

Implications of the Reassessment Policy on the Elementary Classroom

Prisha Puri¹ and Jonathan Frishman[#]

¹Jordan High School, USA

[#]Advisor

ABSTRACT

Previous researchers have found a link between enhanced academic performance and personalized teacher aid in students diagnosed with learning disorders. This finding from the pre-existing research inspired the goal of this research study: to examine the implications of the reassessment policy required under IDEA on the elementary classroom environment. The analysis focused on how the reassessment policy impacts the student being diagnosed, their peers, as well as the teacher responsible for gathering data on the student being assessed. To assess the role the reassessment policy plays on elementary schools in Katy, two methodology tools were utilized, a quantitative questionnaire utilizing the Likert scale and qualitative interviews. 34 teachers and diagnostic coaches were subjects of the study. This study addresses a gap in existing literature by concentrating on the specific effects of reassessment policies on classroom dynamics and learning outcomes. A mixed methods approach was employed, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, 34 elementary school teachers from Katy, Texas participated in a questionnaire and subsequent interviews. The findings reveal significant disruptions to the classroom environment due to the reassessment process. Furthermore, teachers expressed a concern about the time-consuming paperwork involved in the evaluation process. The extensive paperwork took away from lesson-planning and a quality education for all students. Many teachers expressed the need for policy changes to address these issues, particularly regarding the length of waiting times for assessment outcomes and the lack of support for students during this period.

Introduction

The term “learning disorder” is used as an umbrella term to describe conditions in which there are deficits in processing spoken or written languages, resulting in difficulty in reading, writing, doing arithmetic, and other tasks that require a high level of cognitive processing (Begum et.al, 70). Disorders commonly associated with the term “learning disorders: include dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, and developmental aphasia. Although these students tend to have high intellectual capabilities, oftentimes these capabilities are not a help in academics due to the amount of emotional and behavioral problems students with learning disorders face, including ADHD, substance abuse, depression and anxiety (Begum et.al, 70). Therefore, a need for a teacher aid in classrooms for students diagnosed with a learning disorder is imperative.

The pre-existing research concerning learning disorders indicates that without the help of an aid, students diagnosed with learning disorders can lose progress socially, mentally and in education. During the pandemic, the number of special needs students struggling in school was at a peak due to lack of help. Students in Saudi Arabia, for example, needed more personal help in writing assignments and exams, resulting in covering less content (Bachtsis et. al, 1). The lack of support these students receive via online education led to a decline in educational progress, as they fell behind peers who did not struggle with learning disorders. After reviewing numerous studies pertaining to special education, it is clear that students with learning disorders are more receptive to interactive strategies that allow them to feel more connected to the class and their peers. Hence, the

use of teacher aids in classrooms with students diagnosed with learning disorders can help create inclusion in the classroom environment, enabling the child to grow educationally and socially alongside their peers.

Gap in the Research

The pre-existing research links collaborative and personalized learning to positive outcomes concerning the progress of students with learning disorders (Max et.al, 2). However, the pre-existing research does not indicate the impact of laws on interactive special education. The purpose of this is to address this gap. This is salient to determine because the potential of students with learning disorders is very high, yet not always met due to being neglected in class. Therefore, this study can encourage lawmakers to reconsider the impacts of their policies on the special education department. Furthermore, this study will aim to understand the impact of education laws on teachers lesson planning as well as the impact special education can play on their own health. To analyze the impact of lawmaking in the classroom environment, the guiding research question is: What are the implications of the special education laws in Katy, Texas on the elementary classroom environment?

Literature Review

Search Strategies

Sources were gathered via credible databases with the limiter of peer-reviewed and official reports to further ensure credibility. Keywords used while researching were: learning disabilities, special education, learning aid, laws and policies.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

