

## Research Article

### STUDENTS OF DETERMINATION ARE THE FUTURE OF OUR NATION

\*Dr. Mohamed Moghazy

The University of Illinois, Urbana, and Champaign, United States.

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#### ABSTRACT

The term "special needs" or "special education" has long been used to refer to students with disabilities in the K-12 US school system. However, this terminology has been criticized for implying that these students are somehow "less than" or "not normal." As a result, some schools and districts have begun using the term "students of determination" instead. This term is intended to convey a sense of resilience, strength, and perseverance and to shift the focus away from the students' deficits and onto their abilities. This paper aims to discuss how and why the name of students with disabilities be changed from special students to students of determination in the K 12 US school system and how to effectively include students of determination in the general classroom and the community.

**Keywords:** Students of determination, special education, special needs, inclusion, motivation, equity

#### WHY THE NAME OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES BE CHANGED

The term "special students" can be derogatory and stigmatizing, implying that students with disabilities are somehow inferior or "less than" their non-disabled peers (Cologon, 2019). This is because the term "special" is often used to describe something or someone differently negatively (Cologon, 2019). For example, if a person is described as having "special needs," it implies that they have needs that are not the same as the needs of others and, therefore, require special attention. Using this term can lead to a negative perception of students with disabilities, suggesting they cannot perform at the same level as their non-disabled peers (Cologon, 2019). "special students" also means segregating students with disabilities from their non-disabled peers (De Bruin, 2020). This can lead to a lack of understanding and acceptance of students with disabilities among their classmates and a lack of opportunities for them to interact and learn from each other. This segregation can also lead to a lack of opportunities for students with disabilities to be fully included in the school community, which can have a negative impact on their academic, social, and emotional well-being (De Bruin, 2020).

Furthermore, the term "special students" can also be seen as a way of perpetuating the stereotype that students with disabilities cannot achieve the same success level as their non-disabled peers (Primeau, 2022). This can lead to low expectations for students with disabilities, negatively impacting their academic performance and self-esteem (Primeau, 2022). Essentially, "special students" can be derogatory and stigmatizing as it implies that students with disabilities are somehow inferior or "less than" their non-disabled peers (Primeau, 2022). This terminology can lead to a negative perception of students with disabilities, segregation, and perpetuate stereotypes which ultimately can negatively impact students' academic, social, and emotional well-being. Therefore, it is essential to use more inclusive and empowering terms to describe students with disabilities and create a more inclusive and welcoming school environment for all students (Primeau, 2022).

The term "students of determination" is more empowering, as it suggests that these students are determined to succeed despite any challenges they may face (Mohajeri *et al.*, 2021). The term "students of determination" is a more positive and empowering way of referring to students with disabilities (Mohajeri *et al.*, 2021). It acknowledges that these students may face challenges but emphasizes their determination and perseverance. This shift in language is essential because it changes the focus from the students' disabilities to their strengths and abilities (Mohajeri *et al.*, 2021). Highlighting their determination also implies that they can overcome obstacles and achieve success. Additionally, the term "students of determination" emphasizes the idea that all students have the potential to succeed. When students are encouraged to strive for success and are given the support they need to achieve it, they are more likely to reach their full potential (Mohajeri *et al.*, 2021). This positive framing can lead to high expectations for students with disabilities, which can positively impact their academic performance and self-esteem (Mohajeri *et al.*, 2021). The term "students of determination" can help to break down the barriers between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers and create an environment in which all students feel valued and respected. This can lead to better understanding and acceptance of students with disabilities among their classmates and more opportunities for them to interact and learn from each other (Mohajeri *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, this term can also foster a sense of inclusivity and belonging among students with disabilities, as well as their non-disabled peers (Mohajeri *et al.*, 2021).

