



Department of Education, University of Oxford

Specialised education in French-speaking Switzerland: an analysis
of the main reasons for the placement of these students

Julien Nsanzabeza

Lincoln College

Supervisor: Julia Badger

Note that some graphs/tables/images may
be removed in order to comply with
copyright restrictions.

August 2024

Word count: 18,046

Abstract

The over-representation of students from minority backgrounds has been a subject of study since the 1970s. In Switzerland, few studies have used quantitative data to demonstrate this over-representation, and few studies have given a voice to teachers and parents of students. This study could contribute to understanding the phenomenon of the over-representation of students of foreign nationality in Switzerland and in the canton of Geneva.

Quantitative data on students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva were used. Chi-square tests were used to test whether there was an association between the student's nationality and his or her placement in special education, to test whether there was an association between the student's nationality and the presence or absence of a diagnosis. A Monte Carlo test was also used to investigate what was the main reason for placement in special education without a diagnosis in the canton of Geneva. Finally, a thematic analysis was used to give greater depth to the quantitative data.

Students of foreign nationality were over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the canton of Geneva. In the canton of Geneva, students of African nationality were more over-represented than students of other origins. No single reason for placement was significantly more frequently mentioned than others. The thematic analysis indicated that the process of placement in special education in the canton of Geneva was perceived as confusing by parents and teachers.

This study contributed to the literature by using quantitative data to demonstrate the over-representation of students of foreign nationality in special education in Switzerland and in the canton of Geneva.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Julia Badger. Thanks to her support, guidance and feedback, I was able to complete this study in the best possible conditions. I would also like to thank her for the knowledge she taught me during the Core Principles in Child Assessment and Cognitive Development and Educational Attainments courses. I would also like to thank Professor Lars-Erik Malmberg and Dr Sonali Nag for the knowledge they taught in their courses. I would also like to thank my cohort, for the support and the good atmosphere that helped us to have an excellent Masters year.

I would also like to thank the Special School in the canton of Geneva for kindly sharing the data on its students, as well as the two teachers and the parent of the student who agreed to be involved in the study. I would also like to thank the Educational Research Service of the Canton of Geneva for sharing the data on students placed in special education in the Canton of Geneva.

To everyone who has supported me during this academic year and in this research, thank you! Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Berrow Society for supporting me with a scholarship allowing me to do a Master's degree at the University of Oxford.

Table of contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Background and context	1
1.2. Structure of the dissertation	3
1.3. Literature Review	3
1.3.1. Over-representation of students from minority backgrounds in special education around the world	4
1.3.2. Over-representation of students from minority backgrounds in special education in Switzerland	6
1.3.3. Consequences and outcomes of special education, particularly for students from migrant backgrounds	9
1.3.4. Measures to reduce or avoid the over-representation of students from minority backgrounds in special education	12
1.3.5. Research Gap and Rationale	14
1.4. Research Questions	15
2. Methodology.....	16
2.1. Research design	16
2.2. Recruitment	16
2.2.1. Data for Switzerland	16
2.2.2. Data for Geneva	17
2.2.3. Data for the special school.....	17
2.2.4. Interview	17
2.3. Participants	18
2.3.1. Sample size calculation	18
2.3.2. Overview of students in Switzerland.....	18
2.3.3. Overview of students in Geneva	19
2.3.4. Overview of the selected Geneva school	20
2.3.5. Interview participation	20
2.4. Procedure.....	21
2.4.1. Data for Switzerland	21
2.4.2. Data for Geneva	21
2.4.3. Data for the Geneva school	21
2.4.4. Interviews	21
2.5. Analysis Plan	22
2.5.1. Research question 1: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.....	22
2.5.2. Research question 2: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented among students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva without a diagnosis?	22

2.5.3. Research question 3: Among students placed in special education without a diagnosis, what is the predominant reason?	23
2.5.4. Interview	23
2.6. Reliability and validity	23
2.7. Ethics.....	24
3. Results.....	25
3.1. Research question 1: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.	25
3.1.1. In Switzerland.....	25
3.1.2. In the French-speaking canton of Geneva	27
3.2. Research question 2: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented among students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva without a diagnosis?	30
3.3. Research question 3: Among students placed in special education without a diagnosis, what is the predominant reason?	31
3.4. Thematic analysis.....	33
3.4.1. Special education placements	34
3.4.2. Diagnosis	37
4. Discussion	39
4.1. Research question 1: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.	39
4.2. In the French-speaking canton of Geneva.....	41
4.3. Research question 2: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented among students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva without a diagnosis?	45
4.4. Research question 3: Among students placed in special education without a diagnosis, what is the predominant reason?	46
4.5. Limitations	48
4.6. Recommendations for future studies.....	48
4.7. Recommendations for the placement of students in special education	49
4.8. Conclusion	49
<i>References</i>	51
<i>Appendix A</i>	64
<i>Appendix B</i>	67
<i>Appendix C</i>	69
<i>Appendix D</i>	70

List of tables

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of students by nationality and type of education in Switzerland for the 2022-23 school year	27
Table 2: Descriptive statistics of students by nationality and type of education in the canton of Geneva	29
Table 3: Descriptive statistics of students in special education in the canton of Geneva by nationality and gender	30
Table 4: Descriptive statistics of students in a special school in the canton of Geneva by nationality and diagnosis	31
Table 5: Information of students in a special school in the canton of Geneva by nationality and diagnosis	32

List of figures

- Figure 1:** The evolution of students in special education in Switzerland from 2017-18 school year to 2022-23: Total; Swiss; Foreign..... 26
- Figure 2:** The evolution of students in special education in the canton of Geneva from 2015-16 school year to 2023-24..... 28
- Figure 3:** Histogram of reasons for placement of 5 students in special education in a special school in the canton of Geneva for the school year 2024-25 33
- Figure 4:** Themes and sub-themes from interviews with two teachers and a student's parent..... 34

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and context

Since the 1970s, the placement of students in special education has been accused of contributing to inequality by disproportionately placing students from minority backgrounds in special education. The term special education does not have the same definition in every country, but it is generally associated with education adapted to students with special needs (Mazurek & Winzer, 1994). These special needs may be due, for example, to cognitive disorders, learning difficulties, physical disabilities or other reasons (Mazurek & Winzer, 1994; Wettstein et al., 2023). In order to meet these specific needs, these students are taught, sometimes individually, by specialist teachers whose methods may differ from those of teachers in mainstream classes (Cook & Schirmer, 2003). In addition to the specialist teacher, other professionals may support the student, such as social workers, speech therapists or other therapists (Etat de Genève, n.d.; Lozano et al., 2022). Special education can therefore enable students who are not able to receive mainstream education to nevertheless receive an education. It is therefore easy to conclude that special education helps to reduce inequalities by offering education, even to students with special needs. However, it could also contribute to another inequality.

As early as the 1970s and 1980s, studies were looking at the over-representation of minorities in special education (Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Maheady et al., 1984; Mosley & Spicker, 1975). According to American Psychological Association, a minority group is “a population subgroup (e.g., ethnic, racial, social, religious, or other group) with differential power than those deemed to hold the majority power in the population” (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Since then, several studies have shown an over-representation of minority students in special education, particularly in the United States and Europe (Bovey et al., 2022; Cruz & Firestone, 2022; Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008; Morrier & Gallagher, 2011; Ortogero & Ray, 2021; Morgan et al., 2020). We can observe that the issue of the over-representation of minority students in special education is not limited to one geographical region although each country has its own specific characteristics (Bovey et al., 2022; Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008). However, given the specific characteristics of different countries (populations, policies and practices), over-representation manifests itself in different ways in different countries (Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008). In this study, we will focus on the situation in Switzerland.

In recent years, studies and reports have focused on the over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education in Switzerland (Bovey et al., 2022; Dubois-Shaik &

Dupriez, 2013; Evrard et al., 2016; Sahrai, 2015). The concept of the inclusive school has contributed to the questioning of special education (Sahrai, 2015). Examples include UNICEF's calls for action to ensure that all students have access to a quality school, to combat discrimination and to reduce the barriers preventing certain groups from succeeding in the education system (UNESCO, 2009, 2012). As of 31 December 2022, 73.1% of children between 0 and 14 living in Switzerland were of Swiss nationality and 26.9% of foreign nationality (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, n.d.). For the 2022-23 school year, 56.6% of students in special education in Switzerland were of Swiss nationality and 43.4% of foreign nationality (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, n.d.). The over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education in Switzerland therefore contradicts the values of inclusive schooling. In Switzerland, the law stipulates that students with disabilities must be included in mainstream schools whenever possible (Law on Equality for the Disabled, LHand, 2002). One of the basic principles of the Intercantonal Agreement on Collaboration in the Field of Special Needs Education, which aims to regulate and harmonise special needs education in Switzerland, is to prioritise inclusive rather than segregated solutions for students with special needs (EDK, 2007). It is therefore interesting to consider the possible factors contributing to the over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education in Switzerland.

Some authors have looked into the mechanisms favouring the selection and disproportionate placement of students from migrant backgrounds in special education in Switzerland and have suggested that schools contribute to the discrimination of these students, in particular because of the way they operate, and the values embedded (Gomolla & Radtke, 2009; Hinz, 2009). However, none of these studies used statistical data to demonstrate this over-representation at the Swiss level. Other authors have looked at the association between the origin and culture of teachers and their management of students from migrant backgrounds and have suggested that if teachers felt that the student's behaviours and attitudes were different from those expected by the school, this could contribute to the identification of a student's special needs (Nohl, 2010; Schumacher, 2002). We can therefore suggest that the factors contributing to these over-representations are multiple, and question the potential contribution of other factors such as the fact that a diagnosis is not necessary for a placement in special education, the student's socio-economic level, academic performance or the lack of understanding of the placement process by parents of foreign nationality, which are not currently mentioned in these studies. Eckhart et al. (2011) investigated the long-term effects of inclusive schooling for students in Switzerland

with special needs, particularly from a migrant background, on their professional prospects and social integration and concluded that inclusive schooling contributed to better social integration and better employability compared with segregated schooling. The points mentioned in this introduction shed light on the implications of the over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education in Switzerland, and the importance of reducing these inequalities.

1.2. Structure of the dissertation

This paper consists of four chapters. The first, the introduction, sets out the context of the study, the background to important developments in the placement of students in special education and the over-representation of minorities in special education. This chapter will also review the existing literature on the over-representation of minority students worldwide, in Switzerland, the placement of students in special education and its implications. In the second chapter, we will detail the methodology used in the study. This chapter will cover the research design, recruitment and data collection, participants, procedure, analysis plan and ethical considerations. Then, the third chapter will show the results of the statistical analyses and interviews. Finally, in the fourth and last chapter, we will discuss the results, limitations and implications of the study. Suggestions will also be made about how to improve the placement of students in special education in Switzerland.

1.3. Literature Review

To begin with, the literature review will focus on papers demonstrating the over-representation of minorities, particularly students with a migrant background, in special education throughout the world and more particularly in Switzerland. We will then discuss papers dealing with the consequences of this over-representation on the professional and social perspectives of these students, mainly in Switzerland. We will then review the studies dealing with the various measures that have been taken or could be taken to reduce over-representation, particularly in Switzerland. Finally, we will discuss the research gap and the objectives of this study.

1.3.1. Over-representation of students from minority backgrounds in special education around the world

The over-representation of minority students in special education has been documented for a number of years in several countries (Bovey et al., 2022; Cruz & Firestone, 2022; Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008; Morrier & Gallagher, 2011; Ortogero & Ray, 2021; Morgan et al., 2020). It is therefore a well-known and well-documented theme. However, it is important to note that most of the studies concern Europe and the United States. A significant part of the literature in the field is made up of studies dealing with the over-representation of minority students in the United States (Gabel et al., 2009; Morgan, 2020; Morgan et al., 2017). However, depending on the study, there are differences in the way the phenomenon is investigated and in the results. Morgan (2020) suggests that the over-representation of African American students in the United States predates the 1950s. The author also qualified this over-representation by suggesting that minority students with special needs were sometimes under-identified as having special needs compared to white students. To explain these differences in treatment, she suggested the presence of a systemic racist bias. Guiberson (2009), in a systematic review, suggests that Hispanic children in the United States are over-represented in some special education programmes like the "learning disabled" and under-represented in others like the "mentally retarded". Although these studies do not question the over-representation of minority students in special education in the United States, they demonstrate that this is not the case in all situations. These studies used qualitative data or reported the results of quantitative studies without presenting descriptive data such as the proportion of girls and boys or the proportion of students by nationality or ethnic origin. Other authors have gone further by controlling for other factors such as academic success (Farkas et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2017). Farkas et al. (2020), in their regression study of several school districts in the USA, demonstrated that the over-representation of Black and Hispanic students in special education was mostly due to the achievement gap between White and non-White students. In their systematic review, Morgan et al. (2017) concluded that there was no clear consensus on the overrepresentation of black students in special education in the USA. However, it is important to take into account that this systematic review has limitations, including the small number of studies used ($n = 22$). We can suggest that these 22 different studies obtained different results, mainly because of their different methodologies (such as various statistical tests, the inclusion of covariates or not, the use of questionnaires, etc.) and populations. Indeed, the different states of the United States

have different education policies and different demographics, making it difficult to obtain the same results. However, it is important to note that most studies that do not take covariates into account have shown an over-representation of minority students in special education in the USA, and those that do take several covariates into account (socio-economic level, category of SEN, etc.), have obtained mixed results. We can therefore ask ourselves whether the best way to study the phenomenon of inequalities in the placement of minority students in special education is to take into account other potential factors, in particular academic results and socio-economic level. We might also ask whether taking these factors into account when placing students in special education could help to reduce the over-representation of minority students in special education schools.

In Europe, the over-representation of minority students in special education has also been documented (Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008; Gabel et al., 2009; Helakorpi et al., 2023; Jørgensen et al., 2020; Migliarini et al., 2020; Schmaus, 2021; Strand & Lindsay, 2009). In a study using data from 6,469,113 pupils in the January 2005 Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), Strand and Lindsay (2009) demonstrated a relationship between ethnicity and the placement of students in the different categories of special education in England. In their study, they obtained results with and without adjustment for age, gender and socio-economic level (Strand & Lindsay, 2009). They showed, with adjusted results, that depending on the category of special needs, certain ethnic groups were over- or under-represented, without however showing a large over-representation of the Black group (Strand & Lindsay, 2009). However, they did find 1) a slight over-representation of Black Caribbean students in the behavioural, emotional, and social difficulty category schools, 2) an over-representation of students of Pakistani origin in the sensory impairment category schools and, 3) an under-representation of students of Chinese and South Asian origin in several categories of special schools (Strand & Lindsay, 2009). This study, using data from a large number of students, suggests that ethnicity is not the only factor influencing the presence of minority students in special education. Age, gender and, above all, socio-economic level appear to be important (Strand & Lindsay, 2009). Other factors, both biological and environmental, are also mentioned in this study and support a more complex interaction than simply ethnicity and presence in special education (Strand & Lindsay, 2009). The authors mentioned that students of Pakistani origin were over-represented in the categories of hearing impairment, visual impairment and multisensory impairment, that they were more at risk because of genetic factors, but that cultural and socio-economic factors contributed to the non-use of follow-up care (Strand & Lindsay, 2009). In their study, Dyson and Gallannaugh

(2008) suggest that low performance is not the only factor contributing to placement in special education, but also gender, age, socio-economic level and ethnicity. Since then, other studies have confirmed the importance of socio-economic level and other factors in the over-representation of minority students in special education in England (Schmaus, 2021; Strand & Lindorff, 2021).

