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IMPACT OF A STUDENT'S CULTURE ON PLACEMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY
ANNA BEST

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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

IMPACT OF A STUDENT'S CULTURE ON PLACEMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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APPROVED

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Abstract

IDEA requires that schools address the disproportionate amount of minority students in Special Education. This literature review will summarize current research (2010 or later) on the evidence of disproportionality of minority students in Special Education, the potential bias of teachers and how that impacts student placement into Special Education, and how assessment bias affects placement in Special Education. The research revealed that there is no set evidence of disproportionality due to culture, but that disproportionality occurs because of many factors, which does include culture.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Issue of Disproportionality in Special Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that states have policies to prevent over-identification or disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of students with disabilities. Othman (2018) best summarized U.S. Department of Education data on the disproportionality of minority groups in Special Education. Othman summarized the Risk Ratios presented to Congress in 2008. Risk Ratios are derived from the Risk Index from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) 30th Annual Report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2008). The Risk Index is calculated by dividing the number of children/students in a specific age group served by the IDEA according to racial/ethnic groups by the estimated resident population of the same age group according to racial/ethnic groups in the U.S. and then multiplying the results by 100. (p.173). Racial groups include American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black (not Hispanic), Hispanic, and white (not Hispanic).

Children aged three through five who were of American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, or white descent were more likely to be served by IDEA than children of other groups. Asian and Hispanic children were less likely to be served by IDEA than other children. Black/African-American children aged three through five were as likely as children across all other racial/ethnic groups combined to be served by IDEA (United States Department of Education (USDE), 2013).

American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African-American, and Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander students aged 6 through 21 years were more likely to be served by IDEA than

students in all other racial/ethnic groups combined. Asian, Hispanic, and white students aged 6 through 21 years were less likely to be served by IDEA (United States Department of Education (USDE), 2013).

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2009) among minority and English language learner (ELL) proficiency groups, African American, Hispanic, American Indian, and Native Alaskan children were overrepresented, whereas Asian American children were underrepresented (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2009).

To summarize, Risk Ratios of students aged 6-21 years served by IDEA reveal that the Risk Ratios for younger ages are smaller than those for older ages, except for students of Asian and white backgrounds. As students age, the ability gap between themselves and their peers increases (Othman, 2018, p.174).

Reasoning for Research

Recently, the need for cultural awareness, equity, and teacher reflection on race has been a high priority in schools in the United States. Trends in low graduation rates, inequity in Special Education, low scores on standardized tests, and low achievement for students of color are studied and widely known (Cooc, 2017). However, students may be disadvantaged solely because of their cultural background or cultural behaviors and attitudes, or how they are perceived by the adults who are providing their education. Bias in testing, misunderstanding of behaviors, and teacher's expectations of students could contribute to higher placement rates into Special Education. Clarification of the influence of a student's cultural background on their placement in Special Education needs to be discussed to better inform and reduce potential inequities.

For this reason, it is important to examine the literature concerning how a student's culture influences their placement in Special Education. The studies selected show the discrepancies between reality and assumptions. It is worth exploring further what current studies reveal how culture and ethnicity affect a student's placement into Special Education. Revelations in studies during the nineties and early 2000s indicated that racial bias played a role in the determination for Special Education. Previous studies were heard and taken seriously by those in the roles of Education. Therefore changes in IDEA and state policies were created to address the issue of racial bias and discrepancies in placements in Special Education. Initial topics to research include testing bias (the tests themselves and the test administrators), teachers' cultural backgrounds and biases, and the perceptions of students' behaviors in the classroom compared to their peers. I will examine how a student's cultural background could affect their placement within Special Education due to teacher bias, testing bias, and perceptions of student behavior.

Definition of Terms

Disproportionality and *overrepresentation* will be used interchangeably.

Disproportionality reflects data that shows inequities. In Special Education, this generally refers to the racial and ethnic discrepancies in identifying students for services. Overrepresentation is similar to the idea that minority students have more representation in Special Education than white students.

The *WISC-IV* is the Wechsler Intelligence Scale, fourth version assesses a student's intellectual functioning, producing an intelligence quotient (I.Q.) score. Currently, it has been revised, and there is a fifth version and this research references only the fourth edition.

IDEA is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It is a federal law that ensures a free and appropriate public education for all students. It also outlines the rules and regulations regarding placements and services for students with disabilities. The disabilities referenced are *emotional, intellectual, and learning*. A student with an emotional disability will have a pattern of behaviors or responses that affect educational or developmental performance. Some examples of emotional behavior or response are depression, anxiety, aggression, and atypical communication styles. A student with an intellectual disability has significantly below-average intellectual functioning. A student with a learning disability has a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. Students who qualify for Special Education services are required by law to have an *Individualized Education Plan (IEP)* that contains their educational needs, goals, accommodations, and modifications needed for the classroom.

Explicit bias refers to attitudes or affective reactions that people are aware that they have, that they can alter with relative ease as their beliefs change, and that they can strategically misreport when they want to do so. *Implicit bias* reflects the automatic cognitive associations people have with social groups they cannot consciously control (Starck, 2020, p. 274). This correlates with teacher's decisions when implementing instructional practices with their students in their classrooms.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a data set that indicates class differences. This status is typically determined by education, job or income, access to resources, and social position. For this research, it will indicate those who lack access to resources and will aid in classifying students in poverty.

Guiding Questions

The guiding question for this thesis is: How does a student's cultural background affect their placement within Special Education? The first topic will be to examine research *after 2010* to understand recent results and analysis of cultural background related to Special Education placement, specifically disproportionate numbers of minority students placed in Special Education. Secondly, this literature review will examine current literature on placement in Special Education for students of color, focusing particularly on teacher bias, perception of student behaviors, and testing bias.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

The research for this paper was primarily conducted through online academic databases. LibSearch was the primary search engine and accessed databases such as Academic Search Premier, Sage Premier, and EBSCO. Search terms used were: "Teacher disparities: Teacher Race," "Student Behavior: race: Special Education," "Native American or Indian or Indigenous AND Special Education," "Special Education and Race," "Minority and Special Education," and "Bias assessment and Special Education." This chapter will review the literature on the current trends in minorities in Special Education, focusing on the following: Disproportionality of placement of minority students into Special Education, the influence of cultures on teacher bias, Native American overrepresentation in Special Education, and potential assessment bias in placement tests.

Evidence of Disproportionality of Placement into Special Education

The research indicates that there is a discrepancy between scholars of the existence of disproportionate numbers of minority students in Special Education compared to their white peers. Disparities in research are examined for evidence that disproportionality occurs in Special Education but also that there is evidence of no disproportionality for minority students.

Evidence Disproportionality Occurs

Grindal, Schifter, Schwartz, and Hehir (2019) used data from three states to determine how income status and race impact placement in Special Education. Specifically, they wanted to look at how income and race influence placement in levels of Special Education and how educators determine the least restrictive environment for students. There are different levels of

need in Special Education, through level four, which is the most restrictive, meaning the student is completely removed from their non-disabled peers. The first research question used was whether Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be identified for Special Education than white students within income categories. The second question, once identified, was are Black and Hispanic students more likely than whites to be placed in a separate environment?

Participants were K-12 students in public schools during the 2013 to 2014 school year in three different states. The state provided information on the student's disability status, free or reduced lunch status, and educational placement (level of removal from peers) of the student.

Additionally, grade, gender, school, district, and English language learning status were also provided. In order to maintain fairness and reliable comparison in the data, public and private schools that served only students with disabilities were excluded from the data set (p. 532). Due to the different processes for identifying students with disabilities in each of the three states, Grindal et al. chose to analyze and display the data within the three states separately.

Grindal et al. (2019) first identified students by disability category. Then a determination of placement/setting was identified by the categories of full inclusion, partial inclusion, substantially separate, and other. Students were determined to be low-income if they qualified for free or reduced meals. They were also grouped by race/ethnicity of Black, White, Hispanic, and Other. "Other" included Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and those who reported multiple races.

