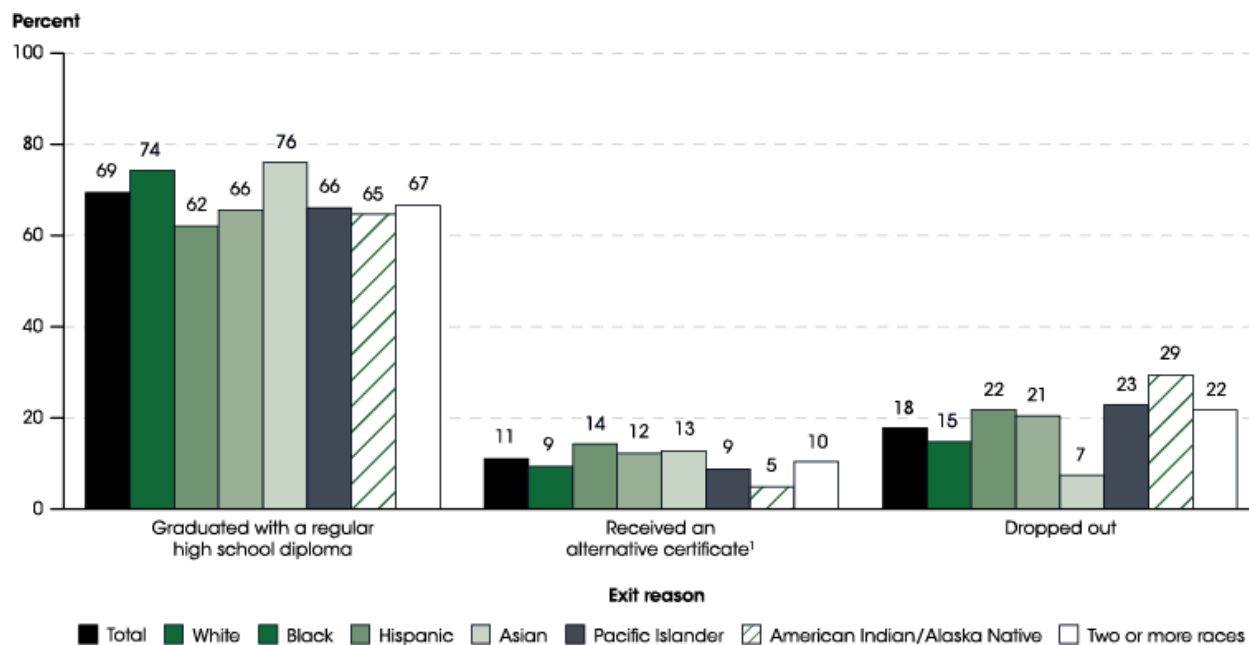
African American Students with Disabilities Graph

Figure #1: In the school year 2015–16, the percentage of students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was highest for those who were American Indian/Alaska Native (17 percent), followed by those who were Black (16 percent), white (14 percent), of Two or more races (13 percent), Hispanic and Pacific Islander (12 percent each), and Asian (7 percent) (*Indicator 9: Students With Disabilities*, 2019).



Children with disabilities may require services in order to have the same opportunities for learning as students without disabilities. This indicator looks at the percentage of students between the ages of 3 and 21 who are serviced by IDEA, as well as the percentage of children and teenagers who get assistance for specific impairments. The indicator also looks at the rate at which IDEA students aged 14–21 dropped out of school in the 2014–15 school year, as well as the reasons for their dropout (*Indicator 9: Students with Disabilities*, 2019). “Thirteen percent of students ages 3–21 enrolled in public schools served under IDEA in the school year 2015–16, a total of 6.7 million individuals. The percentage served varied by race/ethnicity: it was highest for those who were American Indian/Alaska Native (17 percent), followed by those who were Black (16 percent), White (14 percent), of Two or more races (13 percent), Hispanic and Pacific Islander (12 percent each), and Asian (7 percent) (*Indicator 9: Students with Disabilities*, 2019).