Helakorpi et al. (2023) mention that students with a migrant background in Finland are over-represented in special education which may expose these students to harassment and stigmatisation. They add that an inadequate level of Finnish is one of the main reasons for the lower achievement of students with a migrant background (Helakorpi et al., 2023). They also point out that the term migrant background does not take into account the complexity of migration in Finland and the characteristics of different migrant backgrounds (Helakorpi et al., 2023). This study gives us an indication of the implications that placement in special education can have, particularly when one has a migrant background and is therefore susceptible to stigmatisation for two characteristics. It also tells us that an inadequate level of the host country's language can lead to poorer performance and hence to placement in special education. It is important to note, however, that the lack of precision in the definition of students with a migrant background in Finland makes it difficult to interpret the results of the studies in a precise way, as it is complicated to know what characteristics students with a migrant background have in common, apart from a foreign first language. Migliarini et al. (2020), in their qualitative study, showed that despite an inclusive education policy in Italy, students with a migrant background were over-represented in special education. It should be noted that a lack of quantitative data makes it difficult to quantify the phenomenon. There are fewer studies on this subject in Europe than in the United States, and they focus mainly on England. However, we can observe that the phenomenon is not limited to England and seems to be present in other European countries.

1.3.2. Over-representation of students from minority backgrounds in special education in Switzerland

In Switzerland, studies addressing the over-representation of students from minority backgrounds, particularly migrant backgrounds, are more limited. Lanfranchi (2005), in his survey of teachers and school psychologists, already suggested that a student from a migrant

background and/or with a lower socio-economic level was more likely to be placed in special education. This study was carried out in six cantons (an administrative division in Switzerland equivalent to the American states) in German-speaking Switzerland and showed differences between the various cantons, with some favouring integrative solutions and others separative solutions (Lanfranchi, 2005). The author also mentioned that teachers were more likely to take into account the student's origin and the parents' social status, and school psychologists were more likely to take into account the parents' social status but not the student's origin, as they would base their decisions more on professional criteria and would therefore be less influenced by stereotypes and work constraints (Lanfranchi, 2005). This study suggests that the issue of the over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education has been considered for several years. It is important to note, however, that this study is based on a survey of teachers and educational psychologists, and that there is no data to enable us to quantify a possible over-representation. Another interesting point mentioned in this study is that school psychologists are less influenced than teachers by stereotypes and situational constraints (Lanfranchi, 2005). This might suggest that psychologists' specific knowledge, such as language disorders, would enable them to be more objective in their decision whether or not to place a student in special education. Teachers with pedagogical and didactic knowledge, on the other hand, would have more difficulty detecting whether a student has special needs and would be more influenced by stereotypes and by the fact that it is more complicated to teach a class that is heterogeneous in terms of learning. Dubois-Shaik and Dupriez (2013), who mention in their study a tendency for students from migrant backgrounds to be over-represented in special education in Switzerland, also suggest a tendency for teachers to refer students from migrant backgrounds and low socio-economic backgrounds to special education. This study does not contain quantitative data that would make it possible to quantify the over-representation of certain groups of students in special education. However, the authors indicate that teachers often give as justification for placing a student from a migrant background: 1) the student's language level and 2) the difference between the student's supposed culture and that of the host country (Dubois-Shaik & Dupriez, 2013). Here we can make connections to the study conducted by Lanfranchi (2005) in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. It is interesting to note that teachers' reasons for referring students for special education do not seem to be linked to a diagnosis but rather to personal situation. Sahrai (2015) also mentions an over-representation of students with a migrant background in special education. The author suggests that this over-representation is favoured by institutional mechanisms such as principles of action linked to habits (Sahrai, 2015). The author also mentions that a student's origin can influence the way

they are assessed and managed by teachers (Sahrai, 2015). These latter points are in line with the findings of studies by Lanfranchi (2005) and Shaik and Dupriez (2013). Other studies have used quantitative data to attempt to quantify the overrepresentation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education in Switzerland (Bovey et al., 2022; Evrard et al., 2016).

In their study, Bovey et al. (2022) used quantitative data on education in the canton of Vaud in Switzerland and demonstrated an over-representation of students of foreign nationality in special education. They also showed that the over-representation depended on the nationality of the students (Bovey et al., 2022). Of all the students of Eastern European nationality, 15.6% were placed in special education in the canton of Vaud in the 1996-97 school year, whereas the figure for 2018-2019 is 5.7% (Bovey et al., 2022). The proportion of students of Eastern European nationality placed in special education in the canton of Vaud has dropped considerably over the last 22 years. Of the students of Italian nationality, 6.9% were placed in special education in the canton of Vaud in the 1996-97 school year, whereas the figure for 2018-2019 is 3.2%. The proportion of students of Italian nationality placed in special education in the canton of Vaud has also decreased over the last 22 years. Of all the students with a nationality from a country with areas currently in tension, such as Afghanistan or Eritrea, and therefore from recent migration, 7.5% were in special education in the canton of Vaud in the 2010-2011 school year, whereas this figure is 10.6% for the 2018-2019 school year (Bovey et al., 2022). The proportion of students with a nationality from a country currently experiencing tension who are placed in special education in the canton of Vaud has increased over the last 8 years. The authors compared the data for each nationality from the first year for which they were available to the latest available data. The authors suggest that there is an association between waves of migration and over-representation, in particular by suggesting that special classes make it possible to handle the surplus of migrant students who cannot be accommodated in mainstream classes, which have a limited capacity to absorb students from migrant backgrounds (Bovey et al., 2022). The authors also add that socio-economic level is linked to nationality, which has an influence on the type of education the student receives (Bovey et al., 2022). It is interesting to note that this study looks at the numbers of students in special education according to nationality and also makes the association between nationality and socio-economic level. It can therefore be suggested that the longer a group of the same nationality has been migrating, the less over-represented, if at all, the children from that group will be in special education, and the more recent the migration, from regions under stress, the more over-represented the children from that group will be. It might be suggested that people

who have been living in Switzerland for a long time have been able to master the language, the culture and the functioning of institutions such as schools. On the other hand, it can be suggested that people who have migrated recently from countries experiencing tensions have more of a challenge with the language, the functioning of institutions and are greatly affected by the situation in their country of origin as well as by their migration. We might also ask whether the socio-economic level of these groups, potentially linked to the length of time they have been migrating, influences the over-representation of this group in special education. A low socio-economic level can have an influence on access to books and extracurricular activities that promote development, on understanding of how school works and on teachers' perceptions of the student. All these factors can potentially have a negative impact on the student's performance and behaviour, which may lead to placement in special education. This could be in line with other studies suggesting that when socio-economic level and other factors were taken into account, the over-representation of students with a migrant background was less apparent.

1.3.3. Consequences and outcomes of special education, particularly for students from migrant backgrounds

In her qualitative study, Morgan (2020) argues that the over-representation of African American students in the United States in segregated special education classes has negative effects on students by preventing them from enjoying the benefits associated with inclusive classes. Morgan (2020) also mentioned that "a study on over 1,000 children who were predominantly African American revealed that those receiving special education services tended to experience lower rates of high school completion and higher rates of depression, incarceration, and substance misuse" (p. 78). It would be interesting to carry out the same study with a larger number of students, taking other factors into account, such as socio-economic level or history of substance use in the family. However, it can be suggested that inclusive teaching would be the preferred option when a student has special needs. Cole et al. (2022), in their quasi-experimental study in the state of Indiana in the United States, showed that students with special needs in inclusive school environments performed better on reading and maths tests than students in segregated school environments. This study also reinforces the choice of an inclusive environment where possible, in order to support better performance by the students placed in it and thus promote better results in their subsequent schooling and professional life.

Imdorf and Scherr (2015), in their chapter, argue that, despite positive developments, young people of foreign origin are still finding it more challenging to find an apprenticeship place in Switzerland. They add that the socio-economic and educational level of these young people, who are more likely than their Swiss peers to have difficulties at school, has an influence on their chances of finding an apprenticeship place (Imdorf & Scherr, 2015). We can therefore suggest that the addition of special education for these students could further reduce their chances of finding an apprenticeship place and thus planning a peaceful professional future.

Another consequence of placement in special education for students in general, but more particularly for those with a migrant background, is low social participation. In their study, Wahl et al. (2022) asked 436 pupils, including 52 diagnosed with special needs in Austria, to judge which student they would like to sit next to by means of a face: smiling or sad. Students with special needs, a migrant background and a low socio-economic level received more negative (sad face) than positive (smiley face) nominations (Wahl et al., 2022). Among the students who received positive nominations, there was an under-representation of students with special needs. In this study, the students were aware of the purpose of the study. It cannot be ruled out that this may have influenced their decision. It is also interesting to consider whether the students' form of inclusion and the teachers' attitude towards it influenced the students' choice. However, it is important to note that being a student with special needs, a student from a migrant background and/or a student with a low socio-economic level may have an impact on their social participation amongst and with peers. We might, for example, ask whether successful school inclusion implies successful social participation by all students, despite their needs.

A study by Kinsella et al. (2023) suggests that migrant families in Europe face a number of challenges, especially those with children with special needs. "Migrant children are likely to have experienced disruption to, or possible deprivation of, prior education, and relevant information, for example, on disabilities diagnosed, may not 'follow' the child" (Kinsella et al., 2023, p. 198). This instability in schooling and the lack of information about the student's potential disorders can have a negative impact on the student's schooling in the host country. It can be suggested that these difficult backgrounds should be taken into account in order to improve the placement and support of the student.

Another consequence that has been documented in research is teachers' expectations of students placed in special education, particularly those from migrant backgrounds. Cate and Glock

(2018), in their study in Luxembourg using vignettes describing student behaviour, found that teachers had lower expectations for students labelled as having special needs and with a migrant background than for students without a migrant background. It might be suggested that lower expectations would lead to lower results compared with other students and potentially more challenges for their future careers. Setting very low expectations for a student can lead to the student believing that he or she is only capable of achieving those low expectations, and eventually this is exactly what happens (a self-fulfilling prophecy). However, it would be interesting to carry out this research with more participants and include the socio-economic level and performance of the student in the study. This could be consistent with other studies suggesting that a student's socio-economic level and origin play a role in the way teachers perceive their students. In their quantitative study in Switzerland, Lozano et al. (2022) demonstrated a labelling bias for students with limited individual learning goals and those supported by a specialist teacher, even when controlling for personal characteristics and academic performance. It may be suggested that the form of education received by a student with special needs may influence the teacher's expectations. It would therefore be preferable to favour forms of teaching that are as close as possible to inclusive teaching. This can be done, for example, by including the students where possible in a mainstream class and setting them the same learning objectives as other students, while giving them the support and accommodation they need to achieve them. For example, it might be suggested that the number of exercises be reduced to allow more time for learning and understanding the concepts. However, it is important to note that the study does not demonstrate causality and that the number of students supported by a special needs teacher was low in the study (Lozano et al., 2022). However, Sahrai (2015) mentioned that in Finland and Iceland, students with special needs suffer less from negative labelling, as it is estimated that most students need some kind of support whether in mainstream or special education.

Although the studies discussed focus mainly on the negative consequences of placing a student in special education, particularly for students with a migrant background, it is important to note that some studies have obtained the opposite results (Hienonen et al., 2020; Maïano et al., 2003). In fact, in their quasi-experimental study including all schools in the Helsinki metropolitan area in Finland, Hienonen et al. (2020) showed that students with special needs placed in small special schools did not perform less well in Finnish and mathematics than students with special needs placed in mainstream classes at the end of secondary school. Moreover, they showed that students with special needs placed in small special classes had even better GPAs than students

with special needs placed in mainstream classes. Interestingly, the results of this study run counter to those of the studies mentioned above (Cate and Glock, 2018; Cole et al., 2022; Lozano et al., 2022; Morgan, 2020). One may wonder whether specialised teaching in small special classes benefits from teaching adapted to the needs of the students, a low teacher-student ratio as well as adapted classrooms, for example with furniture adapted for students with sensory impairments. However, it is interesting to note that Maïano et al. (2003), in their study of 503 underachieving French adolescents placed in special education, showed that the students, using self-assessment questionnaires, rated themselves as having higher cognitive and physical ability scores compared to typical students in mainstream classes. This is contrary to studies which found that students placed in special education had lower self-esteem than students placed in mainstream schools (Eckhart et al., 2011; Sahrai, 2015). Of course, it is unknown as to whether the students' specific needs may have affected their understanding and ability to complete the self-assessment questionnaire.

1.3.4. Measures to reduce or avoid the over-representation of students from minority backgrounds in special education

Sahrai (2015) recommended measures aimed at reducing or avoiding the over-representation of minorities in special education: 1) prioritising inclusive environments by changing education policies, 2) giving more resources to these inclusive arrangements, 3) encouraging co-teaching, for example with mainstream teachers working with special education teachers, 4) destigmatising the need for support, 5) ensuring the quality of teacher training, for example by adding awareness of cultural differences and human rights, and 6) giving priority to multidisciplinary teams. Morgan (2020) supported these recommendations, suggesting that it is important to improve teacher training, in particular by raising awareness of minority cultures, and that the necessary resources should also be allocated. She also added that collaboration with minority parents needs to be improved so that they can better understand their rights and how schools work (Morgan, 2020). In additional support, Payet and Giuliani (2014) suggested the importance of improving collaboration between parents and schools, particularly for families facing social challenges. All these points could contribute to reducing the over-representation of minority students in special education. However, it is interesting to consider the influence of the placement procedure on this over-representation.