Grindal et al. (2019) presented meaningful data to determine if Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be identified for Special Education than white students within income categories. They found that a non-low-income Black or Hispanic student had a higher probability

of being identified for Special Education services than non-low-income White students in all three states. Black students were twice as likely to be identified as having an emotional disability or an intellectual disability. Additionally, among students in the same income bracket, Black and Hispanic students had a higher probability of being placed in a separate classroom than their white peers, and more so for lower-income students. In presenting the study's limitations, they felt it was important to note that they did not feel that the placement of students into Special Education and separate settings were causal, meaning that because they were not white and low-income, they were targeted. However, they emphasized that they believed this data revealed issues with the identification systems and that biases lead to the overrepresentation of minorities in Special Education. In their concluding remarks, three trends are identified by this study: overrepresentation by students of color in Special Education among low-income students, no overrepresentation in sensory disabilities that have been identified by a healthcare provider, higher probability of being identified for Special Education for students of color if they are lower income.

Shifrer et al. (2011) found a disproportionate number of African American and Hispanic students identified for Special Education due to these groups' lower average socioeconomic status (SES). They found evidence that identifying a learning disability is associated with a student's sex, SES, and academic history. Lastly, if a student is an English language learner, they are more likely to be identified as needing Special Education services (p. 254).

By analyzing the Elementary Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS) to look at patterns of disability identification, Shifrer et al. (2011) were able to tackle the topic of disproportionality focusing on race, socioeconomic status (SES) and language/English proficiency. The ELS is a

data set of 16,000 students in 750 schools. By eliminating sets of students that did not have the criteria needed for the study, the final data set used by Shifrer et al. was 10,487 students in 546 high schools. The research team chose the ELS due to its specifications on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and disability identification (p. 249).

Zhang et al. (2014) examined the long-term trends in the representation of minorities in Special Education. They analyzed data from 2004-2008 that was collected for the purpose of reporting mandates of IDEA. Their study looked at the overall trend of racial representation and representation among the categories of learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and emotional/behavioral disabilities (p. 120). While this paper aims to examine recent trends, it is important to establish the previous trends based on data from legitimate sources such as the Department of Education and the Commission on Civil Rights.

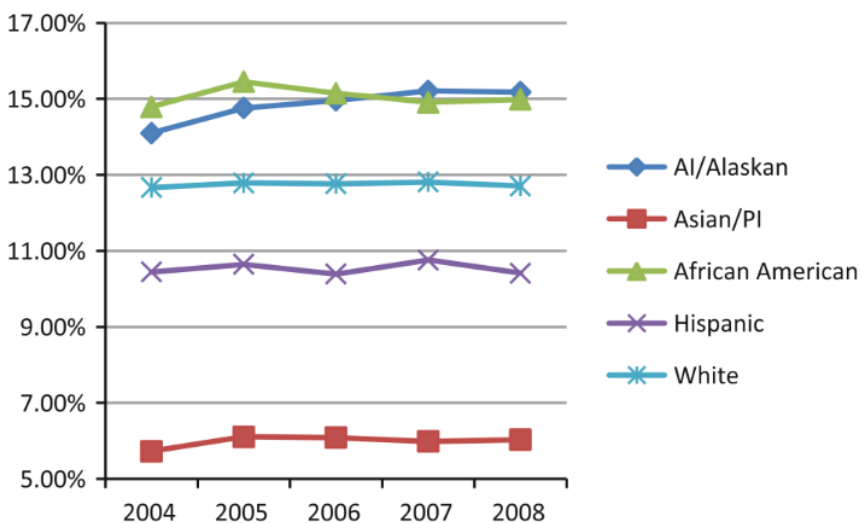


Figure 1: Percentage of Students with Disabilities in each racial group from 2004-2008 (p.121).

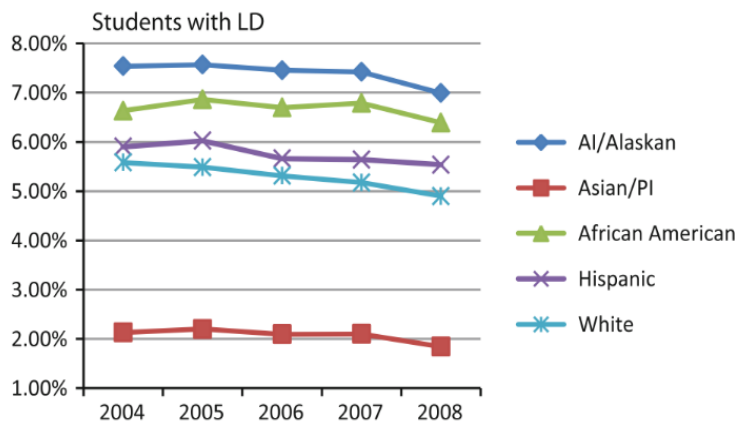


Figure 2: Students with a learning disability 2004-2008 (p. 121).

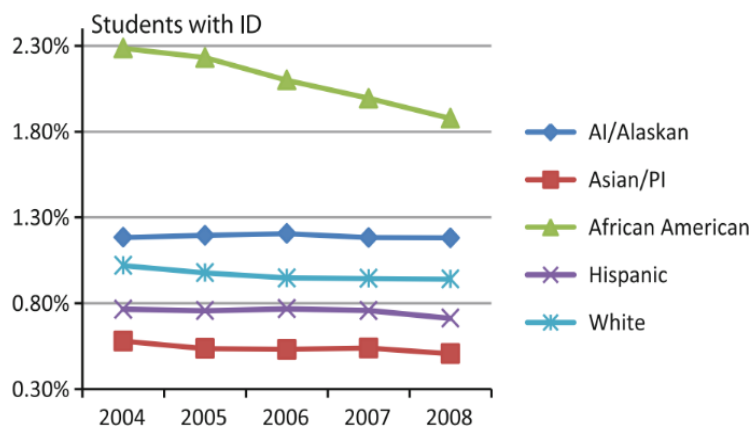


Figure 3: Students with an intellectual disability 2004-2008 (p. 121).

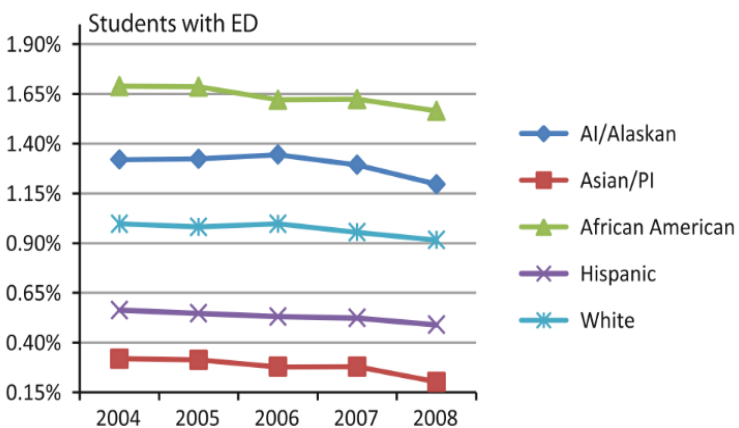


Figure 4: Students with emotional disabilities 2004-2008 (p. 121).

The figures shown above display the following trends: American Indian/Alaska Native and African-Americans are the most represented groups in Special Education. The percentages in Special Education from 2004 to 2008 increased for all groups except for Hispanic students. American Indian/Alaska Native student representation increased the most from 2004 to 2008.

When broken down into Special Education disability categories, American Indian/Alaska Native, African-American, and Hispanic students are represented more than White and Asian/Pacific Islander students. African-American and American Indian/Alaska Native students are the highest in all categories. When considering changes, all groups decreased in representation from 2004-2008. African-American students had the least decline compared to Hispanic and White students. However, representation remained the same for African-American students in Emotional/Behavioral and the Learning Disability categories (Zhang et al., 2014, pp. 121-122).