Using the term "students of determination" can also help challenge societal stereotypes and misconceptions about students with disabilities (Garces-Bacsal *et al.*, 2022). It can help to promote a more inclusive and empowering approach towards students with disabilities and help create a more inclusive and welcoming school environment for all students. Essentially, "students of determination" is a more empowering and positive way of referring to students with disabilities (Garces-Bacsal *et al.*, 2022). It acknowledges these students' challenges but also emphasizes their determination and perseverance. This shift in language can lead to high expectations, foster a sense of inclusivity and belonging, and challenge societal stereotypes, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and empowering approach toward students with disabilities (Garces-Bacsal *et al.*, 2022). The use of inclusive and empowering language can

significantly impact how students with disabilities are perceived and treated in the school setting. Changing the terminology used to refer to students with disabilities can help to create a more inclusive and welcoming school environment for all students (Ainscow, 2020). When students are referred to using positive and empowering terms, it can help to create a more inclusive and welcoming school environment for all students (Ainscow, 2020). This is because inclusive language can help to break down barriers between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers and promote a sense of belonging and acceptance for all students. Additionally, using inclusive and empowering language can help to promote a more positive perception of students with disabilities among teachers, administrators, and other school staff (Ainscow, 2020). When school staff uses inclusive and empowering language, they are more likely to have high expectations for students with disabilities and to provide them with the support they need to succeed. This can lead to better academic performance and self-esteem among students with disabilities (Ainscow, 2020).

Furthermore, inclusive and empowering language can help challenge societal stereotypes and misconceptions about students with disabilities (Richards *et al.*, 2019). It can help to promote a more inclusive and empowering approach toward students with disabilities and help create a more inclusive and welcoming school environment for all students (Richards *et al.*, 2019). This can lead to better understanding and acceptance of students with disabilities among their classmates and more opportunities for them to interact and learn from each other (Richards *et al.*, 2019).

## **HOW NAME OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES BE CHANGED**

Advocacy is crucial in changing the terminology used to describe students with disabilities in the K-12 US school system (Moore *et al.*, 2020). Parents and advocates for students with disabilities can raise awareness about the importance of using person-first language and the negative impact of language that is dehumanizing or stigmatizing (Moore *et al.*, 2020). One way to raise awareness is through social media campaigns and community events. Advocates can share personal stories and information about the impact of language on students with disabilities. They can also create petitions and gather signatures to present to school boards and state legislators (Moore *et al.*, 2020). Advocacy can also involve lobbying state legislators to introduce and support legislation that requires using person-first language in schools (Moore *et al.*, 2020). This can include language that prohibits the use of terms like "special students" and requires the use of inclusive and respectful language. Overall, advocacy is a powerful tool for creating change. By raising awareness and building support for inclusive language, parents and advocates can play a crucial role in creating a more inclusive and respectful school environment for students with disabilities (Moore *et al.*, 2020).

Professional development is essential to changing the terminology used to describe students with disabilities in the K-12 US school system (Collier *et al.*, 2017). Teachers, administrators, and other school staff can be provided with training and resources to learn about the impact of language on students with disabilities and the importance of using person-first language (Collier *et al.*, 2017). One way to provide professional development is through workshops and seminars. These can be led by experts in the field of disability rights and inclusive language and can cover topics such as the history of language used to describe people with disabilities, the impact of language on self-esteem and identity, and strategies for using inclusive language in the classroom (Collier *et al.*, 2017).

Providing professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and other school staff is crucial in creating a more inclusive and respectful school environment for students with disabilities. Another way to provide professional development is through online resources and modules (Krasnova & Shurygin, 2020). These can be accessed by teachers and administrators at their convenience and can cover similar topics as workshops and seminars (Krasnova & Shurygin, 2020). Additionally, teachers and administrators can be provided with resources such as guidelines for inclusive language and a list of appropriate and acceptable terms to use (Krasnova & Shurygin, 2020). This can be helpful for teachers and administrators in ensuring they are using inclusive language in their communication with students, families, and other staff (Krasnova & Shurygin, 2020). It empowers educators to understand language's importance and use inclusive language in their communication and approach (Krasnova & Shurygin, 2020).

Policy change is crucial in changing the terminology used to describe students with disabilities in the K-12 US school system (Kohli *et al.*, 2017). School districts can make this change by adopting inclusive language policies (Kohli *et al.*, 2017). School districts can adopt policies that prohibit the use of the term "special students" and require the use of person-first language. These policies can outline the importance of using respectful and inclusive language for students with disabilities and prohibit dehumanizing or stigmatizing language (Kohli *et al.*, 2017). They can also guide appropriate and acceptable terms when referring students with disabilities. Another way school districts can change this is by including language in student handbooks and school district policies. This can ensure that all students, families, and staff are aware of the importance of using inclusive language and can provide a clear and consistent message throughout the district (Kohli *et al.*, 2017).