Figure #2. Percentage of 14- to 21-year-olds served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, who exited the school, by exit reason and race/ethnicity: The school year 2014–15



For children aged 14 to 21 who received special education services under IDEA and left school during the 2014–15 school year, including the reasons for their departure. In the 2014–15 school year, about 395,000 of these 14–21-year-olds graduated: almost two-thirds (69%) earned a conventional high school diploma, 11% received an alternative certificate, 18% dropped out, 1% attained their maximum age, 4, and less than half of 1% died (*Indicator 9: Students With Disabilities*, 2019). These statistics continue to prove and provide reasoning that poverty impacts education and in some cases health as well. Not only for African American students but for students of a variety of ethnicities. The following year, in 2016, 12 percent of black children in the United States required school-based services for a variety of disabilities, including physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and emotional problems. White children got just 8.5 percent of these services.

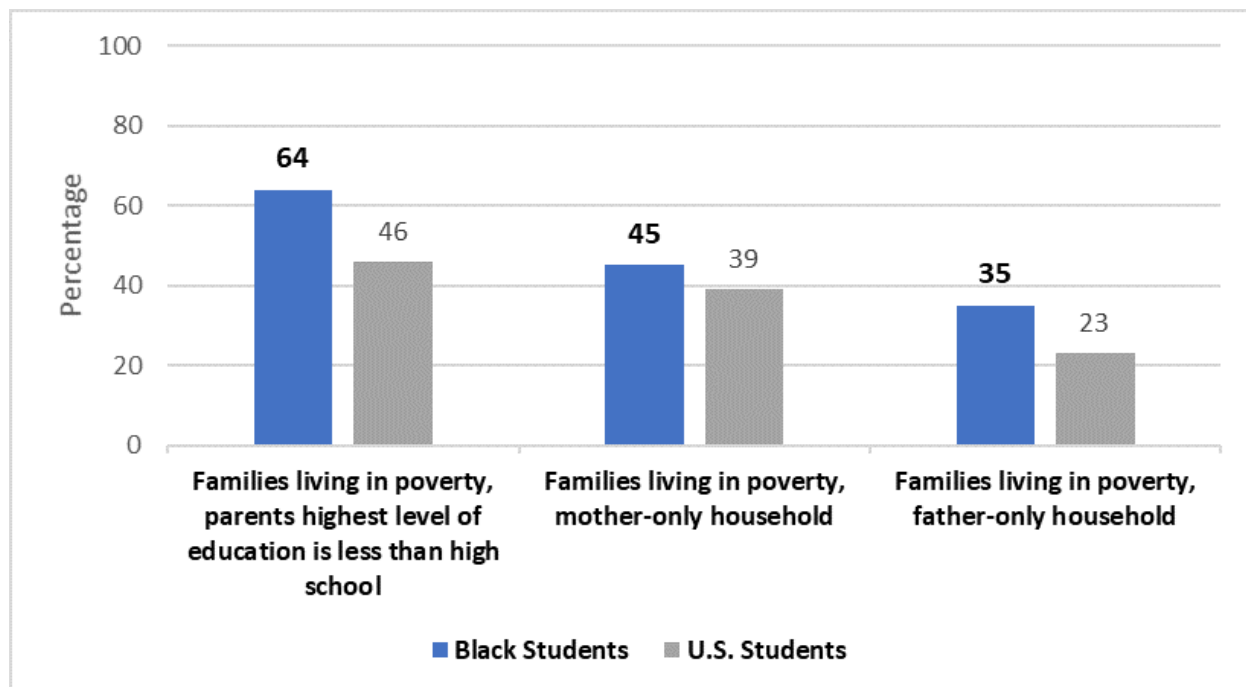
Poverty Rate for Black Students

The poverty percentage among Black students continues to be the greatest. In 2018, over one-third of Black students, which was 32 percent, lived in poverty, compared to only 10 percent

of white students who came from impoverished households. There were 27 percent of Black students who lived in families where either parent had earned a bachelor's degree or higher level of education. This compares to 69 percent of Asian students and 53 percent of white students who did so (*COE - Characteristics of Children's Families, 2021*). As stated earlier, because children in poverty have more experiences that are more linked with impairment, previous research has considered a positive association between poverty and special education assignment to be acceptable. As a result, disability is more common among low-income children and should be more prevalent in special education. While this may be true to some extent, the assumed appropriateness of higher special education identification for low-income students can be problematic because it allows administration, educators, and decision-makers to overlook potential systemic biases that could also lead to higher rates of special education identification. Figure #3 shows that among Black students from families living in poverty,

- 64% have parents whose education level is less than high school.
- 45% live in mother-only households.
- 35% live in father-only households.