Importantly, this study examined the correlation between poverty and trends in representation in Special Education. In states with higher poverty rates (poorer states), fewer white students were identified as having a disability. In states with lower poverty rates (affluent states), more White students were identified as having a disability. Poverty did not affect the trend in representation by African-American students. Poverty proved to be a significant indicator for all three groups, showing that the changes in representation differed by state poverty rates. The drop rates of representation in poorer states were higher than in more affluent states (Zhang et al., 2014, p.123).

Zhang et al. (2014) conclude that there were no significant changes in representation from the previous ten years' study, quoting, "it seems that nothing has changed in the past ten years with regard to the overall representation in Special Education" (p.124).

Evidence Against Disproportionality

Morgan et al. (2017) investigated to what extent minority children are identified as disabled compared to white children in elementary and middle school (p. 281). Morgan et al. have participated in many studies looking into the situations of minority children in educational settings (2010, 2012, 2015, 2017). In this study, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort was used to gather data to create a hazard model. The hazard model was used instead of other models because it predicts disability identification only once. Hazard models more appropriately model disability identification over time (p. 283).

The results of their study revealed many important data points for educators. In their first analyses (Model 1) researchers only investigated race or ethnicity and time as predictors for the specific disability condition. Results showed no evidence that racial- and ethnic-minority children are statistically significantly over-identified as having disabilities. However, results did indicate that minorities are under-identified as having speech or language impairments as well as health impairments.

In their second analysis (Model 2), researchers adjusted for socioeconomic status, academic achievement, and behavioral functioning. This produced different results from Model 1, and they found that minority students are less likely than their white peers to be identified as having a disability. Model 2 added more information to the study, involving various outside factors. For example, children without health insurance are less likely to be identified for

speech/language impairments. Findings revealed that U.S. schools are likely to identify children as disabled based on their academic achievement, behavioral self-regulation, and externalizing problem behaviors (Morgan et al., 2017).

As with all studies involved, the ECLS Kindergarten cohort study has the limitation of following students only through elementary school and not further along to high school to see how continued education impacts identification and representation in Special Education. Additionally, Autism Spectrum Disorder and deaf-hard of hearing were not factored into this study (Morgan et al., 2017).

Also arguing lack of evidence of disproportionality in their study, Kincaid and Sullivan (2017) discuss previous studies' weaknesses in determining how socioeconomic status (SES) contributes to the disproportionate numbers of minorities in Special Education. They argue the weakness of using Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) data when determining placement in Special Education. Kincaid argues that as students get older, this data is incomplete due to missing paperwork, increased income for families, or the stigma placed on students using the program (p. 162).

Data collection occurred periodically following a longitudinal design in the fall and spring of Kindergarten, a subsample in the fall of first grade, and again for all participants during the spring of first, third, fifth, and eighth grades. Each wave of data collection utilized multiple instruments; including parent interviews, student assessments, questionnaires completed by various school personnel, and a review of school records.

As addressed, the trend in the disproportionality of minorities in Special Education has been a concern plaguing education in the United States. The U.S. government has amended

IDEA to start reporting disproportionality by disability in each state (USDE, 2010). Studies referenced are showing a new trend in Special Education, and that is one of underrepresentation of minorities in Special Education. Using national data sets, as will be described, Morgan, Farkas, Millemeier, and Maczuga (2017) were able to analyze the data to support this conclusion. They state that those students with poverty exposure, gender, English Language Learner (ELL) status, or minority labels were less likely than white children to be identified as having disabilities. (p. 305)

The data set used to come to this conclusion was public school data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This data set contains test score information from elementary and secondary students from every state, District of Columbia, and Department of Defense schools (Morgan et al., pp. 307-308). This data set reported the student's ethnicity, IDEA-eligible disability, Free or Reduced Lunch status (helpful in determining the influence of poverty), and English language learner status. This data is reliable for achievement levels in reading and math assessment scores for students in 4th, 8th, and 12th grade. Minority children have been less likely than similarly achieving White children to receive Special Education services in the United States since at least 2003.

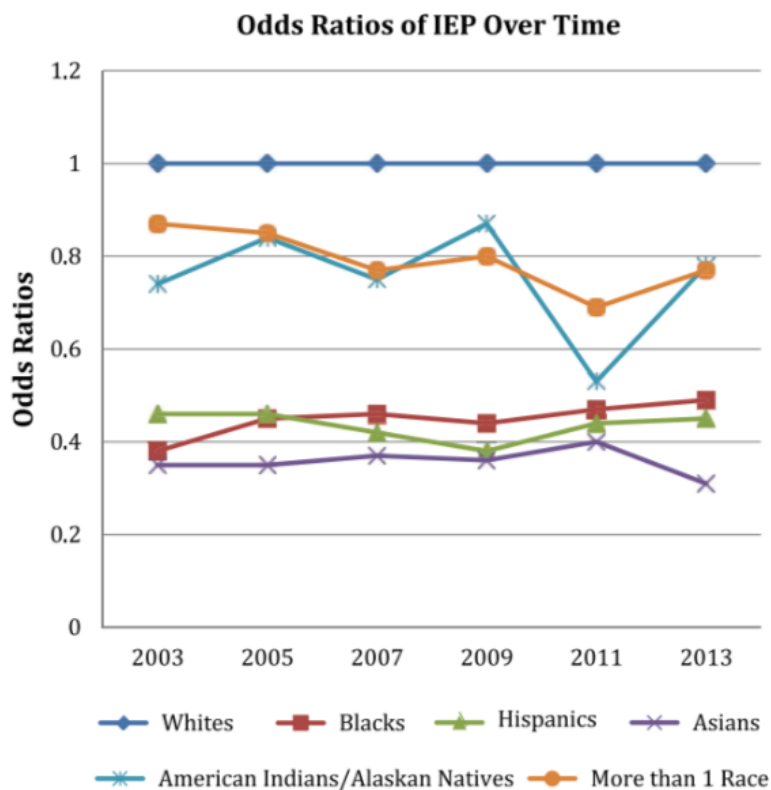


Figure 5: Odds Ratios of having an IEP 2003-2013, Eighth grade (Morgan et al., 2017, p. 316)

Kincaid and Sullivan (2017) decided to use data from the sample of third-grade students due to more information on disability status in third grade to determine evidence of disproportionality. Students' sex, race, level of education of parents, income, and professional status. Additionally, education, income, and professional status were averaged (mean) and used as a level 2 variable. Additionally, third-grade student Special Education status and the label of "high-incidence" (L.D., I.D., and E.D.) were included.

Results showed that girls were less likely to be placed in Special Education, and boys were twice as likely as girls to be placed in Special Education. Asian American students were significantly less likely to be placed in Special Education than their white peers. At the school level, education, professional status (prestige), and income did not significantly affect student

identification for Special Education, meaning that girls and Asian American students were underrepresented. Results showed that parents' income and prestige were unrelated to Special Education identification, but higher levels of parent education were related to reduced risk of identification with a high-incidence disability. This study is significant because it takes the same data used by others and presents information that shows that race is not a factor in the identification of Special Education.

In a more recent study showing evidence of racial disparity in Special Education, Elder et al. (2021) concluded that the school's racial makeup is significant in determining the placement of students into Special Education. The research focused on comparing minority and white students of similar socioeconomic status. The study sought to examine the Special Education gaps in identification in different racial groups, adding a new focus on the composition of races within schools. Initially, the birth records of every child born in Florida between 1992 and 2002 were examined. The research team received the records from the Florida Department of Education. These students were enrolled in schools in Florida from 1995-2013. The data used in this study includes information from 1.6 million students reduced to sample data from Kindergarten and fourth-grade students, leaving the remaining 869,000 students to research. This study, in particular, excluded Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American students, who made up 2.3% of the total students. The researchers looked at factors of race, gender, income, and comprehensive assessment test scores in reading and math.