Schools can also ensure that their language is inclusive in all forms of communication, such as in school websites, brochures, and other publications (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017). This can promote a culture of inclusivity throughout the district. Overall, policy change is essential for creating a more inclusive and respectful school environment for students with disabilities (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017). It ensures that language used by educators, administrators, and staff is inclusive, respectful, and appropriate throughout the school district and sets a standard for inclusive language use for all stakeholders (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017).

## **INCLUSION OF STUDENTS OF DETERMINATION IN CLASSROOM AND THE COMMUNITY**

Developing an individualized education plan (IEP) for each student with special needs is crucial in effectively including them in the general classroom and community in the K-12 US school system (Klimaitis & Mullen, 2021). An IEP is a document that outlines the student's specific needs and goals and how they will be met in the general classroom and community. This plan is developed with input from parents, teachers, and other professionals who work with the student and is reviewed and updated annually (Klimaitis & Mullen, 2021). The IEP process begins with an evaluation of the student's abilities and needs, which is used to identify the student's strengths and areas of need. Once the student's needs have been identified, the team develops specific and measurable goals for the student to achieve over the course of the school year (Klimaitis & Mullen, 2021). These goals are linked to the student's academic and functional needs and are designed to help the student progress in areas such as reading, writing, and math, as well as social skills, self-care, and communication (Klimaitis & Mullen, 2021). The IEP also includes a list of accommodations and modifications that will be made to support the

student's learning in the general classroom (Lemons *et al.*, 2018). Accommodations are changes to the environment or materials that allow the student to access the curriculum without changing the content or expectations. In contrast, modifications shift the student's expectations (Lemons *et al.*, 2018). For example, a student with a visual impairment may be provided with materials in large print. In contrast, students with learning disabilities may be given additional time to complete tests (Lemons *et al.*, 2018). In addition to accommodations and modifications, the IEP may include specialized instruction and support services, such as speech therapy or occupational therapy, as needed. These services are provided in addition to the general curriculum and are designed to help the student progress in areas that need to be addressed by the general curriculum (Lemons *et al.*, 2018). Overall, the IEP is a critical tool for effectively including students with special needs in the general classroom and community in the K-12 US school system. It ensures that each student's unique needs are being met and that they have the support and resources they need to succeed (Lemons *et al.*, 2018). Providing appropriate accommodations and modifications is critical to effectively including students with special needs in the general classroom and community in the K-12 US school system (Nepo, 2017). Accommodations are changes to the environment or materials that allow the student to access the curriculum without changing the content or expectations. In contrast, modifications change what is expected of the student (Nepo, 2017). One example of accommodation could be providing a student with a visual impairment with large print or Braille materials. This allows the student to access the same information as their peers but in a format that is more accessible to them. Another example could be providing students with ADHD extra time for tests or allowing them to take breaks during class as needed (Nepo, 2017). Modifications can also be made to the curriculum to support the student's learning better (Marco-Bujosa *et al.*, 2017). For example, a student with a learning disability may be given modified assignments that are less complex but still cover the same material (Marco-Bujosa *et al.*, 2017). Alternatively, a student with a physical impairment may be allowed to use a computer or other assistive technology to complete assignments (Marco-Bujosa *et al.*, 2017). It is important to note that accommodations and modifications should be tailored to each student's specific needs, as identified in their individualized education plan (IEP). It is also essential that the implementation of accommodations and modifications are monitored and evaluated regularly to ensure they effectively support the student's learning (Marco-Bujosa *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, providing specialized instruction and support services, such as speech therapy or occupational therapy, as needed is also essential. These services are provided in addition to the general curriculum and are designed to help the student progress in areas not addressed by the general curriculum (Marco-Bujosa *et al.*, 2017).