Bovey et al. (2022), in their study of the canton of Vaud in Switzerland, indicated that contrary to belief, it is not always necessary to make a formal diagnosis in order to place students in special education. However, a standardised assessment procedure (PES) is generally used in French-speaking Switzerland to determine the needs of students with special needs and enable them to access special education (Fondation Centre suisse de pédagogie spécialisée, n.d.). Without a professional diagnosis, it may be difficult to identify a student's needs and potential difficulties as accurately as possible. Nevertheless, Bovey et al. (2022) suggest that it can take a long time to obtain a diagnosis from a professional and therefore delay placement. Delayed care can have a negative impact on the schooling of a student with special needs which might explain placement without diagnosis. However, the importance of a diagnosis should not be overlooked, as there is a risk that the placement decision may be subject to personal judgements, potentially influenced by stereotypes. Sullivan et al. (2019), in their study in a midwestern state in the United States, showed that school psychologists did not over-identify African American students as mildly mentally retarded, yet they found that school psychologists tended to over-identify them as autistic and were unable to find specific needs in these students compared to white students (Sullivan et al., 2019). They also added that it was difficult for school psychologists to diagnose comorbidity with autism (Sullivan et al., 2019). We can therefore suggest that diagnoses can sometimes be wrong and contribute to the over-representation of minority students in special education. Hoover (2010) proposed the Response to Intervention Model (RTI) to identify and prevent the specific needs of students as early as possible. He suggested that this makes it possible to intervene effectively with students before they are placed in special education (Hoover, 2010). This study proposes intervening as early as possible which could help to avoid inappropriate placement of students in special education later in their school career by providing them with education that is adapted to their needs and as inclusive as possible from the beginning. RTI consists of several levels of intervention, including differentiated instruction, more intensive intervention for the student, more consistent instructional adjustments, analysis of level in comparison with students of the same age and year, etc (Hoover, 2010). Returning to or going into mainstream education can be very complicated in Switzerland, as the student has to meet certain criteria that can vary depending on the canton, fulfil the objectives of an individualised project and sometimes repeat a Standardised Assessment Procedure. What's more, the parents also have to approve the return.

1.3.5. Research Gap and Rationale

In Europe, few studies have used quantitative data to measure the over-representation of students with a migrant background in special education (Jørgensen et al., 2020). Moreover, the studies in Switzerland that have addressed this question have used data from one canton only, which is not representative (Bovey et al., 2022). In this study, we are going to use three levels of data: national level, cantonal level (Geneva) and local level (a specialised school in the canton of Geneva). Given the differences between the cantons (education system, populations and so on), comparing data at three levels will enable us to highlight trends and differences between each level. To date, few studies worldwide and none in French-speaking Switzerland have used data containing information on the presence or absence of a diagnosis for students placed in special education. Given that a diagnosis is not required to place a student in special education in French-speaking Switzerland, it is interesting to compare students placed with and without diagnoses. Finally, few studies in the world and in Switzerland have combined quantitative data with qualitative data in research into the over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education. In this study, the combination of qualitative (interview) and quantitative data will allow us to learn more about the experience of parents and teachers in placing students in special education in Geneva, and aims to better illustrate and explore what the quantitative data demonstrate. Interviewing parents will give a voice to parents who are often spectators of their child's placement. It will also enable us to find ways of improving communication with parents, for example by better defining what information they need to know to ensure that their child's placement is correct, and goes as smoothly as possible. Interviewing teachers will enable us to learn more about their perspective on the placement of a student in special education. It will also allow us to question them about their feeling of being able to meet the needs of a student without the student having a diagnosis and to find out whether, in their opinion, parents are well informed about the functioning of the school in which their child has been placed. Finally, the interviews will also question teachers about their ability to recognise whether a student has special needs, in the event that the student is placed without a diagnosis and a return to mainstream school is possible. This study could help to improve the placement of students in special education in French-speaking Switzerland and possibly support the reduction of over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds by promoting the use of diagnosis, better informing parents and better preparing teachers.

1.4. Research Questions

1. Are students of foreign nationality over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland?
2. Are students of foreign nationality over-represented among students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva without a diagnosis?
3. Among students placed in special education without a diagnosis, what is the predominant reason?

2. Methodology

In this chapter, we will discuss in detail the methodology used in this study. To begin with, we will explain and argue for the choice of research design. Next, we will discuss recruitment, data collection and participants. We will then discuss the procedure. Finally, we will review the ethical considerations.

2.1. Research design

In this study, the research methods used were descriptive statistics, statistical analysis of primary and secondary data and interviews. This combination of three different methods makes it possible to obtain more information about the object studied than if only one method were used (Dawadi et al., 2021). Analysis of the primary and secondary data enables us to learn more about the placement of students in special education in Switzerland at three levels: national level, cantonal level (administrative division of land in Switzerland) and school level. The interview allows us to find out more about teachers' and parents' views on the placement of students in special education. Bolderston (2012) suggests that the interview allows participants to express themselves. In this study, parents and teachers of students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva were able to express their views on a subject that concerns them and on which they have rarely been able to express themselves. Interviews also provide an opportunity to learn more about how individuals experience the phenomenon under study (Miller & Glassner, 2020). In this study, it allows us to learn more about how teachers and parents experience the placement of students in special education. The semi-structured interview was chosen because it was the most likely to elicit useful responses for the research. In fact, this method makes it possible not only to obtain answers to questions prepared in advance, but also to ask unplanned questions in response to the interviewees' answers (May, 2011).

2.2. Recruitment

2.2.1. Data for Switzerland

The data for the national level (Switzerland) were acquired from the website of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, n.d.) where data is open access. These data contain information on all students in compulsory education, i.e. from the age of 4

to the age of 15, in Switzerland for the school years 2017-18 to 2022-23. These data are collected using the Standardised Assessment Procedure and other administrative documents of students and their families. In this study, we were mainly interested in the 2022-23 school year.

2.2.2. Data for Geneva

The data for the cantons were acquired partly from the website of the Federal Statistical Office (Office Fédérale de la Statistique, n.d.) and partly from the cantons. Switzerland has 26 cantons (administrative divisions equivalent to states in the USA). For this study, I approached 4 French-speaking cantons requesting access to their anonymised data for students in special education. The special education departments of the cantons of Jura and Neuchâtel were unable to provide data on students in special education because the data were not available. The Department of Compulsory Education and Special Needs Education of the canton of Vaud refused to send the anonymised data of students in special needs education due to their concerns over data protection. The education research department of the canton of Geneva sent its report (Wettstein et al., 2023) on special education in the canton of Geneva. The data in this report concern students aged 4 to 20 in special education. They have also sent me the data for students who were in special education in the canton of Geneva during the 2021-22 and/or 2022-23 and/or 2023-24 school year.

2.2.3. Data for the special school

School-level data were obtained from one special school in the canton of Geneva. The data from this school enabled us to identify whether the student placed in special education had a diagnosis prior to placement and what that diagnosis was. To do this, two schools were contacted and asked for access to their students' anonymised data. One school accepted and the other did not provide an answer. The school that accepted was a primary school.

2.2.4. Interview

The school recruited for primary data collection was also asked to take part in interviews. One teacher and a parent of a student were interviewed. The teacher was selected by the principal of the school and the parent of a student in the special school is the only one to have volunteered to take part in the study. In addition, a mainstream school in the canton of Geneva was contacted

so that a teacher could take part in the study. They were contacted by email to explain the purpose of the research and how the interview would be conducted. They received an information sheet (Appendix A) and a consent form (Appendix B). These documents were signed and returned before the interview. The selection criteria for the teacher in a special school were that he or she was a special education teacher in special education setting in the canton of Geneva and that he or she had at least one student of a non-Swiss nationality. The selection criteria for the mainstream teacher were that he or she should be a teacher in a mainstream school and have already completed the process of placing a student in special education. The selection criteria for the parent was they were parent of a student in a separate special education setting in the canton of Geneva and of non-Swiss nationality.

2.3. Participants

2.3.1. Sample size calculation

A power analysis was performed on SPSS to obtain the sample size required to detect a relationship between student nationality and the presence of a diagnosis and between reason for placement and the presence of a diagnosis. A sample size of 200 was suggested for the chi-square test of the relation between student nationality and the presence of a diagnosis.

2.3.2. Overview of students in Switzerland

The data for the national level (Switzerland) contain information on 1,011,406 students for that year. Of these students, 520,049 (51.4%) were boys and 491,357 (48.6%) were girls. In Switzerland, the first year of school is normally 4 years old, although it may be 5 in certain situations. Compulsory schooling generally ends at age 15 but may end earlier or later, for example if a student has skipped a grade or repeated a year. The data also contain the number of students for each form of education. This may be a mainstream class, an introductory class, a class for foreign language students, a class in a special school or another special class. For this school year, 977,903 (96.7%) of students were in mainstream classes, 2,296 (0.2%) in introductory classes, 5,791 (0.6%) in classes for foreign language students, 6,067 (0.6%) in other special classes and 19,349 (1.9%) in special school classes. In this study, we will only consider data from students in special school classes and other special classes (description of each can be found in the next paragraph). "Special schools only admit children and young people who are entitled to enhanced measures on the basis of the standardised assessment

procedure for determining individual needs or an equivalent procedure" (Fondation Centre suisse de pédagogie spécialisée, n.d.). For the school year 2022-2023, there were 19,349 students in special school classes in Switzerland. Of these students, 13,501 (69.8%) were boys and 5,848 (30.2%) were girls. Other special classes consist of classes that are generally located in a mainstream school and may vary from canton to canton and include: developmental classes (individualised programme for each student), small classes and observation classes (Fondation Centre suisse de pédagogie spécialisée, n.d.). For the 2022-2023 school year, there were 6,067 students in the other special classes in Switzerland. There were 3,832 (63%) boys and 2,235 (37%) girls.

2.3.3. Overview of students in Geneva

The data for students who were in special education in the canton of Geneva during the 2021-22 and/or 2022-23 and/or 2023-24 school year contain the information from 2,705 students in special education. Of the students, 69.2% were boys and 30.8% girls. In the canton of Geneva, there are three different types of special education provision: inclusive settings, integrated settings and separative settings. **Inclusive settings:** students are cared for by specialist teachers, social workers and mainstream teachers. The student spends time in a mainstream class without any special measures, in a mainstream class with the support of a specialist teacher or a social worker and in a small group in a different class with a specialist teacher. **Integrated settings:** students are taught by specialist teachers and educators in mainstream schools but in separate classrooms. They may also benefit from therapeutic services such as speech therapy, psychomotor therapy or other therapies. Students may be integrated into mainstream classes where appropriate (Etat de Genève, n.d.). **Separative settings:** students are taught in special schools by specialist teachers, social workers, speech therapists and sometimes other therapists, and some schools specialise in certain disorders or disabilities. Students may be reintegrated into mainstream schools if possible. There are also practical training schools for students with special needs from the age of 12 and pre-vocational training schools for students aged 15 to 18. Students are supervised by specialist teachers, social workers and technical instructors (Etat de Genève, n.d.).

In this study, data from students in special education were used, whether in inclusive, integrative or segregated settings.

2.3.4. Overview of the selected Geneva school

For the special school in the canton of Geneva, data from 17 students were collected. The data were for students who were placed in special education for the upcoming 2024-25 school year. 14 students (82%) were boys and 3 (18%) were girls. The age of the participants ranged from 5 to 10. The data were anonymised, and no student could be identified. The data consisted of the following information: age, gender, nationality (Swiss or foreign), diagnosis (with or without) and main reason for placement (challenges that led the student to be placed in special education). The primary school is a separate setting in the canton of Geneva. It is open to students with special needs from year 3 (age 6) to year 8 (age 11). Students are placed there following a Standardised Assessment Procedure. A Standardised Assessment Procedure is a document used to identify the needs of students with special needs and is used to determine whether a student is eligible for special education (Fondation Centre suisse de pédagogie spécialisée, n.d.). Students follow the same curriculum as students in mainstream schools, but the curriculum is adapted to the students. A specialist teacher gives lessons to students in small classes (around 10 students). Support teachers, educators, educational psychologists and speech therapists also supervise the students according to their needs.

2.3.5. Interview participation

For the interview, a parent of a student in a special school, a mainstream teacher and a special school teacher were chosen. The special school teacher had a class of 10 students aged 8 to 10. She had been a special needs teacher for 2 years. The parent was the father of a student aged 10 who had been in special education for 3 years. The mainstream teacher had a class of 17 students aged 10 to 11. She had been a mainstream teacher for 4 years. There were only two teachers who volunteered to be interviewed, as teachers' workloads were very high at this time of year. Only one parent of a student volunteered to be interviewed. As the aim of these interviews was to obtain the opinions of at least one teacher and one parent of a student in special education on the placement of students in special education, it was not necessary to interview a larger sample. Indeed, as Galvin (2015) mentions, interviews can also be used to access participants' meanings about a topic without generalisability being the goal. However, a larger sample could have made it possible to obtain opinions representing more parents and specialist teachers (Cobern & Adams, 2020). For this study, the interviews of a teacher and a parent of a student were sufficient to have parent and teacher opinions on the placement of students in special education.

2.4. Procedure

2.4.1. Data for Switzerland

The data for Switzerland were retrieved from the website of the Federal Statistical Office and were available on an open-access basis (Office Fédérale de la Statistique, n.d.).

2.4.2. Data for Geneva

General data, such as the number of students in special and mainstream education in the canton of Geneva by nationality, has been acquired from the website of the Federal Statistical Office, which is available on open access (Office Fédérale de la Statistique, n.d.). The more specific data on students in special education in the canton of Geneva was provided by the Educational Research Department of the canton of Geneva. The department was contacted by email and a data access request form was sent. The data was provided a few months after the request.

2.4.3. Data for the Geneva school

For data from the specialised school in the canton of Geneva, an appointment was arranged at the school and an oral request for access to the data was made. The school agreed to provide the available data at the time of data collection.

2.4.4. Interviews

The three semi-structured interviews took place online using Zoom. A teacher and a parent were interviewed. The interviews were recorded and due to the busy schedules of the participants, lasted no more than 15 minutes. The interview schedule (Appendix C) consisted of a greeting, a summary of the purpose of the research, a check on the participant's willingness to take part in the interview, followed by questions. The teachers and the parent had specific questions. One of the questions asked of the teacher was "Do parents, particularly those from foreign origin, always understand their child's placement in a special school?" A question put to the parent was "Did you receive the necessary information before agreeing to your child's placement in a special school? About the reasons for the placement? About your parental rights". The interviews were transcribed quickly after they had been administered. The transcripts of the interviews were used to highlight the main themes in the participants' responses.

2.5. Analysis Plan

2.5.1. Research question 1: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.

2.5.1.1. In Switzerland

A line graph has been used to show the evolution of the proportion of students in specialised education by nationality in compulsory education in Switzerland from the 2017-18 school year to the 2021-22 year. Descriptive data was used when reporting type of education and nationality. A Pearson chi-square test was used to investigate whether there was a significant association between nationality and placement in special education. The statistical package used was (SPSS 29.0.1.0).

2.5.1.2. In the French-speaking canton of Geneva

A line graph has been used to show the evolution of the proportion of students in specialised education by nationality in compulsory education in Switzerland from the 2015-16 school year to the 2023-24 year. Descriptive data was used when reporting type of education, nationality and gender. A Pearson chi-square test was used to investigate whether there was a significant association between nationality and placement in special education. The statistical package used was (SPSS 29.0.1.0).

2.5.2. Research question 2: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented among students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva without a diagnosis?