In 2004, 9.2% of students ages 6-21 living in the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the outlying areas of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the United States Virgin Islands received services under IDEA, or Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Jones et.al, 1). IDEA categorizes students as eligible for special education services if they have been diagnosed with the following: learning disabilities, mild or moderate mental retardation, emotional impairments, speech or language impairments, hearing impairments, visual impairments, deaf-blindness, severe or profound intellectual disability, severe or profound intellectual disability, multiple impairments/orthopedic and neurological impairments, traumatic brain injury, autism, chronic illness or other health impairments. However, in order to qualify for these services that are provided under IDEA, the disability must have been demonstrated by teacher observations to negatively affect a student's progress in school to the extent that accommodations and teacher support is needed. Under IDEA, all services are provided in the general classroom environment under Least Restrictive Environment (Jones et.al, 2). LEA ensures that students who have disabilities and are provided with free education under IDEA still get the experience to connect with peers. This type of classroom environment proves to be very beneficial for students with learning disabilities with the support of a teacher aid (Max et.al, 1). Furthermore, IDEA provides the guarantee for a special education that remains connected with the student's families through Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which also mandates the criteria for students to be identified as disabled. The IEP serves as a plan for the education of students with disabilities (Kors, 1022). However, the issue with IEP's is that each school district varies in their own education plan. While most of them comply with IDEA, they tend to have other issues regarding education quality, resulting in court cases brought up in recent years (Kors 1023). IDEA has regulated the special education department in the United States, in fact, through IDEA 51.6% of students with learning disabilities were educated inside the regular classroom environment, providing

these students with a beneficial, collaborative education (Kors, 1023). The pre-existing research highlights the extent to which IDEA controls policies of special education departments throughout America.

Re-Evaluations Under IDEA

Students with diagnosed learning disabilities are required to be re-evaluated by IDEA prior to receiving certain accommodations provided by these laws. Re-evaluations occur whenever the student is first entering the district, whether that be through Kindergarten or another school district. Re-evaluations are required every 3 years during the time the student is receiving these accommodations to ensure the student's eligibility for accommodations as well as make changes to the IEP. (United States, Department of Education). Parents may also request re-evaluations if they are concerned about the progress of their child (United States, Department of Education). Furthermore, the school district can also request re-evaluation if they feel that the needs of the student have shifted significantly. There is no specific timeline to complete the evaluation, however school districts are expected to have finished re-evaluations in a timely manner (United States, Department of Education). The re-evaluation process is tedious, and can span for multiple weeks. It consists of tests, observations from teachers and parents, as well as any outside information from other professionals. After the initial assessments are completed, the evaluation team analyzes the data to determine the needs of the student. Finally, the IEP team meets and makes decisions about the student's eligibility for special education services (United States, Department of Education). The pre-existing research concludes that the re-evaluation process is done by every school district in the United States to ensure the needs of the students are met, that the student meets eligibility, and to develop an appropriate IEP, regardless of how tedious the process is.

Summary

Prior studies concluded that the IDEA has played a large role in modern policies regarding education for the disabled. Evidence shows that the policy has benefitted those who seek education through it, providing a classroom balance that meets the needs of every student. However, the studies did not address the effects on the classroom during the re-evaluation process required by each district prior to being accommodated through IDEA.

To connect the previous research and to fill a gap, this study determined the extent to which the reassessment policy played a role in the elementary classroom environment.

Research Design and Methodology

Study Design

This study explores the extent to which the reassessment policy affects the elementary classroom environments of schools located in Katy, Texas. The goal is to determine if the current re-assessing policies concerning the needs of students with learning disorders adequately approach the issue of eligibility without creating extra disturbance. The results of the study are important to the mental health of teachers as well as the education quality of all students in the regular classroom.

A mixed-methods study was conducted. The mixed-method approach allowed for a sufficient analysis of the effects created by the reassessment of students through qualitative and quantitative data. Through this method, details that would have not been captured by one component of the method were now included in the analysis. The two methods used to gather data were: a quantitative questionnaire utilizing the Likert scale and

qualitative interviews (Figure 1). Quantitative methods (the questionnaire) provided numerical data that quantified teachers observations and opinions gathered from these observations. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, offered in-depth insights into the perspectives of the teachers regarding the assessment policy, providing new perspectives that are not easily identified by the quantitative questionnaire. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, results from various data sources could be compared to provide a stronger understanding. Moreover, the qualitative data provided more depth to the quantitative findings, offering valuable reasons that drove teachers' perspectives. Prior studies have not created questionnaires analyzing the impacts of IDEA. Additionally, prior studies do not analyze the role laws regarding special education play on the health of the teacher.