Providing specialized instruction and support services, such as speech therapy or occupational therapy, is essential to effectively including students with special needs in the general classroom and community in the K-12 US school system (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). These services are provided in addition to the general curriculum and are designed to help the student progress in areas not addressed by the general curriculum (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). Speech therapy, for example, is provided to students with difficulties with communication, such as those with autism or speech impairment (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). The therapist works with the student to improve their communication skills, such as articulation, fluency, and pragmatics. They also help students develop social communication skills, such as turn-taking, topic maintenance, and initiating interactions (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). Occupational therapy is provided to students with difficulty with fine motor skills, such as those with a physical

impairment or a developmental disorder (Jasmin *et al.*, 2018). The therapist works with the student to improve their ability to perform daily living activities, such as dressing, writing and eating. They also help students improve their participation in classroom activities, such as using scissors, holding a pencil, and completing puzzles (Jasmin *et al.*, 2018). These specialized instruction and support services are determined by the student's individualized education plan (IEP) and are provided by licensed professionals (Jasmin *et al.*, 2018). They are delivered within the school environment, and the therapist closely works with the student's teacher to ensure that the student's goals are being met and to provide strategies for the teacher to use in the classroom. It is also important to note that these services are regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure they effectively support the student's learning and progress (Jasmin *et al.*, 2018).

Fostering positive relationships between students with special needs and their classmates and teachers is crucial in effectively including them in the general classroom and community in the K-12 US school system (Burden, 2020). Inclusive practices, such as peer mentoring and cooperative learning, can create a supportive and inclusive environment for all students. Peer mentoring is a strategy in which students with special needs are paired with typically developing students as "buddies" or "mentors." These pairs participate in activities together, such as reading, playing games, and working on projects. This not only helps the student with special needs but also helps their peers learn to understand and accept differences and to be more understanding and patient (Burden, 2020). Cooperative learning is another inclusive strategy in which small groups of students work together on a task or project (Kumi-Yeboah *et al.*, 2017). This approach allows students with special needs to participate in the classroom and to learn from their peers. It also allows them to develop social skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork (Kumi-Yeboah *et al.*, 2017). Another way to foster positive relationships is through the use of inclusive teaching strategies. This includes using various teaching methods, such as visual aids, hands-on activities, and technology, to reach all students (Kumi-Yeboah *et al.*, 2017). It also includes providing positive reinforcement and recognition for students' achievements and providing opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities and events. It is important to note that positive relationships are built on trust, respect, and open communication; it is also essential to involve parents and other professionals, such as counselors and psychologists, in this process (Kumi-Yeboah *et al.*, 2017). Regularly communicating and collaborating with parents, teachers, and other professionals is essential to effectively including students with special needs in the general classroom and community in the K-12 US school system (Collier *et al.*, 2017). This helps to ensure that the student's needs are being met and that any necessary adjustments can be made to their individualized education plan (IEP). In addition, communicating with parents is crucial to keep them informed about their child's progress and involve them in decision-making (Collier *et al.*, 2017). This can be done through regular parent-teacher conferences, email or phone communication, and progress reports. Parents can also provide valuable insights into their child's needs and strengths, which can be used to adjust their IEP (Collier *et al.*, 2017). Collaborating with teachers is also essential to ensure student needs are met in the classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). Teachers can provide regular updates on the student's progress and any concerns they may have. Collaborating with other professionals, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, and school psychologists is also essential to ensure that students receive the specialized support they need to achieve their goals (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). It is also vital to collaborate with other professionals and agencies outside the school, such as healthcare providers, social services, and community

organizations, to ensure those students' needs are being met in all aspects of their lives (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). It is important to note that regular communication and collaboration among all parties involved help to ensure that the student's needs are being met and that any necessary adjustments can be made to their IEP. This helps ensure that the student is progressing and achieving their goals (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

Changing the name of students with disabilities from "special students" to "students of determination" is a way to shift the focus from the deficits or challenges that these students may have to their strengths and abilities. This can help to promote a more positive and inclusive attitude towards these students in the K-12 school system. To effectively include students of determination in the general classroom and the community, it is crucial to provide accommodations and supports that are tailored to their individual needs. This may include things like extra time for tests, assistive technology, or a special education teacher who can provide additional support in the classroom. It is also essential to foster a culture of inclusion in the school community by promoting understanding and acceptance of diversity among all students. Additionally, providing opportunities for students of determination to participate in extracurricular activities and community service can help to boost their social and emotional development and help them feel more included and valued.

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