Descriptive data was used when reporting the presence of a diagnosis and nationality. As the small sample size violated one of the assumptions of the chi-square test, a Fisher's exact test was performed to test whether there was an association between nationality and the presence of a diagnosis. The statistical package used was (SPSS 29.0.1.0).

2.5.3. Research question 3: Among students placed in special education without a diagnosis, what is the predominant reason?

Descriptive data was used when reporting age, nationality, gender and the reason for placement in special education. As the small sample size violated one of the assumptions of the chi-square test, a Monte Carlo test was performed to test whether one reason of placement in special education was significantly more frequent than the others. The statistical package used was (MATLAB Online).

2.5.4. Interview

Thematic analysis was used for the interview data to identify themes and sub-themes in order to highlight patterns that will give greater depth to the responses obtained by the statistical tests.

2.6. Reliability and validity

The use of logistic regression to answer RQ1 (Are students of foreign nationality over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland) could increase validity and reliability. In fact, it would make it possible to control for other variables, such as socio-economic level and academic performance, which are thought to contribute to the over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education (Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008; Strand & Lindorff, 2021). This would make it possible to ensure that all the variables that have an influence on the phenomenon are taken into account and to test more accurately whether over-representation actually occurs. It would also help to check whether the results are stable over time. However, in this study, the data available did not allow us to run a regression and thus control for confounding variables. The data used in this study cannot be generalised to other Swiss cantons or to other countries, since education systems differ from canton to canton and from country to country. However, it is important to note that the data for Switzerland and for the canton of Geneva contain data for all students for the school years mentioned and are therefore representative.

Measuring validity and reliability in qualitative research can be complicated, as using measures such as those used in quantitative studies may not be possible (Noble & Smith, 2015).

To measure the validity and reliability of the qualitative part of this study, the alternative terms proposed by Guba (1981) are used: truth value, consistency / neutrality and applicability.

Value of truth: a mainstream teacher, a special needs teacher and a parent of a student were interviewed, and their interview responses were used for the thematic review, even when they did not support the recommendations made in the study. The voices of the participants were heard.

Consistency / neutrality: The discussion of themes between several researchers and the use of software to code the interview could contribute to better consistency and neutrality. This was not the case in this research, as it was a master's project, and the researcher was the only one involved and was not trained in the use of appropriate software.

Applicability: The small number of participants makes transferability difficult. In addition, teachers and parents may have different experiences and therefore have very different points of view.

2.7. Ethics

Before the study was conducted, the research had received ethical approval from the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) from the University of Oxford (Appendix D). Data for Switzerland, the canton of Geneva and the two schools were anonymised. Names of students or other identifying details were not included in the data. For the interviews, an information sheet and a consent form were sent to teachers and parent interviewed before the interview. The consent forms were returned signed by the participants before the interview.

3. Results

In this chapter, the results of the three research questions are presented. Firstly, a chi-square test was used to answer the first two questions:

RQ1 – Are students of foreign nationality over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland

RQ2 – Are students of foreign nationality over-represented among students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva without a diagnosis?

In addition, a line graph was used to illustrate the evolution of the percentage of students of Swiss and foreign nationality in special education in Switzerland and in the canton of Geneva.

Then, to answer the third question a histogram was used to show the most frequent reasons for placement in a special school in the canton of Geneva and a chi-square test was used to test if it was significant. Finally, a thematic analysis was used to explore the views of a special education teacher, a mainstream teacher and a parent of a student in special education, on the placement of students in special education in the canton of Geneva

RQ3 – Among students placed in special education without a diagnosis, what is the predominant reason?

3.1. Research question 1: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.

3.1.1. In Switzerland

To begin with, Figure 1 shows the percentage of students in special education in compulsory education in Switzerland from 2017/18 – 2022/23 (Swiss = 1.6 – 1.4%, foreign = 1.1 – 1.1% and total = 2.7 – 2.5%). We can observe that the total percentage of students in special education in Switzerland has decreased slightly over a period of 5 years. A Mann-Kendall test was

performed using MATLAB to test whether this trend was significant. The trend was not significant ($S=1, Z=0, p = 1.000$). The Mann-Kendall test is a non-parametric test that can be used to measure whether a trend is significant (Hussain & Mahmud, 2019). We can also note that the percentage of Swiss students in special education has also fallen the same amount over this period. The percentage of foreign students in special education, however, remained stable over the same period. This trend therefore suggests that the proportion of foreign students in special education has increased in recent years due to the stability of percentage of foreign students against the decrease of total students in special education. Further analysis is needed to learn more about the factors that have contributed to the percentage of foreign students in special education remaining stable, while the trend for Swiss students and total students has been decreasing.

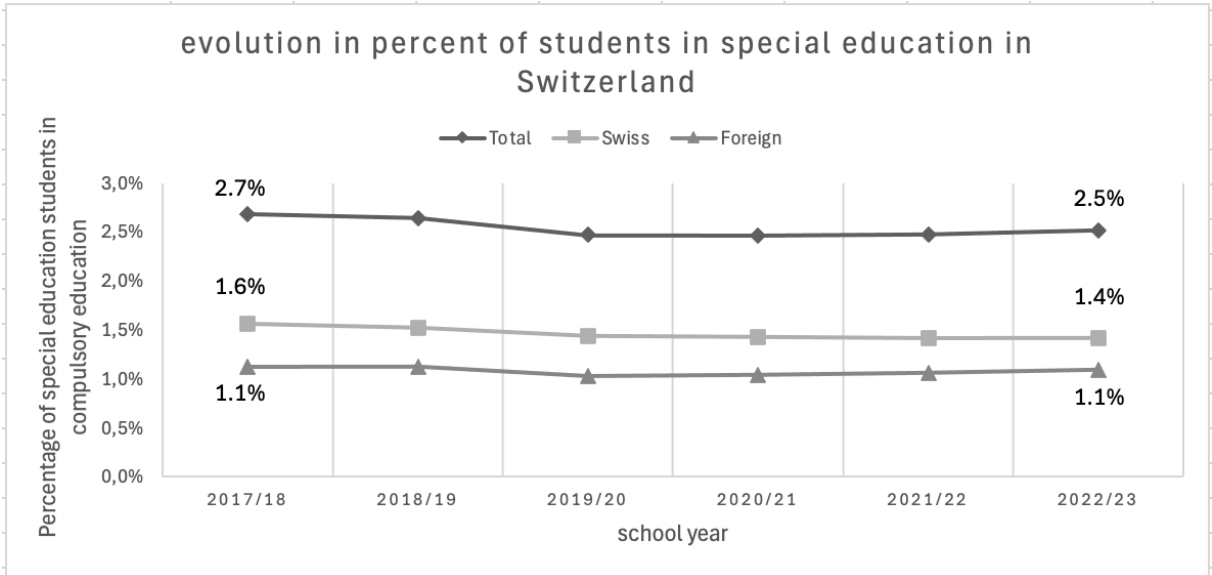


Figure 1: The evolution of students in special education in Switzerland from 2017-18 school year to 2022-23: Total; Swiss; Foreign.

The descriptive data in Table 1 enables us to observe the distribution of students in compulsory education enrolled in mainstream or special education in Switzerland for the 2022-23 school year. We can see that the total percentage of students of Swiss nationality in compulsory education is 71.8% and that of students of foreign nationality is 28.2%, similar to the percentage split observed in mainstream education (72.2% and 27.8%, respectively). However, we can see that the percentage of students of foreign nationality in special education (43.4%) is higher than

would be expected, and that the percentage of students of Swiss nationality (56.6%) in special education is lower than would be expected.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of students by nationality and type of education in Switzerland for the 2022-23 school year

	Total in education	Mainstream education	Special education
Swiss nationality	720,492 (71.8%)	706,117 (72.2%)	14,375 (56,6 %)
Foreign nationality	282,450 (28.2%)	271,416 (27.8%)	11,034 (43.4%)

Notes. The table shows the percentage of students of Swiss or foreign nationality in mainstream education and special education in Switzerland. Students of unknown nationality are not included as the proportion is less than 0.1

To analyse whether students of foreign nationality were more likely to be placed in special education than students of Swiss nationality in Switzerland, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS. The Pearson chi-square test investigates whether there is a relationship between two categorical variables (Field, 2017). To do this, two categorical variables, each with two levels, were included: nationality (Swiss vs. foreign) and type of education (mainstream vs. special). There was a significant association between nationality and placement in special education ($\chi^2(1, N = 1,002,942) = 3002.037, p < .001$). The effect size, calculated with Cramer's V was $\phi_c = .055$, which is considered very small according to Cohen's criteria (Pallant, 2020). The odds ratio showed that the odds of a student being placed in special education were 2 times higher if the student was of foreign nationality.

3.1.2. In the French-speaking canton of Geneva

Figure 2 shows the evolution of the percentage of students of Swiss and foreign nationality in special education in compulsory education in the canton of Geneva from 2017/18 – 2022/23 (Swiss = 1.1 – 1.1%, foreign = 1.3 – 1.6% and total = 2.5 – 2.7%). We can see that the percentage of the total number of students in special education has increased slightly over a period of 9

years. We can also note that the percentage of foreign students in special education has also increased slightly. However, the percentage of students of Swiss nationality in special education has remained stable. This trend therefore suggests that the proportion of foreign students in special education has increased in recent years. Further analysis is needed to investigate the factors that have contributed to the proportion of foreign students in special education to increase, while the trend for Swiss students has been remained stable.

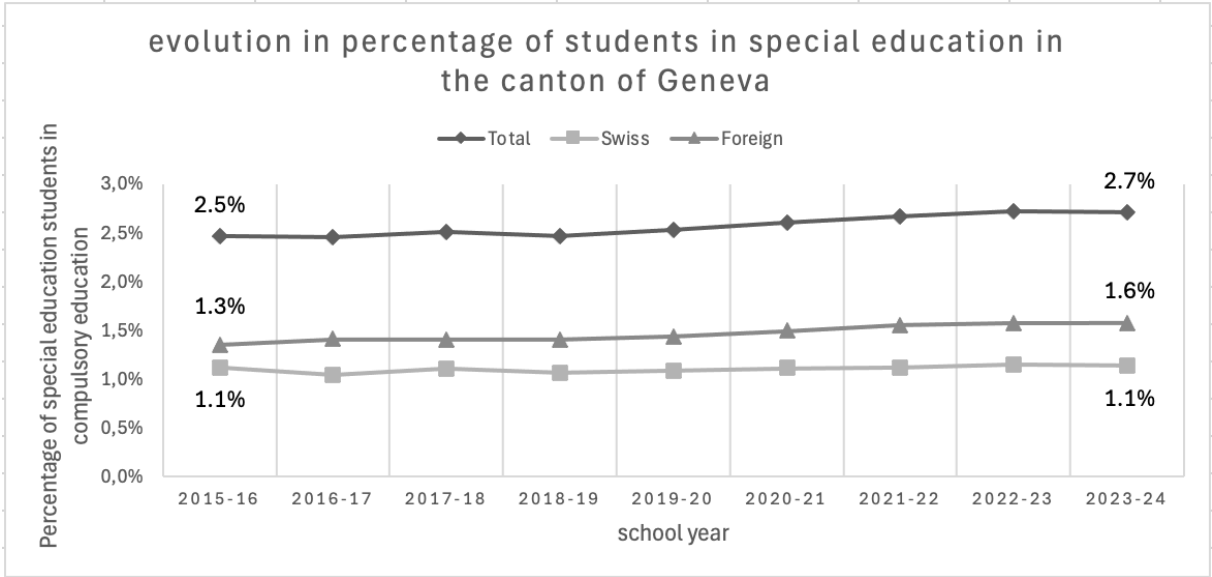


Figure 2: The evolution of students in special education in the canton of Geneva from 2015-16 school year to 2023-24

The descriptive data in Table 2 enables us to observe the distribution of students in compulsory education enrolled in mainstream or special education in Geneva for the 2022-23 school year. We can observe that the total percentage of students of Swiss nationality in compulsory education is 54.7% and that of students of foreign nationality is 45.3%. These percentages are similar to the percentage split observed in mainstream education. However, we can observe that the percentages of students of foreign nationality in special education (57.8%) is higher than would be expected, and that the percentage of students of Swiss nationality (42.2%) in special education is lower than would be expected.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of students by nationality and type of education in the canton of Geneva

	Total in education	Mainstream education	Special education
Swiss nationality	34,599 (54.7%)	33,684 (55.1%)	915 (42.2%)
Foreign nationality	28,687 (45.3%)	27,434 (44.9%)	1,253 (57.8%)

Notes The table shows the percentage of students in compulsory education (primary, secondary and specialised schools) in the canton of Geneva by nationality and type of education.

To analyse whether students of foreign nationality were more likely to be placed in special education than students of Swiss nationality in the canton of Geneva, a chi-square test of independence was performed using SPSS software. To do this, two categorical variables, each with two levels, were included: nationality (Swiss vs. foreign) and type of education (mainstream vs. special). There was a significant association between nationality and placement in special education ($\chi^2(1, N= 63,286) = 140.774, p < .001$). The effect size, calculated with Cramer's V was $\phi_c = .047$, which is considered very small according to Cohen's criteria (Pallant, 2020). The odds ratio showed that the odds of a student being placed in special education in the canton of Geneva were 1.7 times higher if the student was of foreign nationality.

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for students who attended special education in the canton of Geneva for the school year 2021-22 and/or 2022-23 and/or 2023-24. Each student is counted once. We can see that the majority of students are boys (total = 69.2%). We can also see that the majority of foreign students are of European nationality (32.2%). Among the other nationalities, the most represented was African (10.8%).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of students in special education in the canton of Geneva by nationality and gender

Nationality	n	% of all nationalities	% Girls	% Boys
Swiss	1,134	41.9%	29.4%	70.6%
European total	873	32.2%	30.5%	69.5%
Spain	100	3.7%	22.0%	78.0%
Italy	82	3.0%	37.8%	62.2%
France	87	3.2%	24.1%	75.9%
Portugal	303	11.2%	31.0%	69.0%
Other European countries	301	11.1%	32.6%	67.4%
Africa	293	10.8%	31.1%	68.9%
America	212	7.8%	31.6%	68.4%
Asia	192	7.1%	39.6%	60.4%
Oceania	1	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	2,705	100.0%	30.8%	69.2%

Notes: The table shows the percentage of students who benefited from special education in the school year 2021-22 and/or 2022-23 and/or 2023-24. Each student is counted once.

3.2. Research question 2: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented among students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva without a diagnosis?

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for students placed in the special school in the canton of Geneva for the 2024-25 school year. The school has 64 special educational needs students, but at the time of data collection, only data from 17 of the 64 students at the school were available. Of those 17, we can see that 29.4% are of Swiss nationality and 70.6% are of foreign nationality. We can also see that, of the students placed without a diagnosis being made by a professional, 20% are of Swiss nationality and 80% are of foreign nationality.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of students in a special school in the canton of Geneva by nationality and diagnosis

	Total	With diagnosis	Without diagnosis
Swiss nationality	5 (29.4%)	4 (33.3%)	1 (20%)
Foreign nationality	12 (70.6%)	8 (66.7%)	4 (80%)

Notes: The table shows the percentage of students in special school in the canton of Geneva. The school has 64 students, but not all the data was available at the time.