Figure #3. Percentage of Black students from families living in poverty, by parent's education level or family structure: 2018



Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/>

Figure #3, shows the percent of families living in poverty, whose parents' highest level of education is less than school. The data also shows families living in poverty mother-only households. Finally, the figure shows families living in poverty, father-only households. Studies have found that African American kids may be overrepresented in educational programs for students who satisfy the qualifying requirements for emotional disturbance. “Although special education services are designed to improve student outcomes, the provision of services may result in social stigma, removal from the general education setting, and inadequate learning opportunities” (McKenna, 2013, p. 24).

Factors to be considered

Parental involvement: For African American parents, knowing the factors that influence their child's learning environment and achievement, allows parents to identify the difficulties their child has experienced in school and the factors that are contributing to these difficulties. This allows parents to become actively involved in identifying the source of the problem and

providing the support that the child requires. Research from the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education shares that “no matter their income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school” (Brooks, 2019, p. 2). Specifically, in the realm of special education, the subject of family engagement has gotten even greater attention recently. However, as a result of recent federal law, parents are now considered equal partners with school professionals, allowing them access to their children's school records as well as participation in the creation and assessment of special education programs.

The Change That's Needed for African Americans in Special Education

Due to the overidentification of African-American kids for special education, administrators are being pushed to examine their educational programs and ensure that schools are meeting the requirements of all students. Educators and administrators can do a lot to guarantee that all students—including African American students—have excellent school experiences. As this guide has demonstrated, this includes the following steps:

- Developing an effective pre-referral intervention approach to give children the necessary support to enable them to continue engaging and developing in the general education curriculum is essential.
- It is important to recognize how the school atmosphere might influence the intellectual achievement of African American children.
- Involving families and learning from them about how to recognize and respect their child's individual learning talents, needs, and cultural background are important parts of the process (Section 1412, 2019, p. 14).

Schools must have enough funds for special education students in order to

properly teach them according to their requirements. In order to properly teach a kid with special needs, schools will need to invest in assistive technology, curriculum, and personnel resources.

Chapter III: Discussion and Conclusion

Summary of Literature

In terms of the educational systems, there has always been a long-standing correlation between poverty and education. Along with that, there has always been an additional correlation with poverty in the African American community as well as special education. According to research a large proportion of children in special education are minorities, who are more likely than other students to come from low-income families, with the proportion being much higher in the African American population. 6.6 million children received special education services in the 2014-2015 school year, accounting for 13 percent of all public-school pupils in the United States during that academic year. The inability to afford basic necessities is a significant risk factor for a variety of mental, emotional, and behavioral problems in children and adolescents. Currently, about 21% of children under the age of 18 in the United States live in a family that is below the federal poverty line, with another 21% of children under the age of 18 living in a household that is above the federal poverty level. Poverty has had a negative impact on special education children's ability to thrive in school, making it potentially difficult for them to get higher education in order to increase their employment possibilities and earnings.

Overrepresentation of minorities in special education is becoming a more serious issue in today's schools. A study showed that test bias, poverty, inadequate general education teaching, and a lack of professional development for dealing with minority children are all variables that contribute to this overrepresentation. It has been shown that kids of color, especially Black and Brown children, are disproportionately labeled as having impairments by educational institutions. From emotional problems to physical impairments to intellectual impairment, 12 percent of Black students throughout the country required assistance at their schools in 2016.

Only 8.5 percent of white students benefited from these types of programs.

The impact of socioeconomic status on African American secondary students with special needs is a continuous trend across the US. The aim is to establish if a student's socioeconomic situation has an impact on his or her classroom performance, which may lead to the assignment of a special education label. Due to the fact that many students of color are mislabeled or because of their socioeconomic position, they are not getting the necessary assistance early on or later in life, socioeconomic status is important to education. Before formal education starts, there are significant disparities in literacy between children from various socioeconomic origins. When children from low-income families are exposed to experiences that lead to the development of fundamental reading abilities such as phonological awareness, grammar, and oral language skills, they are much less likely to succeed in school (Buckingham, 2013). There is active data that demonstrates the negative consequences of poor socioeconomic status and how it may impact kids at a young age, resulting in more serious issues later in life if not addressed.