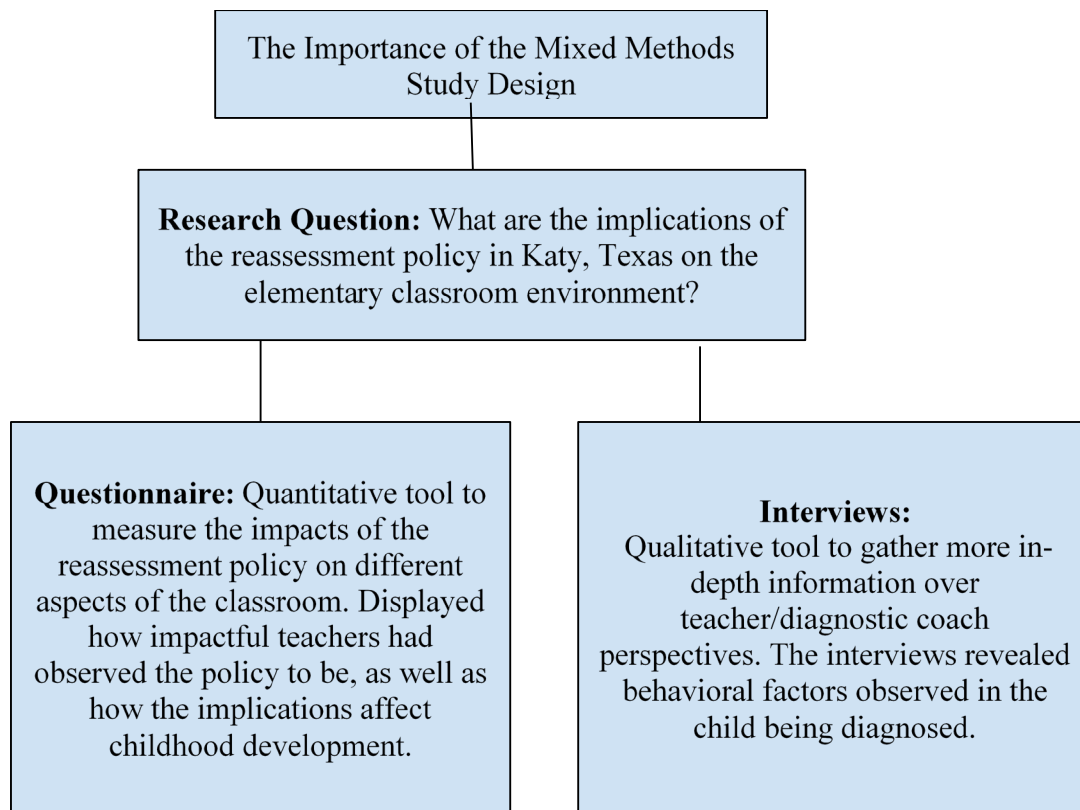


Figure 1. The Mixed Method Design in Alignment with the Research Question

Subjects

The subjects were elementary school teachers who had been part of the re-evaluation process regarding at least one student. Furthermore, a few diagnostic coaches were also interviewed. This demographic of participants was chosen because they have witnessed the effects of re-assessing first hand and they are knowledgeable on how a balanced classroom environment should be. Also, they have the greatest insight pertaining any flaws they have seen in these policies, and thus were the appropriate subjects for this study. Subjects were gathered through compiling a list of all elementary schools in the Katy, Texas area that have a special education department.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire utilized in this study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Table 1 depicts the supplemental questions. The questionnaire used in the study is located in Appendix A as well.

Table 1. Quantitative Questionnaire

Q1	Have you been involved in the evaluation process for at least one student diagnosed with learning/social disorders?
Q2	Have you noticed any significant differences provided to students with learning/social disorders who have undergone the evaluation provided by the district versus those who have not?
Q3	On a scale of 1-5, how adequate do you believe 504 services are for supporting students with learning/social disorders? (1-not adequate, 5-highly adequate)
Q4	On a scale of 1-5, how do you believe the evaluation process impacts the overall learning environment in your classroom? (1-minimal impact, 5-significant impact)
Q5	How much of your planning time as a teacher has to be devoted to meetings and paperwork involved in the evaluation process?
Q6	How have you noticed the delays in the evaluation process to affect the student's academic progress and behavior?
Q7	How have you noticed the delays affect the other students' academic performance and behavior in the class?
Q8	Are there any specific behaviors or challenges that arise during the waiting period for evaluation?

Procedures

After compiling a list of schools with teachers who could be potential subjects, each school was asked for recruitment via email. Upon agreement to participate in the study, the subjects were emailed an online questionnaire,

34 teachers completed the questionnaire and all 34 also were interviewed in person. The consent form (Appendix B) listed that both methods were optional to complete, but highly recommended. To ensure confidentiality, the consent form informed participants that everything was anonymous, including names and school. To keep names classified, each subject received a number (ex. Teacher 1). The study design and procedures were approved by the IRB to ensure no ethical issues were present.

Delimitations

Delimitations were established ahead of time to narrow the subject pool. Only schools within the Katy, Texas area were contacted to participate.