In order to test whether students of foreign nationality had a greater chance of not being diagnosed among the students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva, a chi-square test was applied. Taking into account the small sample size, a test for proportion difference was conducted using SPSS to determine the sample size required to test the research question 2. To obtain 80% power to detect an effect at a significance level of .05, a sample of 200 participants per group was required for a chi-square test. Therefore, the sample available in this study is not sufficient. Furthermore, as mentioned by Nowacki (2017), the small sample size violates one of the assumptions of the chi-square test. Indeed, more than 20% of the expected values are less than 5 and, in this case, it is preferable to use Fisher's exact test, which can be used with small samples (Nowacki, 2017). The results of the Fisher's exact test ($p = 1.000$) do not indicate a significant association between the nationality and the presence of a diagnosis.

3.3. Research question 3: Among students placed in special education without a diagnosis, what is the predominant reason?

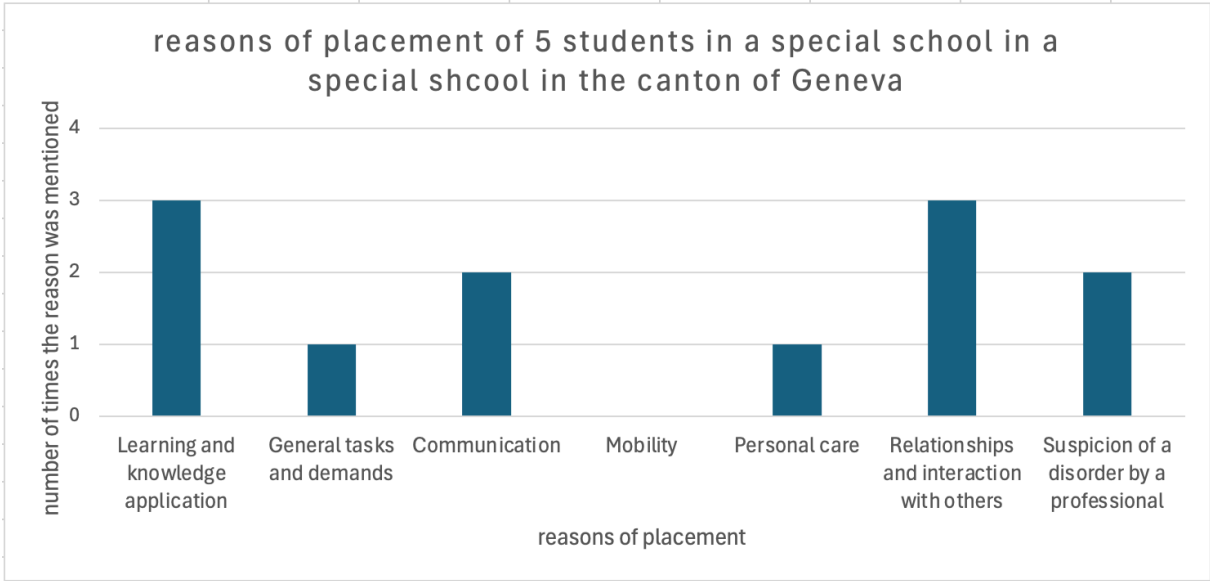
Table 5 gives us the characteristics of the five students (see Table 4) placed without a diagnosis in the special school in the canton of Geneva for the 2024-25 school year. We can see that they are all boys, and that 80% are of foreign nationality. We can also see that students may be placed for one or more reasons. The reasons (categories) are taken from part 5 (assessment of operations, development and training objectives) of the Standard Assessment Procedure (Fondation Centre suisse de pédagogie spécialisée, n.d.): Learning and knowledge application, General tasks and demands, Communication, Mobility, Personal care, Relationships and interaction with others and Suspicion of a disorder by a professional.

Although these categories do not formally indicate the reason for a student's placement, they allow the most standardised possible categorisation of the reasons for placement given by the school in the Standard Assessment Procedure. The category of suspicion of a disorder by a professional does not appear in part 5 of the Standardised Assessment Procedure but has been added by the researcher, as this reason was mentioned for two students and may suggest that a diagnosis will be made in the near future by a professional. As each student can have more than one reason for placement, there are more reasons for placement (12) than students (5).

Table 5: Information of students in a special school in the canton of Geneva by nationality and diagnosis				
	Nationality	Age	Gender	Reason for placement
Student 1	Foreign	6	Boy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and knowledge application • Relationships and interaction with others • Suspicion of a disorder by a professional
Student 2	Foreign	7	Boy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication
Student 3	Foreign	9	Boy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and knowledge application
Student 4	Foreign	6	Boy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and knowledge application <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General tasks and demands • Communication • Personal care • Relationships and interaction with others • Suspicion of a disorder by a professional
Student 5	Swiss	6	Boy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships and interaction with others

In Figure 3, we can see that the most common reasons for placing a student without a diagnosis are learning and knowledge (3 times) and relationships and interaction with others (3 times). Next are communication (2 times) and suspicion of a disorder by a professional (2 times). Finally, general tasks and demands (1 time), personal care (1 time) and mobility (0 times).

Figure 3: Histogram of reasons for placement of 5 students in special education in a special school in the canton of Geneva for the school year 2024-25



In order to test whether the distribution reasons were uniformly distributed, a chi-square test was considered. Given that the sample size violates one of the assumptions of the chi-square test, another non-parametric test, the Monte Carlo test, was used (Field, 2017). The results do not indicate that one reason was significantly more frequent than the others. ($\chi^2(3, N= 12) = .429, p = 1.000$).

3.4. Thematic analysis

This section presents the results of the thematic analysis. Two main themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews with a mainstream teacher, a special needs teacher and the parent of a student placed in special education. Both teachers teach in the canton of Geneva and the parent’s child attends a school in the canton of Geneva. Initial analysis of the transcripts generated many codes. These codes were combined into the two main themes: 1) special education placements and 2) diagnosis. Sub-themes of these themes also emerged from the

analysis of these interviews (see Figure 4). Given the small number of participants interviewed, some of the sub-themes were not mentioned by more than one participant but were nonetheless mentioned because they provided complementary information to the main themes or directly to the research questions and seemed very important to the participant. This data will provide additional insight into answering RQ1 – Are students of foreign nationality over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, RQ2 – Are students with a foreign nationality and no professional diagnosis, over-represented amongst those placed in special education in French-speaking part of Switzerland and RQ3 – Among students placed in special education without a diagnosis, what is the predominant reason?

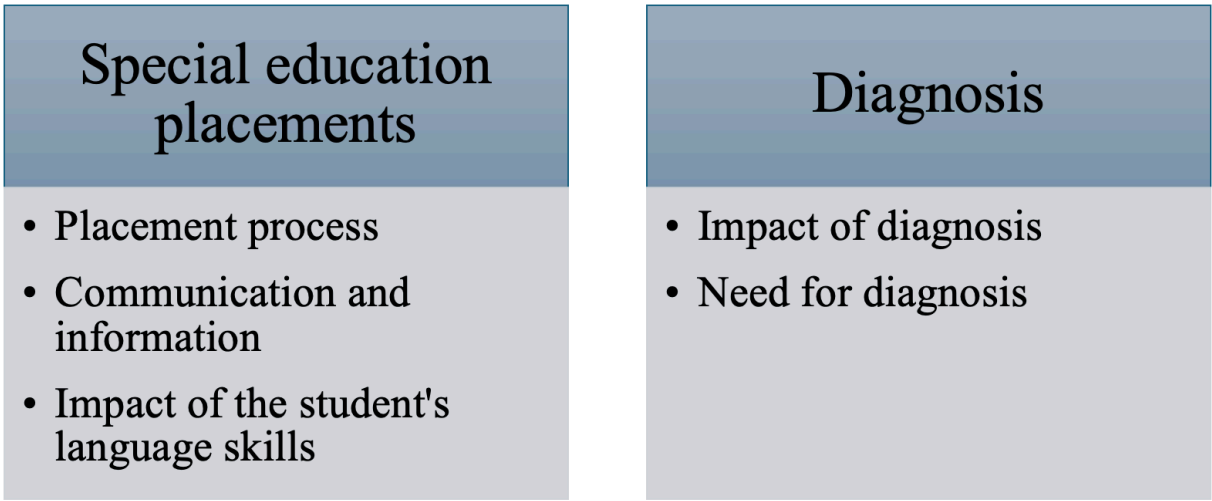


Figure 4: Themes and sub-themes from interviews with two teachers and a student’s parent

3.4.1. Special education placements

The theme of 'special education placements' is directly linked to the research questions, because the process of placement in special education may contribute to the over-representation of foreign students in special education in Switzerland and in the canton of Geneva. Every student placed in special education has to go through this process, which suggests that the mechanisms, the decisions taken in agreement with the parents or both contribute to the over-representation.

Placement process

This sub-theme was mentioned by all participants. There are usually several stages before a student is placed in special education in the canton of Geneva. Firstly, supportive measures are

put in place in the student's mainstream school class. If these measures are not sufficient, a request for a Standardised Assessment Procedure is made, generally by the teacher in collaboration with the parents and professionals working with the student. This request may result in additional supportive measures or special educational measures, such as placement in special education. The possibility of providing detailed information in the Standardised Assessment Procedure was seen as a positive aspect of the investment process:

"I find it gives a fairly detailed view of the student." (Teacher 1)

The possibility that a student whose placement in special education has been requested, could try out different schools before the final decision is made regarding their exact school placement, was suggested as an important step by one participant.

"But the fact that we welcome them here as “trainees”, where we can see if we're suitable for them and conversely if they're suitable for the environment we're offering them, I think it's already a good pre-sorting to find out if we're suitable to teach them things and then if they can develop in the best possible way. " (Teacher 2)

Contrary to the points made by the teachers, the student's parent had a negative opinion of the placement process:

"We didn't know where she was going or what the context of her school was until almost the last minute. Then, when we found out during the summer that she was going, where she was going, it was a new school that had just opened, so we couldn't visit. "(Parent)

It can be noted that the placement process is experienced differently by parents and teachers.

Communication and information

This sub-theme was mentioned by all participants. One of the issues most highlighted by participants was the lack of clarity of information and the incomprehension of parents, and sometimes teachers, about the process and implications of placing a child in special education.

In some cases it was the immediate process:

"The element of information doesn't exist at all, and it's not at all transparent or clear, whether it's the process or where our child is going to end up. "(Parent)

In some cases it was the longer-term expectations:

"I think, they had misunderstood the school's expectations because when they came here, well, they understood that next year their child would be completely in the mainstream. " (Teacher 2)

In some cases, it was the overall understanding of the system:

"But in reality, you don't really know in which specialised structure the child is going to be placed, if there is a place for him ... you're explaining something that's really abstract for you. So I think that we ourselves don't know exactly where the child is going, and the parents even less so. " (Teacher 1)

Two of the participants also mentioned that the incomprehension could be even greater when the parents were not fluent in French.

"I think that for someone who doesn't know the system, who doesn't speak fluent French, it must be even more difficult. If I, as a Swiss citizen who speaks French, and who understands how the system works, and who isn't afraid of the system, not afraid to send registered letters to different people, I think that's something my wife and I have thought about several times, that for people who don't have the same opportunities as us, it must be really difficult. "(Parent)

"Based on the experiences I've had in my circle of friends, in schools, etc., it's true that I have the impression that parents of foreign origin don't question special education placements. So they'll try to understand, they'll ask for lots of things, but they'll never say no, the child won't go. They accept quite quickly ... the parents who were Swiss or, in any case, who'd done their schooling here, were more likely to refuse placement in a special school. " (Teacher 1)

Impact of the student's language skills

This sub-theme is directly linked to the third research question. Both teachers suggested that an inadequate level of French was *not* a reason for placement in special education.

"In my opinion, you don't belong in a special school because your French isn't good enough. " (Teacher 1)

"In any case, I don't know if all schools have them, but in some schools where I've worked as a replacement, there are classes for immigrants or students who don't speak French. So the teachers teach them French. " (Teacher 2)

3.4.2. Diagnosis

The diagnostic theme is directly linked to the 2nd and 3rd research questions.

Impact of diagnosis

The two teachers suggested that the presence of a diagnosis could make it possible to adapt teaching to the student's needs. In the results mentioned under research question 3, it can be noted that 5 out of 17 students were placed in the special school in the canton of Geneva without a formal diagnosis.

"It can be a good starting point and then depending on what is diagnosed, it can help if it's an attention deficit disorder, we can know what to put in place, and ASD as well... But for those, in any case, whose files are complete, yes, I think it's quite easy. We agree, but let's just say that it's more feasible to adapt our practices. " (Teacher 2)

One of the teachers added that the diagnosis made it possible to provide formalised accommodation for the students.

"On the other hand, the real plus, I find, when there has been a diagnosis and it has been made by a specialist, is that very often they will ask for accommodations. And when you have accommodations, you can give more time for assessments, you can change the assessment aids, you can give access to other aids. I find that, on the other hand, there's a real added value and it clearly changes the reality of caring for the child. " (Teacher 1)

Need for diagnosis

There were mixed thoughts regarding the need for a diagnosis. Although the impact of a diagnosis was seen as beneficial by both teachers, one of them also suggested that it was still possible to try to adjust teaching to a student's needs:

"Because in reality, even if you don't have a diagnosis, you see how your student behaves, and you still try to adjust what you do for him. "
(Teacher 1)

On the other hand, for the parent, a diagnosis could make it possible to place students according to their diagnosis and avoid students with different needs being placed together:

"As soon as we have a child who can't manage or be managed in the normal way, we group them all together in a common pot and try to find solutions, rather than saying, I don't know, have a specialised class for children with behavioural problems, another class for children with dyslexia, another class for children with serious autistic problems, we put it all together and say, these are children who can't be managed or can't follow the normal curriculum. "(Parent)

The theme "special education placements" highlighted the lack of clarity in explaining to parents the placement of their child in special education, as well as the challenges in understanding the process and the implications of placement for parents, particularly those of foreign nationality. The "diagnosis" theme emphasised that although not everyone considers diagnosis to be necessary, it provides information that enables the student to be placed in a school or class that corresponds to his or her needs, to better identify the needs of the students and to adapt the program to those needs.

4. Discussion

In this chapter, the key findings will be discussed, associating them with the research questions and previous literature. We will then discuss the implications of the study for research and for the placement of students in special education in French-speaking Switzerland. Finally, we will discuss the limitations of the study and recommendations.

The aim of this study was to investigate the over-representation of students of foreign nationality in special education in Switzerland and in French-speaking Switzerland, to see what proportion of these students were placed without a diagnosis from a professional and to better understand the main reasons for placement for students placed without a diagnosis.