The history of African American students has been well documented over the years and there is a consistent trend in terms of racial disparity as well as inequities. The United States has grown more diverse, with cultures from all over the globe mingling and mixing throughout the country. Families enroll their children in school with the expectation that they would get a high-quality education and will be treated equitably by the school administration and faculty. Children from minority backgrounds are more likely to be labeled as disabled and put in special education programs, which is a problem. One of the most important variables that contribute to this classification is poverty or low socioeconomic level (Jordan, 2005). Jordan (2005) indicated that poverty is the only factor contributing to academic and social failure in children. Students from

low-income families face lower educational standards, safety issues, congestion in classrooms, and a lack of available resources.

In the case of many African American children, “placement in special education has far too frequently served as a tool for separating minority students” (Losen, 2007, p. 274). When it comes to the special education system in the United States, African American children with disabilities have had a variety of bad experiences. One of the most often voiced concerns by academics is the persistent issue of disproportionate representation of African American children in special education. Instead of putting African American children with disabilities in inclusive or general education settings, the practice of separating them has become widespread. General education and special education both suffer from a lack of interventions and instructional methods that are culturally suitable. The term "disparity" refers to when a particular group's representation in special education as a whole and/or in specific disability categories exceeds the representation of that group in the general school population or the special education program (Harry & Anderson, 1995).

Poverty in the African American community is a driving factor in which this research has been found. Poverty can limit a person's ability to get basic necessities such as food, clean water, shelter, and clothing. Access to health care, adequate education, and transportation are all important factors for many people. The Theory of Compromised Human Development indicated that minority students are more likely to be poor and that “being poor increases exposure to social risks that compromise early development and increase the need for special services” (O’Connor & DeLuca Fernandez, 2006, p. 6). The majority of African Americans are now caught in a cycle of intergenerational poverty. This implies that poverty, violence, and dysfunctional families are some of the most significant elements that have influenced the lives of

African Americans, particularly young males. A similar point of view is expressed by MacMillian and Reschly (1998) who believed that poverty lowers an individual's quality of life, which may impair his or her capacity to learn. In light of these conditions, children are underexposed to the resources they need to be successful not just in reading and writing but also in other areas of the classroom.

Here are some demographic factors to think about when assessing African American students who are labeled as special education. In 2015, Black children were three times more likely than white children to grow up in impoverished households. White and Asian children lived in poverty at a rate of 12 percent, compared to 36 percent of Black children, 30 percent of Hispanic children, 33 percent of American Indian children, and 19 percent of other children. Predominantly Black families are more likely than Hispanic-headed households to be food insecure, whereas white-headed households are less likely to be food insecure than Black-led households. Black children are more than twice as likely as white children to have high blood lead levels, and low-income children are more than three times as likely as other children.

Research continues to show the overwhelming amount of overrepresentation for African American students in special education. The overshadowing correlation has been students who live or come from a poverty background. The inequalities in socioeconomic position, poverty, and urban decay, according to some analysts, are the root causes of this social issue. In order to properly place African American children in special education programs, it is essential to do research on the most apparent variables that lead to the improper placement of these children (Shealey & Lue, 2006). According to the findings of the study, by the fourth grade, the disability rate among Black children is 13 percent lower than it would have been if they had been recognized at the same rate as white students born into comparable economic and health

conditions as they were. In order for academics to go further into the issue of poverty and socioeconomic status and how they affect African American students with special needs, it is critical that they look at a diverse range of teacher demographics and characteristics. For example, when it comes to the selection process, ethnicity, age, gender, degree level, and/or experience of the instructor are all variables to examine, among other things. To conclude, the worries about overrepresentation and its cultural implications should be examined in order to better understand how this pandemic is impacting our society and what can be done to combat it (Shealey & Lue, 2006).

Special education was created to give children with disabilities some much-needed educational help that was not available in regular education. For many African American and impoverished children, special education has become a form of exclusion from the general school system. Special education has evolved into a strategy for preventing many African American children enrolled in normal schools from receiving an equal educational opportunity. Special education has been labeled as a new acceptable type of systematic racism and segregation as a consequence of this development. Poverty should not be the downfall for African American students who are looking to better their education, but the statistics prove that if you are a student who lives in poverty you are more likely to end up in special education.