Results

Quantitative Results

The questionnaire (Appendix A) was completed by 34 teachers in Katy. Table 2 depicts the frequency and percentage of teachers' opinions on various topics regarding the district and national policy of assessing of SPED students. Provided each question is a Likert scale of 1-5 that quantifies the qualitative responses. For example, 1 is not adequate while 5 is highly adequate.

As seen in Table 2, the evaluation process taken up by the district has a significant impact on the overall learning of the classroom as the total number of responses that leaned towards “significant impact” is 85.2%. Furthermore, about 55.5% of teachers in Katy, Texas believe that the policy regarding the reassessment of SPED students entering a new school district needs improvement. Therefore, this table presents an overall finding that the majority of students find the assessment process to disturb their classroom environment and believe there needs to be changes in the process for minimal disturbance of the classroom environment. All the questions presented in Table 2 were answered by all teachers that the questionnaire had been sent to.

Table 2. Percentage of Teachers Opinions Per Question

Question	Rating				
	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
How adequate do you find 504 services for supporting students with learning/social disorders? (1- not adequate; 5- adequate)	0%	7.4%	22.2%	48.1%	22.2%
How do you believe the evaluation process impacts the overall learning environment in your classroom? (1-minimal impact; 5-significant impact)	3.7%	3.7%	7.4%	55.6%	29.6%
How strongly do you feel that the policy regarding the reassessment of SPED students entering the district needs improvement? (1-strongly disagree; 5- strongly agree)	3.7%	3.7%	37%	29.6%	25.9%

Table 3 further demonstrates how the classroom environment is changed by the reassessment process through displaying the percentage of each response of questions that dive in deeper into the issue. The total number of responses that found the evaluation process to have a negative impact on the students' was overwhelmingly large. As seen in Table 3, the percentage of teachers who found the evaluation process to negatively affect the student being diagnosed was 100%, while the percentage of teachers who found the evaluation process to negatively affect other students was 92.9%. Thus, this table presents an overall finding that the majority of teachers find the evaluation process to be disturbing to the class in a negative way, hindering social developments in all students.

Table 3. Percentage of Teacher's observations in the classroom

Question	Positively (%)	Negatively (%)	No effect (%)
How do you think the evaluation process affects the student who is being diagnosed in terms of their academic progress and behavior?	0%	100%	0%
How do you think the evaluation process affects the other students' academic performance and behavior in the class?	3.6%	92.9%	3.6%

Table 4 illustrates the hours teachers spend on paperwork required for reevaluation per week. The time allotted for paperwork usually is not enough, and thus the extra time takes away from lesson planning, preventing a high quality education to students. Majority of teachers (45.2%) spent 3-5 hours on paperwork every week. An astounding 67.8% of teachers reported spending 3+ hours per week dedicated to the required paperwork. Furthermore, 22.6% of teachers reported spending 6+ hours a week on paperwork, which is almost one full day of a 9-5 job. Thus, the evidence from this table depicts the idea that the time spent on paperwork regarding reassessment is too time-consuming, taking away from lesson planning as well as putting the mental health of teachers at risk.

Table 4. Hours of Teachers' Planning Time Devoted to Evaluation Paperwork

0 hours (%)	1-2 hours (%)	3-5 hours (%)	6-8 hours (%)	8+ hours (%)
9.7%	22.6%	45.2%	12.9%	9.7%

Qualitative Results

Interviews

The interviews (see Appendix C for questions) were conducted both in person and through google forms. After transcribing the responses, and then coded in an open-coding format for each identified theme. Coding of interviews was complete using Miles and Huberman's (1994) iterative coding process. After two iterations of

open-coding, 4 final themes emerged, the following were found to be most prevalent: 1) behaviors and challenges associated with the evaluation process; 2) differences in treatment of struggling students who have not been evaluated versus those who have.

Behaviors and Challenges Associated with the Evaluation Process

78.6% of teachers found for there to be specific behavioral challenges that arise during the waiting time in the evaluation process. According to Teacher 34, "...when students are awaiting evaluations, they are struggling in the classroom ... leading to work avoidance and other disruptive behavior...an impact on the class as a whole". Teacher 12 further qualified this statement by adding on the observation of "...increase of anxiety and off task behaviors...taking away learning time from the rest of the class ...[the student] may even stop communicating with others". Furthermore, Teacher 17 voiced her concern on how "...there may not be enough support staff in the classroom to handle the needs ... the teacher may not be sure exactly what the student struggles with as she has to pay attention to other students as well...[the student] may not be provided with the correct accommodation". The behaviors highlighted by the teachers interviewed demonstrate the social and emotional regress that occurs during the evaluation process. Challenging emotional behavior in the student thus leads to a decline in academic progress of the child, diminishing the quality of the education they are being provided.