4.1. Research question 1: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.

Overall numbers of students in compulsory education

The results indicated a slight decrease in the total percentage of students in special education in Switzerland from 2.7% in 2017-18 to 2.5% in 2022-23; a slight decrease in the percentage of Swiss students in special education from 1.6% in 2017-18 to 1.4% in 2022-23 and stability in the percentage of foreign students in special education 1.1% in both 2017-18 and 2022-23. These results may suggest that the factors influencing the percentage of students in special education differ depending on whether the student is of Swiss or foreign nationality or these factors have a different influence on whether the student is of Swiss or foreign nationality. The decrease in the total percentage of students in special education is potentially due the law promoting the reduction of discrimination against people with a disability (Law on Equality for the Disabled, LHand, 2002). It is important to mention, however, that there are differences between cantons (Lanners, 2023). However, Bovey et al. (2022), in their study focusing on the canton of Vaud, suggested that the canton's integration policies have helped to reduce the gap between the proportion of foreign and Swiss national students in special education. The different education policies of the different cantons, the different populations and the different proportions of Swiss and foreign students in the cantons make it difficult to interpret these results in a national context.

National versus foreign students in special education

The data in this study indicate that the percentage of students in compulsory education are close to those of the Swiss population on 31 December 2022, 74% of whom were Swiss nationals and 26% foreign nationals (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, n.d.). The data also indicate that the percentage of Swiss students in mainstream education (72.2%) and that of foreign students in mainstream education (27.8%) are also close to that of the Swiss population on 31 December 2022. However, the data indicate that the percentages of foreign students are higher than expected and those of Swiss students are lower than expected. The results also show an association between student nationality and placement in special education in Switzerland: students of foreign nationality were twice as likely to be placed in special education in Switzerland than their Swiss peers. These results were expected and are in line with the findings of other research (Bovey et al., 2022; Sahai, 2015). Indeed, the study by Bovey et al. (2022) showed an over-representation of students of foreign nationality in special education in the canton of Vaud. Sahrai (2015), for her part, mentions in her report that there is an over-representation of students of foreign nationality in special education in Switzerland. These results fill a gap in the literature by providing qualitative and quantitative data demonstrating an association between special education placements in Switzerland.

Gomolla and Radtke (2009), in their study in Germany, suggested that migrant students were more likely to be placed in special education and that this discrimination was institutionalised, and gives as an example the habit of schools of directing students with a migrant background to special education or to less prestigious secondary education streams. Bovey et al. (2022) support this point by indicating that certain types of special education classes had previously been used to manage the arrival of students from migrant backgrounds. This way of managing student intake by discriminating against students from a migrant background is just one aspect of the over-representation of students from a migrant background in special education in Switzerland. Lanfranchi (2005), in his study in German-speaking Switzerland, showed that a student's economic status, origin or name had an influence on their placement in special education, and that students of migrant origin were more often placed in special education. We can see that the factors influencing this over-representation are at the level of the school, the student and his or her family, but also at the level of the teachers. Other authors have suggested that teachers' backgrounds may have an impact on the placement of students from migrant backgrounds in special education, as teachers may perceive the culture of these students as

differing from their own, which could contribute to their referral to special education (Nohl, 2010; Schumacher, 2002).

Other studies have suggested that other factors, including socio-economic level and academic performance, contribute to the over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education (Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008; Strand & Lindorff, 2021). Strand and Lindorff (2021), in their study conducted in England, demonstrated that, controlling for socio-economic level and student performance, the over-representation of students with a migrant background disappeared in most SEN categories and that certain ethnic groups were even under-represented in certain categories compared to the 'white British' group. Dyson and Gallannaugh (2008), in their study in England, also support this point by suggesting that gender and socio-economic level contribute significantly to the placement of students from migrant backgrounds in special education.

In the case of Switzerland, it could be a combination of the various factors mentioned below. However, the data available and the interviews conducted did not allow us to carry out the tests necessary to reach these conclusions. However, they do not contradict the results mentioned above. These results are in line with previous research and provide new information on the over-representation of foreign national students in Switzerland, in particular on the evolution of the proportion of students in special education depending on whether they are Swiss or foreign nationals.

4.2. In the French-speaking canton of Geneva

Geneva versus Vaud

The results showed a slight increase in the total percentage of students in special education in the canton of Geneva over the last 9 years, a slight increase in foreign students in special education and a slight decrease in Swiss students in special education. These results are consistent with the hypothesis of an over-representation of nationality students in special education, but the increase in the total percentage of students in special education was not expected, given the implementation of inclusion policies in the canton of Geneva (Les Fondements De L'école Inclusive, n.d.). Moreover, these results are not consistent with those of the study by Bovey et al. (2022) in the canton of Vaud (also French-speaking). In their study, Bovey et al. (2022) showed that the percentage of students in special education in the canton of Vaud had decreased between the 1996-97 school year and 2018-19. These differences can be

explained by the different education policies of the two cantons (an administrative division in Switzerland equivalent to the American states). As for the slight increase in the percentage of students of foreign nationality and the stability of the percentage of students of Swiss nationality, it can be suggested that inclusion policies have not had the same impact on the two populations and that other factors have influenced these results. However, the available data do not allow a more precise interpretation. It is important to note the main differences between Geneva and Vaud. Geneva is a very dense canton, unlike Vaud, which is larger but not very dense. Geneva is home to the headquarters of many international organisations. On 31 December 2022, the proportion of the permanent resident population aged 15 and over with a migrant background was 64.4% for the canton of Geneva, 52.3% for the canton of Vaud and 40% for Switzerland (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, n.d.). We can suggest that the migrant populations of the two cantons differ in terms of socio-economic status and origin. These factors can potentially influence placement in special education, as discussed above. It is also important to note that the Covid pandemic has also potentially impacted the special education placement process in both cantons, due to restrictions on entering and leaving the country, but also by prolonging planned placements or preventing a proper assessment of the student's skills.

The data indicate that the percentages of students in mainstream education, 51.1% of Swiss nationality and 44.9% of foreign nationality, are slightly different from those of residents of the canton of Geneva at the end of December 2022, Swiss (58.7%) and foreign (41.3%) (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, n.d.). The data also indicate that the percentages of students in special education of Swiss nationality and of foreign nationality, are considerably more distant from those of residents of the canton of Geneva at the end of December 2022 (Swiss: 42.2% vs. 51.1% and Foreign: 57.8% vs. 41.3%, respectively). The data also indicate that students of foreign nationality are 1.7 times more likely to be placed in special education than their Swiss peers. These results support the hypothesis that foreign students are over-represented in special education in the canton of Geneva. These results are in line with those of the study by Bovey et al. (2022) in the canton of Vaud and those of the report on special education in Switzerland by Sahrai (2015). The possible causes mentioned above for the over-representation of students of foreign nationalities in Switzerland are also conceivable for the canton of Geneva. The available data do not allow us to reach the conclusions mentioned in the Dyson and Gallannaugh (2008) and Strand and Lindorff (2021) studies, but do not contradict them.

Proportion of students in special education in the canton of Geneva by nationality

Descriptive statistics for nationality of students who attended special education in the canton of Geneva during the years 2021-22 and/or 2022-23 and/or 2023-24 show that the majority of students were Swiss (41.9%), with the majority of foreign nationals coming from Europe (32.2%), followed by Africa (10.8%), America (7.8%), Asia (7.1%) and Oceania (0.0%). On 31 December 2023, the population of the canton of Geneva was made up as follows: Swiss nationality (58.4%), with the majority of foreign nationals coming from Europe (29.5%), followed by Asia (4.2%), Africa (3.7%) and America (3.7%) (OCSTAT, 2023). If we compare these percentages, we can see that the percentages of students placed in special education differ from those expected. We can see that the percentage of students of foreign nationality in special education, all continents included, is higher than the percentage of residents of foreign nationality in the canton of Geneva on 31 December 2023 (Europe: 32.2% vs. 29.5%, Africa: 10.8% vs. 3.7%, America: 7.8% vs. 3.7% and Asia: 7.1% vs. 4.2%, respectively). Students of African nationality are the most over-represented, followed by students of American nationality, then Asian and finally European. On the other hand, the percentage of students of Swiss nationality in special education is lower than the percentage of residents of Swiss nationality in the canton of Geneva on 31 December 2024 (41.9% vs. 58.4%). It should be noted, however, that the difference between the expected percentage and that obtained varies according to the origin of the student. We can therefore assume that not all nationalities are affected by the over-representation in special education in the same way. This is in line with the results of the thematic analysis. One of the points on which the three participants agreed was the lack of clarity and information regarding the placement of a student in special education. One teacher and the parent said that they had little information about the school in which the student would be placed. Another teacher said that some parents did not fully understand their child's placement. It should be noted that the placement process is complicated to understand, even for trained teachers and for parents whose mother tongue is French and who have a good understanding of the education system in the canton of Geneva. Two of the participants added that it could be even more complicated for parents of foreign origin who did not speak French well to understand the placement. One teacher added that parents of foreign origin were more likely to accept their child's placement in a special school. These experiences suggest that communication about placement is not clear enough to enable parents and teachers to know in which school the student will be educated. It can also be suggested that, given that parental consent is required for the student to be placed in special education (Fondation Centre suisse

de pédagogie spécialisée, n.d.), the fact that they do not understand French well may contribute to their acceptance without understanding everything. This could contribute to the over-representation of foreign students in special education. This may partly explain the over-representation of foreign students in special education. It may also explain the different impact of over-representation according to nationality. We can suggest that parents from Europe will have a better understanding of the Geneva school system, which is certainly closer to the way schools operate in other European countries than in Africa. This is in line with the study by Bovey et al. (2022), which indicates that students from sub-Saharan Africa are more over-represented in special education in the canton of Vaud than other nationalities. Bovey et al. (2022) also indicate that students from more recent migrant backgrounds are more likely to be placed in special education. The authors also indicate that students from countries currently in a state of conflict, such as the Congo, Afghanistan, Somalia, etc., make up recent migration and are more over-represented in special education in the canton of Vaud than other older migrant backgrounds such as Italy and Eastern Europe.

These results are in line with previous research that suggests an over-representation of students of foreign nationality in special education in French-speaking Switzerland, but also a differentiated over-representation according to nationality (Bovey et al., 2022; Sahrai, 2015) but also provides new information on the over-representation of pupils of foreign nationality in the canton of Geneva, in particular by providing data on this over-representation according to the origin of the student and giving possible explanations for this over-representation. This study is the first to use quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate the over-representation of students of foreign nationality in special education in the canton of Geneva. It is also the first to show the differences in proportions in special education in the canton of Geneva according to nationality (continent).

Placement process

The results of the thematic analysis also provided information on advantages of the placement process of students in special education. One of the teachers said that the placement process had its advantages, in particular the fact that he was able to give a lot of information about the student in the Standardised Assessment Procedure, and another teacher said that sometimes the student was given the opportunity to try out his potential future school to see if it was right for him. The parent, for his part, mentioned the uncertainty of not knowing which school his child would be placed in as a negative point.

4.3. Research question 2: Are students of foreign nationality over-represented among students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva without a diagnosis?

Students can be placed in a special education school with or without a professional diagnosis. Descriptive statistics showed that of the 17 students placed in a special school in the canton of Geneva for the start of the 2024-25 school year, 33.3% of the students placed with a diagnosis are Swiss nationals and 66.7% of the students placed with a diagnosis are foreign nationals. Of the students placed without a diagnosis, 20% are Swiss nationals and 80% foreign nationals. However, the data collected is not sufficient to draw any conclusions due to the limited sample numbers. At the time the data was collected, only the files of these 17 students were available out of the total of 64 students that the school will have at the start of the 2024-25 school year. Furthermore, following the recent inclusion policies of the canton of Geneva (Les Fondements De L'école Inclusive, n.d.), it is to be expected that the proportion of students placed in special schools (separative settings) with a diagnosis will increase over time, because the students with the most accommodations, often following a diagnosis, will be placed in a special school or special class, while those without a diagnosis will receive educational measures in an ordinary or inclusive class.

The Fisher's exact test, performed instead of the chi-square test due to the small number of data available, does not indicate a significant association between nationality and the presence of a diagnosis. As noted above, the limited sample numbers, only 14 students out of a total of 64 influence the results. It should be noted that the small number of students does not represent all of the students who will be attending this school in 2024-25, nor can it be generalised to all special schools or special education in the canton of Geneva. As no study has analysed the proportions of students placed in special education in Switzerland with or without a diagnosis, it is not possible to associate the results and descriptive data with those of other studies.

The results of the thematic analysis indicated that a diagnosis could enable mainstream and special education teachers to adapt their teaching to the needs of the student. The student's parent also indicated that a diagnosis could facilitate a placement in a school adapted to the student's needs. However, one of the teachers felt that a diagnosis was not necessarily needed to adjust her teaching to the student because, in her opinion, teachers can notice that a student has special needs and adapt their teaching programme to meet those needs. These results suggest that diagnosis (either professional or suggested) has several advantages and perhaps should be fully integrated into the placement of a student in special education.

The data available did not enable us to obtain the results we had anticipated but did highlight important aspects of placement in special education without diagnosis that would benefit from further investigation. No studies have investigated the over-representation of foreign national students among students placed without a diagnosis in special education in Switzerland. However, Sullivan et al. (2019), in their study in the United States, have examined the impact of diagnosis in the placement of African-American students in special education. They found that school psychologists were sometimes influenced by non-medical aspects such as the socio-economic level or ethnicity of students when diagnosing them and that their decisions were not always reliable and could contribute to the over-identification of African-American students as having autism (Sullivan et al., 2019). These results suggest that the diagnoses made by school psychologists may be incorrect and contribute to a student's needs being misidentified. These results contradict the hypothesis that minority students are over-represented among students placed in special education without diagnosis. However, future research is needed to test this hypothesis.

4.4. Research question 3: Among students placed in special education without a diagnosis, what is the predominant reason?

The data show that the majority of students placed without a diagnosis at this special school in the canton of Geneva are of foreign nationality (80%) and are all boys. The data also indicate that two of the students were placed for several reasons. The reasons are organised into categories taken from part 5 of the Standardised Assessment Procedure (Fondation Centre suisse de pédagogie spécialisée, n.d.), except for the category 'Suspicion of a disorder by a professional'. This category was added by the researcher because, although it is not mentioned in the Standardised Assessment Procedure, it was mentioned in the records of two students. In addition, this mention may provide information on potential future diagnoses for these two students. Following the student's placement in a special school, it is highly likely that the school's professional team will take the necessary steps to make a diagnosis. As mentioned by one of the teachers, the diagnosis enables the school to provide accommodations for the student and also enables the teacher to adapt his or her teaching to the student. This makes it possible to support the student as early as possible and possibly benefit from accommodation in mainstream education or to facilitate a suitable placement in special education, either in a special class or in a special school.