Limitations of Research

There have been a wide array of studies that have looked at the effect of poverty on the African American community and how it connects to academic achievement. While others are concentrating on special education. When it comes to the impact of poverty on African American students in special education, the studies that have been conducted have either looked at how a nation's poverty levels affect its ability to provide special education for its disabled population or

how individual poverty affects their ability to learn in special schools. This research will contribute to the body of knowledge by investigating the relationship between national poverty index levels for African Americans and individual poverty status in relation to special education and related services.

The Implication of Future Research

During this process, I found that the research and data on my topic were very relevant to my upbringing and how I navigated my childhood. The research and data also were relevant to my current teaching and coaching career. The goal is to continue working at my current high school facilitating special education as well as my AVID elective courses. I want to make sure that I look over the research I have found during this process as well as continue to keep track of it in the future. I have a great relationship with my co-workers at my school who have also done research on topics like this and I look forward to having those conversations about this topic in the future. At the school I work at, we recently discontinued our strategies setting 3 classes, and the two teachers who taught that class now are our behavior intervention teachers (BIT). Setting 3 strategies is level three services that are designed to meet the need for extra challenge. Students are eligible based on multiple criteria and are generally served in groups with those of similar ability. I personally think having a setting 3 strategies program is important for our building, especially for our young African American boys. My hope is that the new BIT position will provide some positive instruction for those students in the near future.

Professional Application

Over the last 10 years, I have been lucky enough to work with a number of remarkable young people. I first got into education because it was the easiest way for me to coach. After a year working in a behavioral room at North View Middle school, I quickly realized how much I

enjoyed working with children in the classroom. It wasn't until year 3 of my educational journey that I began working in special education, and this change was for the best. I began the school year working in general education but was supporting students who needed special services. Shortly after that, I had the pleasure of working with the students in the ASD setting 3 classrooms. I believe that transition was the change that altered my life. Working with my ASD students really gave me a new perspective on education and how much those students or any students who needed services needed a person like me in their life.

I chose this topic because I have a personal experience living in poverty as well and being an African American man who has been referred to special education services while I was in elementary and secondary school. When I was in the 3rd grade my family and I lived in a one-bedroom apartment, there were 5 of us in that apartment. Our living conditions were poor, to say the least. My parents did the best that they could for us, which I can't thank them enough for. I didn't understand then, but I fully understand now, how living in poverty impacts your ability to learn and function in the classroom. Also in the 3rd grade, my teachers referred me to special education on the basis that I had ADHD. I struggled to stay in my seat and I blurted out in class frequently. My parents' understanding was that at home I did not have much space to move around so when I entered a new environment or bigger environment like school, I used that space to move around because I did not have that luxury at home. Understanding that now makes a lot of sense to me in terms of space. I see a lot of high school students that I work with in the same situation. As in living in poverty or smaller living conditions and when they get to school that is their free space to get up and move around and want to be heard.

Finding research on this topic has really opened my eyes to a lot of things. It has led me to think more about the placement of special education students and the outcome if it has effects

on them through the majority of their adulthood. The students that I currently work with, have college aspirations and dreams. I don't know the poverty level or the number of students I support who actually are living in poverty but I know that these students have goals and I want to help them accomplish their goals. My goal is to continue to impact the students that I come in contact with by any means necessary and I look forward to being a change agent in their lives, no matter what their home life situation is.

Conclusion

What a unique and unforgettable experience. Overall, the process of collecting research and data and then using that knowledge to create my thesis on the impact of socioeconomic status and poverty of African American students with special needs has been a rewarding and fruitful one. Based on the study I conducted, I was able to draw a clear connection between the negative effect that poverty has on special education students and the necessity of providing those African American students with an appropriate education that would enable them to become contributing members of society. According to research, poverty has the impact of inhibiting a child's brain from developing to its full potential when compared to their counterparts who do not live in poverty. Additionally, special education placement may have long-term consequences for a child's ability to live in poverty for the rest of their lives. Finally, the data and research collected over the years and the history of special education for African American students who have suffered from poverty has pushed the United States to provide inclusive education for individuals with disabilities, particularly in the African American community, throughout the years.

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