Differences in Treatment of Students Who Have Not Been Evaluated Versus Those Who Have

Although one would say it makes logical sense for the student who has completed district evaluations to receive all accommodations needed since they have proven to be eligible, one must address concern for the students who have been diagnosed with learning disorders from an outside professional, yet receive very little support from the district in the weeks of re-evaluation. 93.5% of teachers noticed significant differences in the support provided to evaluated versus non-evaluated students. Evaluated students received individualized plans, targeted instruction, and in-class support from teachers and staff (Teacher 13). They also had access to specific accommodations, modifications, and services tailored to their needs. In contrast, non-evaluated students lacked consistent support and struggled to receive appropriate interventions, leading to academic gaps and behavioral challenges. However, the extent of these resources are not provided to students waiting on re-evaluation, hindering their progress in school subjects and behavior. Furthermore, these discrepancies can increase the amount of depression or anxiety the student is regarding towards schools, establishing preventable, harmful feelings (Teacher 14). Teacher 22 supports the idea of regress by adding, "...these differences are harming the child's education, even during a short period of time, just because lack of support leads to work avoidance"

The qualitative findings highlight the complexities and challenges associated with the evaluation process for students with learning disorders. Teachers' insights provide valuable perspectives on the current shortcomings of the reassessment policy and underscore the importance of addressing these issues to improve outcomes for students in the classroom.

Discussion

The study was designed to examine the extent to which the IDEA reassessment policy directed towards SPED students disrupts the elementary classroom environment.

Findings

After examining the results obtained from the mixed-methods study, it can be concluded that the reassessment policy significantly disrupts the elementary classroom environment. This is evident as 67.8% teachers interviewed spend 3+ hours per week on paperwork involved in the evaluation process. 22.6% of the teachers interviewed reported spending 6+ hours per week on paperwork (Table 4). Teachers who spend 6+ hours a week on paperwork are spending the equivalent of a 9-5 job on the observation of one student, detracting attention from the other students in the class. The time spent on the paperwork required in the evaluation process distracts from time that could be spent on lesson planning, thus negatively affecting the classroom environment as students may not get the quality education expected. Moreover, the decline of teacher mental health is becoming a serious issue, and the burden of hours of paperwork may contribute to teacher burnout. Therefore, the extensive amount of paperwork has been shown to be a large weight on the shoulders of the teacher.

As depicted in Table 3, the percentage of teachers that observed negative academic and behavioral progress in the student being assessed was 100%. Furthermore, 92.9% of the teachers interviewed also noticed negative behavior and academic issues in the peers of the student who is being diagnosed. During the interviews, Teacher 14 reported that while waiting on the reassessment to begin, the student being diagnosed “does not have the support needed, and the teacher spends most of their time helping the child in need of special education services, resulting in the other students being deprived of attention.” Teacher 4 added that “there should be a plan put in for the waiting period during the reevaluation”. These findings emphasize the harm that the reevaluation process creates in the social/academic progress in elementary students. Furthermore, the input from the interviews depict the need for change in the policy.

Supporting the idea of implementing change in the reassessment policy, 55.5% of teachers interviewed selected a 4 or 5, leaning towards “agreed”, when asked if the reassessment policy needs improvement. 70.3% of teachers found the 504 accommodations provided by the district to be highly adequate, however, if the waiting time in receiving some of the accommodations provided is “as long as 8 weeks”, reported by Teacher E, the harm created by the policy is irreversible as “the struggles created during waiting time lead to work avoidance” (Teacher F), thus regressing social and behavioral progress in the student waiting to be diagnosed. Furthermore, the work avoidance created in the student can lead to disruptive behavior, interfering with the learning of other students in the classroom, as well as negatively affecting the mental health of the teacher.

In addition to the administrative burdens and disruptions to the classroom environment highlighted by the study, it's crucial to recognize the long-term implications of delayed reassessment on student outcomes. Research suggests that early intervention and consistent support are vital for addressing the diverse needs of students with learning disorders (Bachtis, 3). However, prolonged waiting periods for reassessment can exacerbate existing challenges, hindering students' academic progress and social development. As educators strive to meet the individual needs of each student, delays in the evaluation process can impede access to essential resources and interventions, perpetuating inequalities in educational outcomes. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to policy reform must prioritize timely assessments and equitable access to support services to ensure that all students have the opportunity to thrive academically and socially.