Elder et al. (2021) found that Black and Hispanic students are less likely to be classified for Special Education programs in these situations of comparison. This study is significant because of the sample size used. Results show that by the time students are in 4th grade, the

disability rate among Black students is 13 percent lower, and Hispanics are 8 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. In contrast, when looking at the data on race in schools, Black and Hispanic students are placed in Special Education more often when they are in majority-white schools. However, in predominantly minority schools, Black and Hispanic students are less likely to be placed in Special Education. For example, in 4th grade, a "Black students attending school where more than 90 percent of students are minorities is roughly 9 percentage points less likely to be identified as disabled than an observationally identical Black student in a school with fewer than 10 percent minorities" (Elder et al., 2021, p. 155).

Implications of this study reveal that students are not properly identified for Special Education within schools in Florida. Elder et al. (2021) suggested that resource constraints in districts with more minority students could be a factor in the identification of students for Special Education but acknowledged that might not be the entire explanation. Their data shows that economic conditions can predict placement and/or non-placement in Special Education.

Evidence of the Influence of Culture on Teacher Bias

Although there is disagreement in the evidence of disproportionality in Special Education, there is discussion of teacher influence on placement of students into Special Education. Specifically, how do biases impact teacher's perceptions of their student's cultural characteristics, resulting in an incorrect placement into Special Education.

On this topic, Cooc (2017) examined whether teachers disproportionately perceive minority students as having a disability. Cooc identified how the "overrepresentation of some minority groups in Special Education in the United States raises concerns about racial inequality

and stratification within schools” (p.1). Cooc cited numerous studies that were completed prior to 2015 for the background information of their article, which presented a new question for this review; if initial studies prior to 2010 proved teacher’s bias, did this cause changes in IDEA and therefore resulted in fewer occurrences of bias in teachers. The author also discussed how minority students with disabilities might not be equitably served compared to their white counterparts due to a lack of funding and resources in their local districts. Cooc decided to focus specifically on teachers in this study because “it is a teacher’s perception of whether a student has a disability that initiates the Special Education process” and points out that perception is likely influenced by the “performance and behavior of other students” (pp. 3-4). The study sought to answer some of these questions.

Before conducting the study, Cooc (2017) identified the limitations of previous studies she researched. Cooc points out that the studies cited in her paper do not consider teacher’s own perceptions of their students, prior studies do not examine contextual evidence, the studies use small sample sizes, and the studies lack data on Asian-American students. Cooc used the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) of 2002, which examined 10th graders and she removed unknowns in order to have a complete sample size of approximately 23,000 students. These students were followed from 2002 until 2012 in the original longitudinal study. Cooc identified the limitation of using data that is over a decade old but assures her findings will provide new information not previously addressed. The results of this study "show that teachers were on average more likely to perceive Black, Hispanic, and Native American students as having a disability than White students. Asian American students, on the other hand, were less likely to be

perceived to have a disability" (p. 20). However, when adding in school contextual factors, the results were reversed and the teachers may not identify students with disabilities as needed.

Fish (2017) also desired to discover how educators' potentially biased decisions can affect placement into Special Education. In her study, the author sought to clarify the assumption that educators' bias is contributing to the over-representation of students of color in Special Education.

Fish (2017) identified her main objective as discovering "how teachers' interpretations of student abilities, skills, and behaviors are affected by student race" (p. 318). Fish targeted third and fourth-grade students and surveyed the teachers of those students with a sample size of 140 students. All surveys asked teachers to rate their likelihood of providing each intervention and additionally, teachers were unaware of the focus of the "exceptionality" of each student. They ranked their decision to provide intervention from 1-4, one being not likely and four being very likely to provide an intervention.

Fish's study (2017) revealed that white males are more likely to be referred for exceptionalities when they have academic struggles than other males of color in this age group. Inversely, young males of color are more likely to be referred for having behavior challenges than their white counterparts. Overall, there is evidence that there is racial bias in education, although not the bias the assumptions of educators may have suggested, being that minority students are more likely to be referred (Fish, 2017).

The studies selected show the discrepancies between reality and assumptions. It is worth exploring further what current studies reveal how culture and ethnicity affect a student's placement into Special Education. Revelations in studies during the nineties and early 2000s

indicated that racial bias played a role in the determination for Special Education. It is apparent that previous studies were heard and taken seriously by those in the roles of Education. Therefore changes in IDEA and state policies were created to address the issue of racial bias and discrepancies in placements in Special Education.

Bates and Glick (2013) used the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort of 1998 to determine the extent to which children receive different evaluations from their teachers depending on the racial/ethnic match of teachers and students. There is a discussion of the white student presented as the model student and that cultural differences contribute to teachers that will indicate a student has more behaviors because of their perception of what a disruptive student is based on biases. Similar to other studies referenced here, Bates and Glick used data reported in the spring of Kindergarten, first, third and fifth grade. Teachers were asked to rate students on their "acting out" behaviors of arguing, fighting, getting angry, acting impulsively, and disturbing ongoing activities on a scale from one (not often) to four (very often). In order to be included in the study, all four assessments needed to be present for the participants. However, as the study was published in 2013, it relies on data from students that were in the fifth grade in 2003-2004. The results of this study are important but may not contribute to the discussion on recent trends in the placement of students in Special Education. They analyzed the data starting with the student's racial/ethnic identification. They also sought to compare the data for those teachers that identified similarly to students, so the race and gender of teachers were also identified. Additionally, Bates and Glick factored in the teacher's education level, assuming that experience level could be associated with a teacher's expectations of student behavior.

After organizing the data to include the above factors, initial results indicated that teachers characterized behaviors differently by students' race. Overall, scores tend to reflect few externalizing behaviors on the part of most children. However, minority students are the ones most likely to be rated as having more externalizing behaviors. First, Black students tend to have teachers who rate their entire classes as having worse externalizing behavior scores than non-Hispanic white students in first, third, and fifth grade. The majority of teachers in the sample are non-Hispanic white. Black students are the minority group most likely to have a Black teacher and, therefore a match between themselves and their teachers at each grade level. Hispanic and Asian children are the least likely to have a teacher from their own racial/ethnic background. Evidence from the data shows that minority children overwhelmingly attend schools where the student body is primarily made up of minority students. Also, minority students are more likely to attend public schools as well as schools that receive Title I funding. Minority students are also more likely to attend schools with a higher percentage of minority teachers. Additionally, minority students are more likely to be associated with externalizing behavior than white students.

When comparing minority students, Black students were reported to have behaviors the most, while Asian students were reported to have the least. Hispanic students are reported to have similar behaviors to white students. The results were the same even when factoring in teacher gender and race. Black and Asian teachers rated students differently than their non-Hispanic white counterparts. Black teachers tended to rate students as having fewer behaviors, and Asian teachers tended to rate students exhibiting more externalizing behaviors than non-Hispanic white teachers. For example, black children receive more favorable ratings when they

have a black teacher compared to when they have a teacher of a different race than themselves. This reveals that teacher bias and stereotypes persist in education (Bates & Glick, 2013, p. 1184).

In their study on minority students with disabilities, Wu et al. (2014) sought to consider the impact that disability status had on minority students in elementary school, specifically seeking evidence that being identified as a minority could lead to further negative impacts for a student with a disability. In order to study this possible negative impact, Wu et al. also used the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study and three analyses to identify a conclusion. First, taking data from Kindergarten to fifth grade, they built growth models on understanding these students' reading and math achievements over time. Next, they predicted the effects that having a minority status could have on the growth of students in reading and math over time. Lastly, they identified the group of students targeted as at-risk due to their lagging achievement using this growth model (p. 367).