The most common reasons given for placing these students were learning and knowledge (3 times) and relationships and interaction with others (3 times), then communication (2 times) and suspicion of a disorder by a professional (2 times) and general tasks and demands (1 time), personal care (1 time) and mobility (0 times). Several reasons were given for two of the students. We can suggest that for these students, whose disorder was suspected by a professional, a diagnosis could not be made because of the length of the procedure, but that a placement in special education was proposed by the school and accepted by the parents. This point is in line with the study by Bovey et al. (2022), who mention that it can take several years for a diagnosis to be made. For the other 3 students, only one reason was mentioned. For the student with the learning and knowledge application category, we can suggest that it is the same reason, the student having learning challenges that make it difficult for him to attend mainstream school. For the student with the communication category, we can also suggest the same reason, the student potentially having an undiagnosed language disorder. We can also suggest that some teachers use the communication category for students with a low level of French. It is conceivable that a student who does not speak French well, but who also has other difficulties, could be placed for several reasons. In this case, the communication category could be used to indicate their French language difficulties. Low level in French would not be the only reason for placement, but would be part of a group of reasons. However, we can also suggest that if the student's only difficulty is a low level of French, he or she would be entitled to French classes as mentioned by the teachers. For the student in the relationships and interaction with others category, this raises more questions. As the definition of the category is broad, more information about the student is needed to interpret this data. This category would benefit from being more precise by dividing it into several categories such as: language production difficulties, national language difficulties, language processing difficulties, etc. These precisions could help to better identify the student's needs.

The data available are not sufficient to draw reliable and generalisable conclusions. However, the use of sufficient data could make it possible to learn more about the predominant reasons for placements for students placed in special education without a diagnosis and thus improve the support provided to these students by their mainstream teacher in order to potentially prevent placement. No studies have investigated the reasons for placement for students placed in special education in Switzerland without a diagnosis. However, studies have looked at the over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education in England and

found a relationship between ethnicity and placement in specific SEN categories (Strand & Lindsay, 2009; Strand & Lindorff, 2021).

4.5. Limitations

Although this study provides new findings in the context of Switzerland and the canton of Geneva, it does have several limitations. Firstly, as the Swiss cantons have different education policies, including special education, it is difficult to interpret the results on a Swiss perspective.

Secondly, the limited available quantitative open-access data on students in special education in Switzerland and the canton of Geneva do not allow a more powerful logistic test such as logistic regression to be performed, and thus control for other variables such as socio-economic level and school results. Indeed, other studies, notably in England, have shown that when these variables were controlled for, over-representation was greatly reduced, non-existent or sometimes became under-representation (Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008; Strand & Lindorff, 2021). It would be interesting to see whether the phenomenon is the same in Switzerland and in the canton of Geneva.

Thirdly, the lack of data for special schools in the canton of Geneva meant that it was not possible to obtain interpretable and potentially generalisable results. With only 17 student files, it is not possible to determine whether students of foreign nationality are over-represented among students placed in special education without a diagnosis and to clearly define the main reasons for the placement of students without a diagnosis.

Fourthly, the qualitative data obtained during the interviews with two teachers and one parent of a student do not allow us to generalise their views to other teachers and parents of students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva. The number of people interviewed was insufficient. However, a larger sample could have made it possible to obtain opinions representing more parents and special education teachers (Cobern & Adams, 2020).

4.6. Recommendations for future studies

Further studies could be conducted with more data on the students, including socio-economic level and academic performance. This would make it possible to control for these variables and to see whether the results concur with those of studies which have found an influence of these factors in the over-representation of students from migrant backgrounds in special education

(Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008; Strand & Lindorff, 2021). It would also be interesting to analyse the diagnoses of students placed in special education according to nationality. This would make it possible to investigate in which category students are under-represented or over-represented and to investigate the reasons for this. Finally, a larger number of teachers and parents interviewed would make it possible to obtain results that could be generalised to the canton of Geneva.

4.7. Recommendations for the placement of students in special education

The results of this research indicate that the process of placing students in special education is not always understood by parents and teachers. This can result in a parent accepting the placement without understanding what it means for the education of their child and the teacher not being able to properly inform the parents and the student about the placement. The researcher recommends that the process of placement in special education should be the subject of an information sheet, translated into the languages most widely spoken by parents and easily accessible to parents and teachers.

The results of this research showed that a significant number of students were placed in special education without a diagnosis. This can result in a student being placed without the reasons for their placement being clear and without their needs being identified. The researcher recommends combining the Standardised Assessment Procedure with a test that measures a student's potential, such as RTI to provide the earliest possible support for the student and regularly assess his or her progress (Hoover, 2010) and (or) the VESPARCH test, which measures verbal and spatial reasoning (Badger & Mellanby, 2018). The combination of these methods could provide a better overview of the student's potential and skills when a diagnosis is not available, and thus help to ensure that special education placements are only made when specific needs that require a placement are identified.

4.8. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate and demonstrate with quantitative and qualitative data 1) whether students of foreign nationality are over-represented in special education in Switzerland and in French-speaking Switzerland, 2) whether students of foreign nationality are over-represented among students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva without

a diagnosis, and 3) the main reasons for placement in a special school in the canton of Geneva without a diagnosis. Based on the qualitative and quantitative data, it can be concluded that students of foreign nationality are over-represented in special education in Switzerland and specifically in the canton of Geneva. The data were not sufficient to conclude that foreign students are over-represented among students placed in special education in the canton of Geneva without a diagnosis. The data were also insufficient to conclude on one or more of the main reasons for placement without diagnosis.

This study used qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate the over-representation of students of foreign nationality in Switzerland and in the canton of Geneva. Future studies are needed to investigate the influence of other variables such as socio-economic level and student performance. Future studies could also use more student data to investigate whether students of foreign nationality are over-represented among students placed in special education without diagnosis and what are the main reasons for placements for students placed in special education without diagnosis. It is also essential that schools make the process of placement in special education more comprehensible to parents and teachers. In addition, the use of several means to support the student and assess his/her level when a diagnosis is not available is recommended in order to improve the process of placement in special education.

References

- American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/minority-group>
- Badger, J. R., & Mellanby, J. (2018). Revealing hidden talents: The development, use, and benefit of VESPARCH. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88(3), 380–395. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12189>
- Bauer, S. (2018). L’enseignement spécialisé est-il (toujours) pertinent pour les élèves issus de la migration ?. *Revue Suisse De pédagogie spécialisée*, 8(4), 47–53. <https://ojs.szh.ch/revue/article/view/69>
- Bolderston, A. (2012). Conducting a research interview. *Journal of Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences*, 43(1), 66–76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmir.2011.12.002>
- Bovey, L., Bauer, S., & Bonvin, P. (2022). La surreprésentation des élèves de nationalité étrangère dans l’enseignement spécialisé vaudois : une analyse par les dispositifs scolaires et la région d’origine. *Schweizerische Zeitschrift Für Bildungswissenschaften*, 44(1), 103–115. <https://doi.org/10.24452/sjer.44.1.8>
- Cate, I. M. P., & Glock, S. (2018). Teacher expectations concerning students with immigrant backgrounds or special educational needs. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 24(3–5), 277–294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2018.1550839>

Cavendish, W., Connor, D., Gonzalez, T., Jean-Pierre, P., & Card, K. (2018). Troubling “The Problem” of racial overrepresentation in special education: a commentary and call to rethink research. *Educational Review*, 72(5), 567–582.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1550055>

Chinn, P. C., & Hughes, S. (1987). Representation of minority students in special education classes. *Remedial and Special Education*, 8(4), 41–46.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/074193258700800406>

Coburn, W. W., & Adams, B. A. J. (2020). When interviewing: how many is enough?

International Journal of Assessment Tools in Education, 7(1), 73–79.

<https://doi.org/10.21449/ijate.693217>

Cole, S. M., Murphy, H. R., Frisby, M. B., & Robinson, J. (2023). The Relationship Between Special Education Placement and High School Outcomes. *The Journal of Special Education*, 57(1), 13-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669221097945>

Conférence suisse des directeurs de l’instruction publique (CDIP) (2007). *Accord intercantonal du 25 octobre 2007 sur la pédagogie spécialisée*.

Cook, B. G., & Schirmer, B. R. (2003). What is special about special education? *The Journal of Special Education*, 37(3), 200–205.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669030370031001>

- Cruz, R. A., & Firestone, A. R. (2022). Understanding the empty backpack: The role of timing in Disproportionate special Education identification. *Sociology of Race & Ethnicity*, 8(1), 95–113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23326492211034890>
- Dawadi, S., Shrestha, S., & Giri, R. A. (2021). Mixed-Methods Research: A Discussion on its Types, Challenges, and Criticisms. *Journal of Practical Studies in Education*, 2(2), 25–36. <https://doi.org/10.46809/jpse.v2i2.20>
- Dubois-Shaik, F., & Dupriez, V. (2013). Les défis structurels, organisationnels et cognitifs liés à la gestion de l'hétérogénéité [l'hétérogénéité] des élèves dans les systèmes éducatifs. *Schweizerische Zeitschrift Für Bildungswissenschaften*, 35(1), 113–129. <https://doi.org/10.25656/01:10290>
- Dyson, A., & Gallannaugh, F. (2008). Disproportionality in special needs education in England. *The Journal of Special Education*, 42(1), 36–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466907313607>
- Eckhart, M., Haeberlin, U., Sahli Lozano, C., & Blanc, P. (2011). *Langzeitwirkungen der schulischen Integration. Eine empirische Studie zur Bedeutung von Integrationserfahrungen in der Schulzeit für die soziale und berufliche Situation im jungen Erwachsenenalter*. Haupt Verlag.
- Elder, T.E., Figlio, D.N., Imberman, S.A., & Persico, C.L. (2021). Segregation and Racial Gaps in Special Education: New evidence on the debate over disproportionality. *Education Next*, 21(2), 62-68. <https://www.educationnext.org/segregation-racial-gaps-special-education-new-evidence-on-debate-over-disproportionality/>

Etat de Genève. (n.d.). *Enseignement spécialisé*. Retrieved May 10, 2024, from

<https://www.ge.ch/enseignement-specialise/structures-lieux-accueil>

Evrard, A., Hrizi, Y., Ducrey, F., & Rastoldo, F. (2016). *Analyse des dispositifs d'accueil et d'intégration des élèves primo-arrivants allophones: Rapport 2 : Étude des parcours scolaires des élèves issus des classes d'accueil à Genève*. Genève: SRED.

<https://www.ge.ch/document/analyse-dispositifs-accueil-integration-eleves-primo-arrivants-allophones-rapport-2-etude-parcours-scolaires-eleves-issus-classes-accueil-geneve>

Farkas, G., Morgan, P. L., Hillemeier, M. M., Mitchell, C., & Woods, A. D. (2020). District-Level achievement gaps explain Black and Hispanic overrepresentation in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 86(4), 374–392.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402919893695>

Field, A. (2017). *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications

Fondation Centre suisse de pédagogie spécialisée. (n.d.). *Qu'est-ce qu'une école spécialisée ? Et une classe spéciale ?* Fondation Centre Suisse De Pédagogie Spécialisée.

<https://www.csps.ch/themes/ecole-et-integration/integration-scolaire/reponse-16>

Gabel, S. L., Curcic, S., Powell, J. J., Khader, K., & Albee, L. (2009). Migration and ethnic group disproportionality in special education: an exploratory study. *Disability & Society*, 24(5), 625–639. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590903011063>

- Galvin, R. (2015). How many interviews are enough? Do qualitative interviews in building energy consumption research produce reliable knowledge? *Journal of Building Engineering*, 1, 2–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jobe.2014.12.001>
- Gomolla, M., & Radtke, F. O. (2009). *Institutionelle Diskriminierung. Die Herstellung ethnischer Differenz in der Schule*. 3rd ed. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften Wiesbaden
- Guba, E.G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 29, 75-91.
- Guiberson, M. (2009). Hispanic representation in special education: patterns and implications. *Preventing School Failure : Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 53(3), 167–176. <https://doi.org/10.3200/psfl.53.3.167-176>
- Helakorpi, J., Holm, G., & Liu, X. (2023). Education of Pupils with Migrant Backgrounds: A Systemic Failure in the Finnish System?. In: M. Thrupp, P. Seppänen, J. Kauko & S. Kosunen (Eds), *Finland's Famous Education System* (pp. 319–333). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8241-5_20
- Hienonen, N., Hotulainen, R., & Jahnukainen, M. (2021). Outcomes of Regular and Special Class Placement for Students with Special Educational Needs – A Quasi-experimental Study. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 65(4), 646–660. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1739134>

Hinz, A. (2009). Inklusive Pädagogik in der Schule – veränderter Orientierungsrahmen für die schulische Sonderpädagogik!? Oder doch deren Ende?? *Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik* 5, 171–179.

<https://www.fachportalpaedagogik.de/en/literatur/vollanzeige.html?FId=3097517#verfuegbarkeit>

Hoover, J. J. (2010). Special education eligibility decision making in response to intervention models. *Theory Into Practice*, 49(4), 289–296.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2010.510752>

Hussain, M., & Mahmud, I. (2019). pyMannKendall: a python package for non parametric Mann Kendall family of trend tests. *The Journal of Open Source Software*, 4(39), 1556. <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.01556>

Indorf, C., & Scherr, A. (2015). Égalité des chances et discrimination lors du passage vers la formation professionnelle. In A. Haenni Hoti (Ed.), *Équité – Discrimination et égalité des chances au sein du système éducatif. Migration et origine sociale* (pp. 82–88). Conférence suisse des directeurs cantonaux de l’instruction publique (CDIP).

Jørgensen, C. R., Dobson, G., & Perry, T. (2020). Migrant children with special educational needs in European schools – a review of current issues and approaches. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 36(3), 438–453.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2020.1762988>

Kinsella, W., Fenwick, A., Prendeville, P., & Kelly, M. (2023). Migration, special educational needs and inclusive education. In H. Pinson, N. Bunar & D. Devine (Eds.), *Research Handbook on Migration and Education* (pp. 189–202). Elgar Handbooks in Education. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839106361.00019>

Kronig, W., Haeblerlin, U., & Eckhart, M. (2007). *Immigrantenkinder und schulische Selektion. Pädagogische Visionen, theoretische Erklärungen und empirische Untersuchungen zur Wirkung integrierender und separierender Schulformen in den Grundschuljahren*. Haupt.

Lanfranchi, A. (2005). Nomen est omen: Diskriminierung bei sonderpädagogischen Zuweisungen. *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik*, 7(8), 45–48. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7628392>

Lanners, R. (2023, January). *La mise en œuvre des recommandations en matière d'éducation inclusive dans un contexte fédéral: un pour tous ou tous pour un?* CDIP. Retrieved July 10, 2024, from <https://www.edk.ch/fr/la-cdip/blog/180123>

Les fondements de l'école inclusive. (n.d.). République Et Canton De Genève. Retrieved July 10, 2024, from <https://www.ge.ch/dossier/ecole-plus-inclusive-geneve/presentation-ecole-inclusive/fondements-ecole-inclusive>

Loi sur l'égalité pour les handicapés, LHand (2002). *Loi fédérale du 13 décembre 2002 sur l'élimination des inégalités frappant les personnes handicapées.*

<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2003/667/fr>

Lozano, C. S., Brandenburg, K., Ganz, A. S., & Wüthrich, S. (2022). Accommodations, modifications, and special education interventions: influence on teacher expectations.