These findings indicate a clear need for policy reform to address the shortcomings of the reassessment process in Katy. By streamlining administrative procedures, providing timely support to students, and implementing strategies to alleviate the burden on teachers, policymakers can promote a more supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students.

Fulfillment of Gaps in Research

This study addresses several gaps in the pre-existing research concerning SPED education. Firstly, the Katy, Texas area was not the area specifically studied in any of the aforementioned studies. In pre-existing studies,

the area studied was America as a whole and does not specify if the observations are directly from the teacher or the researcher. In this study, the teachers were all working in Katy schools, and thus all these schools had the same rules regarding special education policies. Secondly, this study focused on only one policy regarding special education students- the reassessment policy. This policy states that students entering the district must be tested by the district in order to get any accommodations that come with being diagnosed with a learning or social disorder, such as dyslexia. Prior studies have looked into how various SPED departments around the nation work, rather than focusing on the assessment policy, or the criteria for which a student must fall under in order to receive these 504 accommodations. This gap served as the foundation for this study.

Implications

The results of this study can encourage national education lawmakers to implement changes in their policy and requirements for getting a student 504 accommodations or extra support in class. One factor that could be changed as a result of this study is the time allotted for the evaluation process. A shorter time period given to complete the evaluation will lead to more developed students in terms of social and learning process. As Teacher 11 stated, "...the process seems to take a very long time, causing the student who needs support to fall behind in school, leading to outbursts because of the frustration that has built up." Once the time allotted to complete the assessment becomes shorter, consequently the paperwork will also become less tedious, thus leading to an increase in teacher happiness as well as potentially lowering teacher shortages.

Limitations

As noted, the sample size of this study was 34 teachers. Had there been more teachers surveyed, the answers may have differed or been more skewed. Furthermore, a larger sample size would allow for the study to have a more diverse perspective and observations. However, due to the short time in which this study was conducted, reaching out to schools and teachers in further areas to gather a larger sample size was a major obstacle. Another limitation to this study is the small area in which it was conducted. Since only the teachers of Katy, Texas were sampled, the perspectives of teachers were limited. Other cities in Texas tend to have different demographics than the area of Katy, regarding political beliefs, average household income, sex, jobs, race, etc. These varied demographics allows for a potential of skewness in teacher opinions and observations, and thus yielding different results to the study. If teachers from all of Texas' cities were reached out, the study would have more diverse and more accurate observations over the policy on a larger scale.

Areas for Future Research

The limitations of this study allow for new areas of research. The number of teachers interviewed can be larger and span across various regions of Texas, thus allowing for a more accurate representation of the policy's implication. By taking into account factors such as race, income, political standing, etc, the new research can discuss the role such factors play in the perception of lawmaking regarding special education policies. Furthermore, a larger subject pool that also takes in account demographics will allow for the researcher to understand more perspectives of teachers, allowing for a final conclusion to encompass all of Texas.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor for the valuable insight provided to me on this topic.

References

- Asarnisa Begum M, and Kandasamy V. "Behavioral and Emotional Functioning of Children With Specific Learning Disorders". *Asian Journal of Medical Sciences*, vol. 15, no. 2, Feb. 2024, pp. 70-74, doi:10.3126/ajms.v15i2.58140
- Bachtsis, Rafail, et al. "Challenges Faced by Students with Special Needs in Primary Education during Online Teaching." *Education Sciences*, vol. 14, no. 3, Feb. 2024, p. NA. *Gale Academic OneFile*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A788246006/AONE?u=j101914014&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=f98d4efe. Accessed 14 Apr. 2024.
- Jones, Jami L., et al. "The Forgotten Partners In Special Education: Teacher-Librarians." *Teacher Librarian*, vol. 37, no. 4, Apr. 2010, pp. 65–69. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=50300772&site=ehost-live.
- Kors, Annie. "In Need of Better Material: A New Approach to Implementation Challenges Under the IDEA." *University of Chicago Law Review*, vol. 89, no. 4, June 2022, pp. 1021–68. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=157721937&site=ehost-live.
- Lyon, G. Reid. "Learning Disabilities." *The Future of Children*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1996, pp. 54–76. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1602494>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2024.
- United States. Department of Education. "Strategies for supporting students with learning/social disorders." United States Department of Education, 2022. <https://www.ed.gov/strategies-supporting-students-learning-social-disorders>.