Scores for math and reading were analyzed from the fall of kindergarten to the spring of fifth grade. The study sampled 9,796 students, and by removing the students and situations with missing data, the final sample used by Wu et al. (2014) was 6,446 students. Disability status from kindergarten IEPs, race reported by parents to school documents, socioeconomic status, and learning-related behaviors reported by teachers while in kindergarten was used to determine longitudinal data and outcomes through a "parallel processes growth outcome" for students in this study. Initial results determined that students who displayed low reading achievement also displayed low math achievement. Those with low progress in reading also displayed low progress in math. Specifically, results showed that reading and mathematics achievement were highly correlated both initially and over time; higher achievement in one domain in Kindergarten

had a statistically significant and positive effect on the subsequent growth in the other through fifth grade, the end of the age studied.

The first question answered by this study was, do disability and racial/ethnic status predict children's initial growth in reading and mathematics achievement over time? The results showed that regardless of race/ethnicity, children with disabilities tended to start lower and grow slower in reading and mathematics. Minority children also averaged lower intercepts and slopes than children who were white. Learning-related behaviors and socioeconomic status showed positive effects on both initial status and growth rates of reading and math (Wu et al., 2013, pp. 370-71).

Secondly, the study looked at the data to answer whether disability and race/ethnicity status predict latent class membership, meaning, could status in Kindergarten be correlated with disadvantages that continue? When looking at data, they sought to determine "disadvantage" for students, defining "doubly disadvantaged" as students that were low in both reading and math. In reading and math, average or consistent growth was defined as "typical growth." They found that children with disabilities were 2.30 times as likely as children without disabilities to be in the doubly disadvantaged versus typical growth class, minorities were more likely than White children to be in the doubly disadvantaged class, and children with more frequent learning-related behaviors were less likely to be in the doubly disadvantaged class. Children who showed more consistent learning-related behaviors, who entered Kindergarten at an older age, and from higher socioeconomic status families were more likely to show higher achievement (Wu et al., 2014, p. 371).

Finally, Wu et al. (2014) summarized their findings. Their data supported other studies and evidence that disability and minority status independently predicted lower reading and mathematics achievement. "However, our results provided no empirical evidence of an interaction between these two risk factors." They found that a student with a disability will have the same academic disadvantage regardless of their minority status (p. 371-72).

Using the Kindergarten data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), Minor (2014) seeks to answer how kindergarten teachers rate black and white students' academic ability and social and behavioral skills differently and to what extent do test scores, teacher perceptions of academic ability in the fall of the school year, and social and behavior skills (SBS) explain racial differences in teacher evaluations of students' academic ability in the spring of Kindergarten. Only students who identified as black or white were used for the sample. Biracial students were excluded. Additionally, to be included in the study, students needed to have completed the entire year within the same school, resulting in complete data for the fall and spring of Kindergarten. Therefore, the study samples data from 1,988 black and 8,328 white students.

Both student academic ability and teacher perceptions of academic ability were studied. Academic ability was measured through a short version of a larger test using a smaller subset of questions. Teachers rated their students' academic abilities on a scale of 1-5, one being "not yet" and five being "proficient." The students' teachers also rated social behavioral skills through a Social Rating Scale. Teachers were asked to describe student attentiveness, task persistence, eagerness to learn, learning independence, ability to be organized, ability to control his or her

actions, and ability to get along with others. A high-value score would indicate that students rarely show negative externalizing behaviors.

The results of the study revealed the teacher's perception of black students' academic ability regardless of the results of scores. Student academic ability in all racial groups was more similar in the spring than in the fall, meaning students' academic performance improved. However, teachers rated black students' academic abilities lower than white students in both the spring and the fall. For behaviors, teacher ratings do not show growth from fall to spring for black students, showing a steady rating, despite the socialization that occurs for students in schools. Minor states, "behaving well for black students has a larger influence on teacher perceptions of students' academic ability than it does for white students" (Minor, 2014, p.1). Minor's study identifies a concern in the perception of behaviors of minority students, specifically that of African American students.

Examining teacher expectations as well, Gershenson et al. (2016) investigated whether student-teacher demographic mismatch affects high school teachers' expectations for students' educational attainment. They looked for systematic biases in teachers' expectations related to the demographic match between students and teachers using survey data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, from which two teachers reported their expectations for each student's achievement. This may have long-term effects on students because if their teachers have biased views, these could influence students' beliefs and affect their decisions about effort within the classroom (p. 210). Gershenson et al. (2016) present three ways that teacher expectations can influence the outcomes for their students. First, the concern that a teacher's expectations could directly lead to students having a negative perception of education and

learning. Second, this may lead to students conforming to teachers' beliefs and biases, leading to students being unsuccessful, like a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (p. 211-212). Finally, teachers who stigmatize certain types of students may modify how they teach, evaluate, and advise them, potentially leading to lowered educational achievements.

In order to determine whether teacher biases affect student perceptions, Gershenson et al. (2016) used the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 by the National Center for Education Statistics. Within this study, reading and math teachers were asked subjective survey questions about their tenth-grade students. The ELS also contains students' demographic and socioeconomic information. The data sample was 16,810 black and white (only) students who were evaluated by two teachers. Results indicate many trends in the data. First, it was found that teachers have systematically lower expectations for black students' educational attainment than white students, and teachers have significantly higher expectations for females. White and female teachers are shown to be more optimistic about students' educational outcomes. Of teachers' rating expectations, teachers are about 20 percentage points less likely to expect black and Hispanic students to complete a college degree but 16 percentage points more likely to expect Asian students to do so. Gershenson states that "teachers' expectations for students' educational attainment are shaped by students' sex, SES, and academic performance. Importantly, when making within-school comparisons, these factors dominate the effect of race and ethnicity" (p. 213-215). While the study is current, the data is dated, and trends in equity have not been considered in the data.

In a 2020 study, Starck et al. sought to discover if teachers perpetuate racial inequality in schools. In order to answer their questions, they searched data sets more recent than that of

Gershenson (2016) to compare teacher bias to adults with similar characteristics (teachers and non-teachers). They also sought to answer the question if there was a significant difference in biases between teachers and non-teachers. The study investigated explicit (conscious) as well as implicit (unconscious) bias of teachers and non-teachers (p. 272-273). Starck et al. (2020) define explicit bias as “attitudes or affective reactions that people are aware that they have, that they can alter with relative ease as their beliefs change, and that they can strategically misreport when they want to do so” (p. 274). They summarize implicit bias as reflecting individuals' predispositions with different social groups and having limited control over their implicit biases.

Citing evidence from other studies, Starck et al. (2020) discussed the possibility and assumption that teachers would tend to be less biased than their adult counterparts. However, they provided evidence that this is not always the case (p. 275). In order to answer the question, they used two data sets: Project Implicit (Xu et al., 2014) and the American National Election Study (ANES) 2008 Time Series Study. Project Implicit is a data set that collected data from hundreds of thousands of self-administered, web-based Implicit Association Tests (IATs) and other explicit bias measures. The ANES is a regularly administered survey gathered before and after every presidential election. The researchers chose to use the 2008 study because it sampled data for implicit and explicit bias.