Educational Research and Evaluation, 27(5–8), 396–419.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2022.2103571>

Maheady, L., Algozzine, B., & Ysseldyke, J. E. (1984). Minority overrepresentation in special education: *Special Services in the Schools*, 1(2), 5–19.

https://doi.org/10.1300/j008v01n02_02

Maïano, C., Ninot, G., Bruant, G., & Benattar, B. (2003). Répercussions du placement en établissement spécialisé sur le sentiment de compétence d'adolescents en échec scolaire. *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie canadienne*, 44(2), 139–151.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086932>

May, T. (2011). Interviewing: Methods and process. In *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process* (4th ed., pp. 131–161). Open University Press.

Mazurek, K., & Winzer, M. A. (1994). *Comparative studies in special education*. Gallaudet University Press.

- Migliarini, V., D'Alessio, S., & Bocci, F. (2020). SEN Policies and migrant children in Italian schools: micro-exclusions through discourses of equality. *Discourse*, 41(6), 887–900. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2018.1558176>
- Miller, J., & Glassner, B. (2020). The “inside” and the “outside”: Finding realities in interviews. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 53–68). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Morgan, H. (2020). Misunderstood and mistreated: Students of color in special education. *Voices of Reform*, 3(2), 71–81. <https://doi.org/10.32623/3.10005>
- Morgan, P. L., Farkas, G., Cook, M., Strassfeld, N. M., Hillemeier, M. M., Pun, W. H., & Schussler, D. L. (2017). Are Black children disproportionately overrepresented in special education? A Best-Evidence synthesis. *Exceptional Children*, 83(2), 181–198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402916664042>
- Morgan, P. L., Woods, A. D., Wang, Y., Hillemeier, M. M., Farkas, G., & Mitchell, C. (2020). Are schools in the U.S. south using special education to segregate students by race? *Exceptional Children*, 86(3), 255–275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402919868486>
- Morrier, M. J., & Gallagher, P. A. (2011). Disproportionate representation in placements of preschoolers with disabilities in five southern states. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 31(1), 48–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121410363830>

- Mosley, W. J., & Spicker, H. H. (1975). Mainstreaming for the educationally deprived. *Theory Into Practice*, 14(2), 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405847509542559>
- Noble, H., & Smith, J. (2015). Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 18(2), 34–35. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102054>
- Nohl, A. M. (2010). *Konzepte interkultureller Pädagogik. Eine systematische Einführung*. Verlag Julius Klinkhardt.
- Nowacki, A. (2017). Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests. *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*, 84(9 suppl 2), e20–e25. <https://doi.org/10.3949/ccjm.84.s2.04>
- OCSTAT. (2023). BILAN ET ÉTAT DE LA POPULATION DU CANTON DE GENÈVE EN 2023. In *République Et Canton De Genève*. https://statistique.ge.ch/tel/publications/2023/informations_statistiques/autres_themes/is_population_03_2023.pdf
- Office fédéral de la statistique. (n.d.). *Elèves de la scolarité obligatoire selon la forme d'enseignement, le sexe, la nationalité (catégorie) et le type de mesures de pédagogie spécialisée - 1.8.2017-31.7.2023 | Tableau | Office fédéral de la statistique*. Office Fédéral De La Statistique. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/education-science/personnes-formation/cole-obligatoire/pedagogie-specialisee.assetdetail.30745648.html>

- Ortoger, S. P., & Ray, A. B. (2021). Overrepresentation of English learners in special education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. *Educational Media International*, 58(2), 161–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2021.1930485>
- Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS Survival Manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS* (7th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003117452>
- Payet, J., & Giuliani, F. (2014). La relation école-familles socialement désqualifiées au défi de la constitution d'un monde commun : pratiques, épreuves et limites. *Education Et Sociétés*, 34(2), 55–70. <https://doi.org/10.3917/es.034.0055>
- Sahrai, D. (2015). Égalité des chances et discrimination dans le cadre de la scolarisation spécialisée des enfants et des jeunes issus de la migration. In A. Haenni Hoti (Ed.), *Équité – Discrimination et égalité des chances au sein du système éducatif. Migration et origine sociale* (pp. 51–63). Conférence suisse des directeurs cantonaux de l'instruction publique (CDIP).
- Schmaus, M. (2021). Disproportionate identification of special needs for ethnic and language minority students in England—patterns and explanations. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 43(1), 40–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2021.2002682>
- Schumacher, E. (2002). Die soziale Ungleichheit der Lehrer/innen – oder: Gibt es eine Milieuspezifität pädagogischen Handelns? In J. Mägdefrau & E. Schumacher (Eds), *Pädagogik und soziale Ungleichheit. Aktuelle Beiträge – Neue Herausforderungen* (pp. 253–270). Verlag Julius Klinkhardt.

Strand, S., & Lindsay, G. (2009). Evidence of ethnic disproportionality in special education in an English population. *The Journal of Special Education*, 43(3), 174–190.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466908320461>

Strand, S., & Lindorff, A. (2021). Ethnic Disproportionality in the Identification of High-Incidence Special Educational Needs: A National Longitudinal study Ages 5 to 11.

Exceptional Children, 87(3), 344–368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402921990895>

Sullivan, A. L., Sadeh, S., & Hourri, A. K. (2019). Are school psychologists' special education eligibility decisions reliable and unbiased?: A multi-study experimental investigation.

Journal of School Psychology, 77, 90–109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2019.10.006>

UNESCO. (2009). *Principes directeurs pour l'inclusion dans l'éducation*.

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000177849_fre

UNESCO. (2012). *Combattre l'exclusion dans l'éducation: Guide d'évaluation des systèmes éducatifs pour des sociétés plus inclusives et plus justes*.

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000217073_fre

Wahl, S., Trauntschnig, M., Hoffmann, L., & Schwab, S. (2022). Peer acceptance and peer status in relation to students' special educational needs, migration biography, gender and socio-economic status.

Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 22(3), 243–253. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12562>

Wettstein, J., Valarino, I., Mouad, R., & Dutrévis, M. (2023). *Indicateurs de la pédagogie spécialisée*. Genève : SRED. <https://www.ge.ch/document/34004/telecharger>

Appendix A

Department of Education
Dr Julia Badger
Julia.badger@education.ox.ac.uk

Julien Nsanzabeza, MSc Education student
Julien.n sanzabeza@education.ox.ac.uk
Oxford University telephone number: +44 1865 274024
Oxford University e-mail: general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk



Specialised education in French-speaking Switzerland: an analysis of the main reasons for the placement of these students

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: EDUC_C1A_24_051

1. Introductory paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. If you decide you would like to take part, please complete the attached consent form and return it to your / your child's school office.

2. Why is this research being conducted?

I'm doing this research as part of my master's degree. The aim of this research is to understand more about the demographics of people in special schools and factors behind their placement, especially if they do not have a diagnosis. As part of this research, I am conducting interviews with 2 teachers and 2 parents to hear their views on the placement of their students or child in a special school.

3. Why have I been invited to take part?

The Department of Public Education of the Canton of Geneva informed me of the schools I could visit to interview two teachers and two parents of foreign students placed in special schools. Your school has been invited to take part.

4. Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the research, without giving a reason, and without negative consequences by advising me of this decision. You can withdraw until 15/06/24 and your data will be destroyed.

5. What will happen to me if I take part in the research?

The interview will take place in person in the school, in the room allocated to us. I will take the time to explain how the interview will be conducted. If you agree to take part in the interview, I will ask you a few questions about your child's / student's placement in a special school. The interview will take place once and will last no more than 20 minutes. You can choose not to answer any or all of the questions without giving any reasons. You may choose to withdraw from the interview at any time without giving any reason. With your agreement, I would like to make an audio recording of the interview so that I can transcribe it later the same day. The recording will be erased once the data has been transcribed. The transcription will not include your name or identifying information.

6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

There are no direct risks in taking part in this study. There will be no way of identifying you in the research results. Your personal data will not be linked to the transcription of your interview.

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will be no direct or personal benefit to you from taking part in this research.

8. What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?

I am interested in your experiences as a teacher or a parent of a student in a special school. I am also interested in your opinion on the reasons for the student's placement and the consequences it may have. The information you provide will help me to better understand the implications of placing a student of foreign nationality in a special school. The recording of the interview will be transcribed onto a Word file and once checked, the audio recording will be erased. The transcript of the recording will be saved on a secure server at Oxford University and will be kept for 3 months.

The researcher supervisor will have access to the research data.

Identifiable data including consent forms will be stored for 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research. Other research data will be stored for 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

The findings from the research will be written up in a dissertation. It will not be possible to identify participants in this paper.

We would like your permission to use direct quotations but without identifying you in any research outputs.

9. Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the research. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from the University's Information Compliance web site at <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

10. Who has reviewed this research?

This research has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: **xxxxx**).

11. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, please contact Julien Nsanzabeza (+44 1865 274024, Julien.n sanzabeza@education.ox.ac.uk), or Dr Julia Badger (+44 1865 274024, Julia.badger@education.ox.ac.uk) and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge

6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

There are no direct risks in taking part in this study. There will be no way of identifying you in the research results. Your personal data will not be linked to the transcription of your interview.

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will be no direct or personal benefit to you from taking part in this research.

8. What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?

I am interested in your experiences as a teacher or a parent of a student in a special school. I am also interested in your opinion on the reasons for the student's placement and the consequences it may have. The information you provide will help me to better understand the implications of placing a student of foreign nationality in a special school. The recording of the interview will be transcribed onto a Word file and once checked, the audio recording will be erased. The transcript of the recording will be saved on a secure server at Oxford University and will be kept for 3 months.

The researcher supervisor will have access to the research data.

Identifiable data including consent forms will be stored for 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research. Other research data will be stored for 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

The findings from the research will be written up in a dissertation. It will not be possible to identify participants in this paper.

We would like your permission to use direct quotations but without identifying you in any research outputs.

9. Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the research. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from the University's Information Compliance web site at <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

10. Who has reviewed this research?

This research has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: **xxxxx**).

11. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, please contact Julien Nsanzabeza (+44 1865 274024, Julien.n sanzabeza@education.ox.ac.uk), or Dr Julia Badger (+44 1865 274024, Julia.badger@education.ox.ac.uk) and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge

Appendix B

Department of Education
Dr Julia Badger
Julia.badger@education.ox.ac.uk

Julien Nsanzabeza, MSc Education student
Julien.n sanzabeza@education.ox.ac.uk
Oxford University telephone number: +44 1865 274024
Oxford University e-mail: general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk



Consent to take part in

Specialised education in French-speaking Switzerland: an analysis of the main reasons for the placement of these students

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval reference: EDUC_C1A_24_051

Purpose of Study:

The aim of this research is to understand more about the demographics of people in special schools and factors behind their placement, especially if they do not have a diagnosis.

Please initial each box if you agree with the statement

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point until 15/06/24, without giving any reason.

I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.

I understand that I will not be identifiable in the research paper

I consent to being audio recorded.

I understand how audio recording will be used in research outputs.

Use of quotations: Please indicate your preference (select *one* option):

a) I do not wish to be quoted. **or**

b) I agree to the use of quotations in research outputs if I am not identifiable.

I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.

I agree to take part.

I agree that my personal contact details can be retained in a secure database so that the researchers can contact me about this study.

YES / NO

Name of participant

dd / mm / yyyy
Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

dd / mm / yyyy
Date¹

Signature

¹ To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant. Once this has been signed by both parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form. The original signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents, which must be kept in a secure location.

Appendix C

Semi-structured interview schedule

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the study. The interview will last about 15 minutes. I'm going to ask you a few questions relating to the placement of students in special education in the canton of Geneva. You don't have to answer the questions, and you can leave the interview at any time. Do you still agree to take part in the study?

Questions for teachers:

1. What do you think of the process involved in placing students in special schools? What are its strengths? What could be improved?
2. Does the absence of a diagnosis have an influence on the way a student is cared for?
3. Do parents, particularly those of foreign origin, always understand their child's placement in a special school?
4. Do you think you can assess whether a student should be placed in a mainstream or special school?
5. Do you think you have enough information about the students to adapt your teaching and didactics to their needs?
6. Do you think that some students are placed in special schools because of their insufficient French language skills?

Questions for parents:

1. How do you feel about the placement of your child in a special school?
2. Did you receive the necessary information before agreeing to your child's placement in a special school? About the reasons for the placement? About your parental rights?
3. In your opinion, what could be improved in the placement process?

Appendix D

**SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES
INTERDIVISIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk; staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk



Julien Nsanzabeza
Department of Education, Social Sciences Division
University of Oxford

3 March 2024

Dear Julien,

Research ethics approval

Research title: Specialised education in French-speaking Switzerland: an analysis of the main reasons for the placement of these students

Research ethics reference: EDUC_C1A_24_051

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the University's procedures for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to confirm that, on the basis of the information provided to the DREC, ethics approval has now been granted for this study.

Please note the following:

Personal data: It is the responsibility of the PI to ensure that all personal data collected during the project is managed in accordance with the University's [guidance and legal requirements](#).

In-person activities: Any data collection involving in-person interactions with participants must have an up-to-date fieldwork risk assessment in place; further guidance is available from the Safety Office's [website](#).

Amendments: Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval, as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available on the [SSH IDREC webpage](#).

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk / student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk or ethics@soecsci.ox.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Dr Gary Snapper

DREC member

cc: Dr Julia Badger

**SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES
INTERDIVISIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk; staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk



Julien Nsanzabeza
Department of Education, Social Sciences Division
University of Oxford

23 March 2024

Dear Julien

Research ethics approval

Research title: Specialised education in French-speaking Switzerland: an analysis of the main reasons for the placement of these students

Research ethics reference: EDUC_C1A_24_051

Date of amendment: March 2024

Amendment number: 1

The above amendment has been considered on behalf of the Department of Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the University's procedures for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to confirm that, on the basis of the information provided to the DREC, ethics approval has now been granted for this amendment.

Please note the following:

Personal data: It is the responsibility of the PI to ensure that all personal data collected during the project is managed in accordance with the University's [guidance and legal requirements](#).

In-person activities: Any data collection involving in-person interactions with participants must have an up-to-date fieldwork risk assessment in place; further guidance is available from the Safety Office's [website](#).

Amendments: Please notify the committee if you intend to make any further amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval, as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available on the [SSH IDREC webpage](#).

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk / student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk or ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Dr Gary Snapper

DREC member

cc: Dr Julia Badger