Using the Project Implicit data, they were able to gather data from those who indicated that they were preschool through 12th-grade instructors, living in the U.S., and were 18 years or older. This resulted in a data set of 68,930, of whom identified themselves as female (73.7%) (Starck et al., 2020, p. 275). The following table is important information for the data set used with the Project Implicit IATs:

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Teacher and Nonteacher
Subsamples in Project Implicit Data

Study 1 Descriptive Statistics		
	General Public	PreK–12 Teachers
Sample size	1,561,269	68,930
Age (in years)	29.0 (11.7)	34.9 (11.5)
Sex		
Female	936,101 (60.0%)	50,811 (73.7%)
Male	625,168 (40.0%)	18,119 (26.3%)
Race		
White	1,109,727 (71.1%)	56,429 (81.9%)
Black	196,738 (12.6%)	6,029 (8.7%)
Other	254,804 (16.3%)	6,472 (9.4%)
Ethnicity		
Not Latino	1,415,549 (90.7%)	64,588 (93.7%)
Latino	145,720 (9.3%)	4,342 (6.3%)
Education		
High school or less	185,225 (11.9%)	655 (1%)
Some college	793,478 (50.8%)	5,877 (8.5%)
BA or higher	582,566 (37.3%)	62,398 (90.5%)
Political orientation	4.5 (1.7)	4.7 (1.7)
Implicit bias	.32 (.45)	.32 (.45)
Explicit bias	.33 (2.05)	.30 (1.79)

Note. Numbers in parentheses (excluding percentages) are standard deviations.

Figure 6: Project Implicit Data revealing the difference between the general public and K-12 teachers in implicit and explicit bias (Starck et al., 2020, p. 275).

It is important to note that the numbers in each category and the percentages of participants are fairly similar. While explicit bias is lower with teachers, implicit bias is the same result, meaning that the unconscious bias is similar to the general public.

In the second study using election data, the researchers point out that the Project Implicit data is not nationally representative because it was self-selecting participation. The ANES data addresses that issue through a nationally representative sample of implicit and explicit biases.

Through measured criteria, including specification of occupation and age, the data set for this study resulted in 1,984 individuals, narrowed down to 63 total who identified themselves as preschool to 12th-grade teachers.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Teacher and Nonteacher
Subsamples for American National Election Study

Study 2 Descriptive Statistics		
	General Public	PreK–12 Teachers
Sample size	1,921	63
Age (in years)	47.403 (17.206)	43.194 (11.452)
Sex		
Female	1,066 (55.5%)	49 (77.8%)
Male	855 (44.5%)	14 (22.2%)
Race		
White	1,202 (62.6%)	45 (71.4%)
Black	475 (24.7%)	10 (15.9%)
Other	237 (12.3%)	8 (12.7%)
Ethnicity		
Not Latino	1,507 (78.4%)	48 (76.2%)
Latino	411 (21.4%)	15 (23.8%)
Years of education	13.097 (2.528)	16.063 (1.469)
Political orientation		
Conservative	997 (51.9%)	29 (46.0%)
Moderate	209 (10.9%)	6 (9.5%)
Liberal	715 (37.2%)	28 (44.4%)
Implicit bias	.12 (.29)	.11 (.28)
Explicit bias		
Thermometer	1.12 (19.82)	2.86 (16.58)
Symbolic racism	2.63 (.93)	2.77 (1.04)

Note. Numbers in parentheses (excluding percentages) are standard deviations.

Figure 7: Implicit and Explicit Bias using the National Election Study (Starck et al., 2020, p. 279)

Results of this show very little difference between teachers' and non-teachers' explicit and implicit bias. Teachers do show a lower implicit bias score overall.

Through both the Project Implicit and ANES studies used, when comparing teachers to non-teachers, the results were that there is not a significant difference in implicit bias and explicit bias in participants.

Focus on Native American Student's Overrepresentation in Special Education

In conducting research, frequently, there has been a lack of information on Native American and Asian students in relation to data samples for educational studies. Because of the smaller amount of the overall population, Native American and Asian students are left out of the research. "For child's race, we exclude the small numbers of Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans and examine only the gaps between white, Black, and Hispanic children" (Elder, 2021, p. 65). Also, "Results indicated complete absence of American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races in these studies." (Carrero et al., 2017, p. 253) In the study using the ECLS-K study, students identified as American Indians were not included in the results based on recommendations from the developers of the study (Kincaid & Sullivan, 2017, p. 163). Also, using the ECLS-K study, Hibel et al. (2008), found that the higher rate of placement in Special Education for Native American students may be due to a lack of academic readiness upon entering schools, as measured by standardized tests in reading and math.

American Indian and Alaska Native populations make up approximately 2.9 percent of the total population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). As evidenced, minority students have higher numbers in Special Education, and there is a concern about the overrepresentation of Native American students in Special Education. Zhang (2014) found that the rates of minority students in Special Education have not changed significantly, and Native

American students' rates of placement in Special Education are increasing. Researchers found a large portion of these students were not staying in school long enough to determine the effects of their Special Education placement and transition services (Matsa, 2018).

Gritzmacher and Gritzmacher (2010) researched referral and placement in Special Education throughout Minnesota and attributed the increase in Native American students into Special Education because “these students are often referred for assessment because their ways of learning and responding are not the same as those of the dominant culture” (Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher, 2010, p. 11). Students who should possibly not be eligible for Special Education services are labeled with a disability and are confused about how the assessment process qualified them. Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher called for better procedures in the referral and assessment process, as well as education for school personnel about cultural differences to prevent the overidentification of minority students (Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher, 2010, p. 29). Due, in part, to this research, the Minnesota Department of Education has implemented the "Dream Catcher Project," a program to help schools prevent the overidentification of Native American students in Special Education (*Dream Catcher Project*, 2022). This program provides cultural awareness training, support through collaboration with the Department of Education, and support for schools to collaborate on behalf of Native American students.

In her study, Squires (2016) explores the Special Education pre-referral process through the lens of two white teachers also in Minnesota. These teachers offered students academic and behavioral support before a Special Education evaluation. The two teachers were referred to Squires through the School Psychologist. Squires herself taught within the school district that is in the study; however, the actual name of the school has been given a pseudonym. The

pseudonym is without explanation; however, it can be assumed that it is for the purpose of presenting the information and protecting those involved. Native students within the school population were 25% of the total population, but represented 38% of Special Education students.

To gather data, classroom observations, interviews, and documents were collected. Observations consisted of seven 45-minute classes, four interviews with each participant, and email correspondence over a three-month period. Teachers did not use a standardized practice for pre-referral, for example, Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies. This is not recommended, as it is subjective information for referral to Special Education and is not based on data. Students that were referred were labeled as "disengaged, unmotivated, and non-participatory." When looking at a cultural lens, this is not an objective recommendation strategy for Special Education; as stated by Squires, the teachers' expectations of "attentive and academically oriented students were incongruous with their understanding of traditional Native American learners" (p.21).

These studies address the larger issue of cultural bias and the overrepresentation of minority students in Special Education. It is important to continue to find data, even within the smaller groups of minority students, to determine how the dominant culture impacts the successes of those of a different culture.

Addressing the Possibility of Bias in Special Education Assessments

Ready and Wright (2011) examined how teachers perceive students' abilities differently. They focused on how test scores and classroom demographics helped explain achievement differences. Similar to other studies, they used the ECLS-K. Starting with over 1,000 schools, the analytic sample was narrowed down. From each school, 24 students were targeted that had data from both the fall and spring of Kindergarten. These students were in the same classroom for the

entire school year with the same teacher. Socioeconomic information given was a necessary criteria in order for each of the students to be part of the sample. The students took both the fall and spring reading and math assessments and were evaluated by their teachers in both the fall and spring. The final sample was 9,493 children from 1,822 classrooms (Ready & Wright, 2011, p.341). They found that teachers, similarly to Gershenson (2016), underestimated the ability of black students in the fall and were more likely to have accurate assessments of abilities in the spring.

Intelligence tests are used as a data input to determine if a student's I.Q. affects their ability to participate in the general education classroom. A student can have an average I.Q., but still need services for their emotional/behavior disorder, for example. The Wechsler Intelligence Test is used nationwide as a determinant of a student's I.Q. in Special Education evaluations that determine placement into Special Education.

In their analysis of the effectiveness and bias of the WISC-IV intelligence test used for Native American students during the qualification process for Special Education services, Nakano and Watkins (2013) specifically sample a group of Native American students due to the lack of data provided by previous studies and call for more studies to be done to specifically address the educational needs of Native American students, prior to their own. The sample studied included 176 Native American students attending six school districts in Central and Northern Arizona. These students were examined because they had received psychoeducational evaluations to determine their eligibility for Special Education services and placement. To meet the criteria for the study, the students had to have all subtests of the WISC-IV available, classify as Native American, and speak English as their primary language. These students were majority

male, 40% Navajo affiliation, and were examined for the following disabilities: learning disability, cognitive impairment, other health impairment, emotional disturbance, autism, and traumatic brain injury (p. 115).

This study assumed that the students were assessed by professionals who accurately and reliably gathered information. Second, 176 students is a small sample and cannot be taken as a fact for all students of every nation/tribe recognized in the United States. It did not factor in the environments, urban or rural, in which the students lived. Lastly, there was no data to inform the level of English proficiency of the students included in the sample.

Due to their focus on Native American students, they were able to prove the reliability of the use of the WISC-IV as one measure to determine the Special Education placement of Native American students (Nakano & Watkins, 2013, pp. 963-64). No structural bias was evidenced through the data collected.

Using the Early Childhood Longitudinal study, Ouazad (2017) sought to decipher if there was evidence of racial bias in how students are graded and assessed in the classroom by their teachers. Teacher assessments are available to be scrutinized for all students from Kindergarten through 5th grade. Using the information in the study, Ouazad estimated the same-race effect on teacher assessments. Grades are important to consider as they are an important factor for determining student achievement and success.

The information taken from the ECLS included 48,065 observations, by teachers, in Math and 67,885 in English. 14% of students are black, 16% are Hispanic, and 6% are Asian students. Significantly, this data allowed Ouazad to follow observations for students throughout multiple grades. On average, seven observations were recorded for each student over the years studied.

Teachers were asked to assess students' skills in Math and English; however, they were asked *separately* to view students' testing results in each subject. For the skills, teachers were asked to rate students' skills based on a 5-point scale "Not yet, Beginning, In Progress, Intermediate, and Proficient." (Ouazad, 2017, p. 341)

Through the selected identification strategies used, Ouazad concluded that being assessed by a same-race teacher increases teacher assessments of students' performance by 4 percent of a standard deviation in English and by 7 percent of a standard deviation in math. Based on the data, students who have been assessed by the same-race teacher show higher assessments. The difference is noticeable, with the dashed line showing a clearly lower teacher assessment of skills

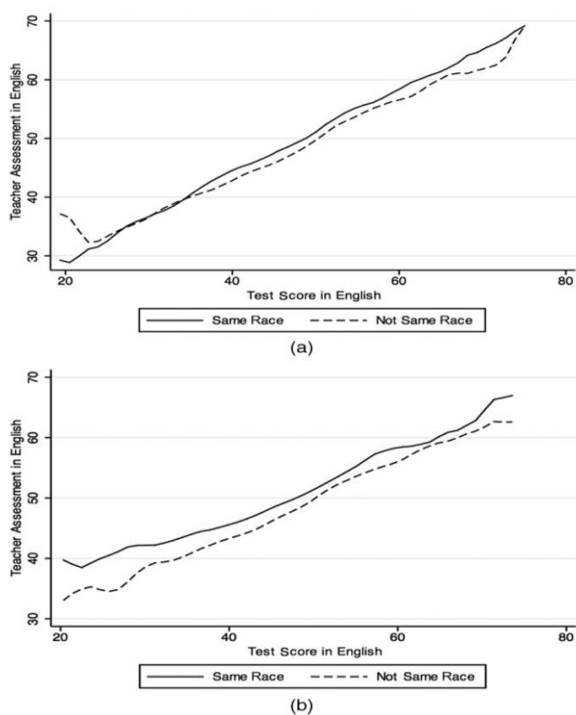


Figure 8: Teacher Assessment scores in English for student race compared to their teacher (p. 343).

Interestingly, results show that black and Hispanic teachers give higher scores to white students than white teachers to minority students. It is important to note that because teacher assessments are not feedback for students, the students do not see the ratings, and teachers are unlikely to try to please students with positive remarks.

Sullivan et al. (2019) focused on school psychologists' bias when assessing students for Special Education. School psychologists are a significant part of Special Education evaluations, conducting the intelligence, behavioral, and academic aspects of a student's history. Sullivan et al. (2019) conducted the three studies in three different states, with approximately 100 participants in each study. Each group evaluated a different disability: emotional disability, intellectual disability, and autism. Each participant was provided three case studies at three different levels of ambiguity: Low ambiguity that did not meet the criteria of the disability being studied, high ambiguity that did meet the criteria of the disability, and a highly ambiguous study that was indeterminate of the criteria for the disability. The researchers discovered no racial bias in the emotional disability and intellectual disability groups and slight bias in the autism group (Sullivan et al., 2019). The authors noted that studies of this scope have not been completed for 20-30 years and that many reforms in Special Education and changes in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have occurred to combat potential bias and illegitimate placement into Special Education. In conclusion, the study stated: "our findings challenge both the supposition that school psychologists *systematically* over-identify Black boys with disabilities and the more recent suggestion that school psychologists are less responsive to the Special Education needs of these students" (Sullivan et al., 2019, p. 103). This study challenges the belief that students of color are disproportionately referred to Special Education. It does not

dismiss the possibility of it occurring, but it somewhat supports the idea that race is generally not a deciding factor in a student's eligibility for Special Education services.

School psychologists play an important role in determining the placement of students into Special Education. In 2019, the Department of Psychology at the University of Minnesota wanted to study the "disparate treatment of students by race in evaluations required to determine eligibility." (Sullivan et al., 2019, p. 90). Via three studies, their goal was to "measure the influence of race and assessment data on school psychologists' perceptions of students' eligibility for Special Education in cases centering on emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, or autism, respectively." (p. 90) These researchers discussed the historical perspective of their central question, "Are school psychologists' Special Education eligibility decisions reliable and unbiased?" They found that the studies contain conflicting opinions about whether or not students of color are *systematically* experiencing higher rates of being identified for Special Education due to their ethnicity.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of the Research

The disproportionality of races in Special Education has been a concern for the U.S. Department of Education. Many factors, including educational systems, poverty, displacement, cultural bias, and home and family structures, have contributed to the majority of minorities being placed into Special Education. The literature research focused on discovering evidence of this disproportionality, potential causes of disproportionality, including cultural differences and biases, as well as systems of assessment for potential Special Education students. Specifically, the lack of data concerning Native American/Alaska Native students was addressed and summarized.

Evidence of disproportionate amounts of minority students in Special Education is mixed, proving that the same data can be interpreted with different results, depending on the variables used. Regardless of the discrepancies, the data proves that there are issues with regard to students encountering poverty, racial biases, and systems that are not supportive of minority achievement. Grindal et al. (2019), using data from three states, found that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be placed in Special Education. Additionally, Grindal et al. pointed out that low-income status was a high factor associated with placement in Special Education for all students, not just minority students. Shifrer et al. (2011) also found that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be placed in Special Education than their white counterparts. Zhang et al. (2014) hoped to find that trends of disproportionality in Special Education had changed but concluded that this correlation had not changed; in fact, this group of researchers found that being Black and in poverty were indicators of being more likely to be placed in Special Education.

Alternatively, Elder et al. (2021), Kincaid and Sullivan (2017), as well as Morgan et al. (2015 and 2017) found that although race was a factor in placement in Special Education, the numbers showed an *underrepresentation* in minority students in Special Education. In 2015, Morgan et al. removed socioeconomic factors and found that there was not a disproportionate amount of minority students; in fact, minority students were less likely than their peers to be identified for services. In their 2017 study, Morgan et al. found that poverty is more of an indication of a need for Special Education than minority status. Finally, Elder et al. (2019) found that minority students were not identified at the same rate for services as their white counterparts. They addressed the rate of placement for students depending on the makeup of their school; for example, minority students in a white majority school are more likely to be placed, but in a minority majority school, they are less likely to be identified as needing Special Education services. Kincaid and Sullivan (2017) found that girls and Asian Americans are less likely than boys to be placed in Special Education but did not find significant data that minority students overall are more likely to be placed. They stated that race is not a factor in identifying students for Special Education.

When examining how potential bias by teaching professionals can affect students' placement into Special Education, results revealed that bias existed and created disadvantages for minority students. Cooc (2017) looked at data concerning the disproportionate perceptions of minority students, pointing out that equity in schools is a contributing factor. Cooc found that teachers are more likely to perceive minority students as having lower academic success, with the exception of Asian American students. Fish (2017) also examined the perception of ability based on race and found that statistically, males are more likely to be identified for services, with

White students being referred for academic needs and Black students being referred for behavior services. Bates and Glick (2013) took the behavior bias further and found that behaviors are characterized differently by race. Minorities are shown to have more behaviors, particularly when viewed by white teachers, but not exclusively. Wu et al. (2014) found that once identified as having a disability, students were assured of an academic disadvantage compared to their peers. Minor (2011) scoured data to identify how teachers rated the academic ability of blacks versus whites. Minor found that black students were rated lower than their white peers and were more likely to be identified as having significant behavioral problems. Gershenson et al. (2016) hoped to find data that would show a situation in which minority students were not at a disadvantage when compared to their white peers. They were able to find data to show that when minority students were matched with a teacher who was of a similar race, they were less likely to have academic disadvantages and were more likely to be rated better on their academic achievement levels.

When addressing issues with assessment bias, whether from school professionals, classroom grading procedures, or intelligence tests, data is consistent in showing that when objectivity is removed, there is more likely to be bias resulting in disadvantages for students. Sullivan (2019) and Watkins (2013) looked at testing procedures by School Psychologists and ratings and evaluations of intelligence data from assessments. They did not indicate any bias from the results, indicating that the testing procedures and testing instruments are valid assessments for all cultures. However, for grading students and determining their academic abilities, which can be a subjective choice, bias has been revealed in studies by Ready and Wright (2011) and Ouazad (2017).

Limitations of the Research

In summarizing the research about disproportionate numbers of minorities in Special Education, the first limitation encountered was the sources of data that the studies used to compile their findings. Many of the studies cited data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of 1998 or the Elementary/Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002. While this can contribute to consistency in results, it remains limited in its accessibility to information on many different minority groups. Zhang (2014) points out that “the national database only provides racial information, without more specific information about diversity beyond race. More research is needed to cross-examine overrepresentation with other measures of minority or diversity such as ethnicity, home language, socioeconomic status, and so on” (p. 125). This was addressed in the section of the research with the limited information on Native American students provided in the studies. Additionally, “current” studies, as I was researching studies 2010 or later, used this information from the ECLS and ELS gathered from 1998-2007 and 2002 to determine their results. Therefore, the current study is based on data that may be outdated and not current. The purpose of this research was to find current trends in disproportionality, and using data from 20 years ago does not help to indicate the possible changes in the placement of minority children into Special Education. Also, the ECLS and ELS are focused on elementary-aged children, leaving out indications of disproportionate placement of minority students in secondary grade levels.

Implication for Future Research

Disproportionality, as shown, is disputed, even when using the same sources of data. More longitudinal studies need to be conducted to identify the comparison between minority

students and their white counterparts. Socioeconomic status and Special Education outcomes are important pieces of this. Grindal (2019) and Kincaid (2017) call for future IDEA mandates to be put in place to also report on Special Education identification and its relation to income status because race is not a singular indicator of placement into Special Education.

To address potential biases of educators, more research on before and after cultural bias training procedures needs to be conducted, particularly in its impact on the placement for students into interventions, including Special Education.

Implications for Professional Application

The literature presented does not find uniformity on the issue of disproportionate numbers of minorities in Special Education. However, whether or not there is underrepresentation or overrepresentation, each is equally detrimental. Either students who should not be placed in Special Education are removed from their peers, or students who need extra support and services are not having their educational needs met. As Morgan et al. (2015) argued, "the last thing we need is to compound these widespread disparities in disability diagnosis and treatment by making school officials reluctant to refer black children for special-education eligibility evaluations out of fear of being labeled racially biased" (p. 1). Shifrer (2011) claims that disproportionate numbers of African American students are directly related to their lower socioeconomic status.

Cohen et al. (2015) point out that more effort should be placed towards academic interventions in reading and math prior to placing students in Special Education due to an academic deficit rather than a disability (p.23). School systems also need to consider their populations and demographics, a more equitable distribution of resources, and consideration of

schools with high populations of minority students. Many studies (Elder et al., 2019; Grindal et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2014) proclaim the racial disparities in the identification of Special Education students and reveal that schools with higher minority populations have difficulties identifying and servicing students with high needs.

Overrepresentation is likely to continue because the literature reveals it can be correlated to low income, cultural differences, and English proficiency issues. If the desire is to address the overrepresentation, then it is necessary to improve resources and funding to schools could eliminate disparities for minority families. Equally concerning is the inability of schools to provide Special Education resources for their students. High minority population schools tend to have fewer resources; due to this discrepancy, schools could be either less likely to identify students or unable to provide services to students with disabilities (Morgan et al., 2014, p. 287).

Schools and teachers need to be aware that teacher biases are similar to the general public, and the awareness and importance of objectivity need to be ever-present in classrooms. Gershenson (2016) found that non-black teachers have significantly lower educational expectations for black students than black teachers. Bates and Glick (2013) address the stigma of Asian students as the least of the groups to display externalizing behaviors and African American students as exhibiting the most and least desirable student behaviors. Minor (2014) also determined that lower expectations can affect student outcomes. Ready and Wright (2011) acknowledge teacher bias in literacy abilities for students leading to disparate outcomes for students. As Starck (2020) found, teacher bias is not significantly different from the general public, and implicit and explicit bias exists at a comparable rate. Starck also points out that studies have proven that more bias training for teachers helps improve educational outcomes for

minority students. These findings, specifically how lower expectations could affect student outcomes, could help teachers and schools identify the contributions to this expectation and better address it in the future.

With the addition of more teachers who are not white, biases that can potentially impact students lessen. This can have a more positive outcome for students, as addressed by Cooc (2017). They found that, on average, teachers were more likely to identify minority students as having a disability than white students. Cooc acknowledges that teachers today are more cognizant of biases and may address and account for those limitations when assessing the needs and skills of their students: “it is a teacher’s perception of whether a student has a disability that initiates the Special Education process” (Cooc, 2017, p. 3). Gershenson et al. (2016) encourage a more immediate solution of hiring a more diverse staff and teachers of color, as most teachers are white.

Until more people of color enter the education profession, more culturally responsive interventions, prior to being placed in Special Education, need to happen for students of color. Academic gaps may be confused for a learning disability. If such gaps can be addressed and improved, students may not need to be placed into Special Education to address their gaps in reading and math achievement. Additionally, while there are few teachers of color, more cultural training is needed to understand if academic behaviors are a result of a disability or cultural differences. For example, the researchers determined the increased potential of African American boys to be placed in Special Education due to their behaviors, indicating that there might be social differences rather than learning differences.

Conclusion

A student's cultural background and race should not indicate their likelihood of being placed into Special Education. The research indicates that culture is not a factor alone in placement in Special Education but that alongside other factors such as socioeconomic status, poverty, parent education, and access to resources, a student's culture can be a contributing factor to placement in Special Education. More research needs to be done to see how all these factors can contribute to disproportionate numbers of students in Special Education.

The social factors that place students in Special Education should be addressed by IDEA and education systems. Training for teachers to reduce biases, increase support, and address achievement gaps needs to be implemented in all schools.

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