

# BRIDGING INCLUSION TO THE MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF PULL-OUT CLASSES ON MEETING IEP GOALS FOR SEN STUDENTS

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## Introduction

Inclusion is a key part of modern educational policy. It promotes fair learning opportunities for all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN). Pull-out classes are a common method used to help SEN students with specialized instruction that matches their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals. However, concerns exist about how effective they are, especially when these interventions operate separately from the main curriculum (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

This action research looks at how pull-out sessions affect the achievement of a student's IEP goals, specifically the reading progress of three Year 8 SEN students, with an emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary, and inferencing. Although pull-out programs provide targeted help, they often fall short due to limited connections with classroom instruction and a lack of teamwork among teachers (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015). Disjointed practices can create fragmented learning experiences and slow academic growth (Norwich, 2013).

Collaboration between mainstream and support teachers is crucial for making pull-out sessions reinforce classroom learning. However, time limits and heavy workloads often reduce chances for collaborative planning and coordination (Kennedy, 2010). Using inclusive frameworks like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can improve accessibility and clarity in instruction, making learning more effective for diverse learners (Priyadharsini and Sahaya Mary, 2024).

Using pre-assessments, post-assessments, IEP tracking, and student feedback, this study evaluates the academic impact and learning perceptions related to pull-out interventions. Future research will focus on a short-term collaborative intervention aimed at improving planning between mainstream and support teachers. This will better connect pull-out instruction with IEP goals. This study aims to contribute to more cohesive, student-centered practices within inclusive education.

## Background of the Problem

This action research took place at Hartland International School in Dubai, a British curriculum school that serves a diverse student body, including learners with special educational needs (SEN). In the Secondary Department, the Inclusion Team offers a mix of in-class support and specific interventions. One of these interventions is the pull-out program, where selected SEN students leave non-core subjects, like Arabic or modern foreign languages, to receive focused help tailored to their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals.

This study focuses on three Year 8 SEN students with reading targets for term 2 related to comprehension, vocabulary, and inference. Their needs include specific learning difficulties (SpLD), communication and interaction (C&I), and cognition and learning (C&L). Although pull-out sessions aim to meet these goals, questions have arisen about how effectively they lead to measurable progress in core literacy skills that are essential for success across subjects.

The current model shows a commitment to individual support, but there are ways to make collaboration between mainstream and inclusion staff more organized and consistent. Improving this partnership can help ensure that targeted interventions not only support IEP goals but also enhance classroom instruction, improving skill transfer and engagement.

## Literature Review

This research is based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework created by Rose and Meyer (2002) that encourages inclusive instruction using various ways to represent information, express ideas, and engage students. UDL is especially important in special educational needs (SEN) contexts, such as pull-out sessions, where flexibility and accessibility are crucial for meeting different learning needs.

Related theories complement and strengthen this foundation. Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller et al., 2011) emphasizes the need to reduce unnecessary cognitive demands. This approach matches UDL's focus on supportive, easy-to-access instruction. Differentiated Instruction (Tomlinson, 2001) stresses the importance of adapting content and methods to fit individual student profiles. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1986) highlights the value of guided support in promoting progress.

These theories together support intervention models that are responsive and personalized, meeting learners' developmental needs. This study looks at how theory-based pull-out sessions can better support the Individual Educational Plan goals of SEN students, especially in reading.

## Methodology

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What is the impact of pull-out classes on meeting the IEP targets of SEN students, specifically in reading comprehension and vocabulary?
- RQ2: What teaching strategies and learning styles are most effective in supporting SEN students within pull-out sessions?

These questions aim to evaluate both the effectiveness of the intervention and identify successful instructional approaches that can be used or adapted for similar contexts.

### Participants

The study focused on three Year 8 SEN students at Hartland International School, each with a reading-related IEP target. Although the students have different primary needs, they all work at Level 2 in their respective categories:

- One student with Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) focused on reading comprehension and inferencing
- One student with Communication and Interaction (C&I) needs, targeting reading
- One student with Cognition and Learning (C&L) difficulties, focusing on reading comprehension and vocabulary

The small, targeted sample size allowed for close tracking of individual progress and tailored instructional adjustments during the intervention.

### Data Collection

A combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools was used to measure the impact of the pull-out sessions over a 6-week period (January–February 2025). The tools included:

- IEP tracking sheets, completed by Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs), to document progress in every pull-out class
- Teacher's termly IEP reviews to reflect on student development and goal alignment
- Pre- and post-tests using short, grade-level reading passages to assess changes in comprehension and vocabulary

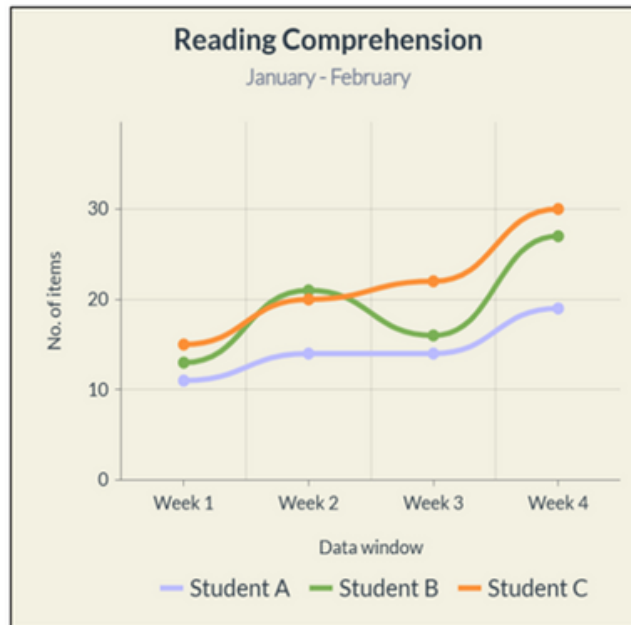
- Student questionnaires to gather learners' perspectives on what strategies helped them and how they felt during sessions
- Weekly pull-out sessions, delivered once per week during MFL/Arabic exemption periods, provided the structured intervention class.

## Results

RQ 1: What is the impact of pull-out class instruction on the IEP targets of SEN students, specifically in reading comprehension and vocabulary?

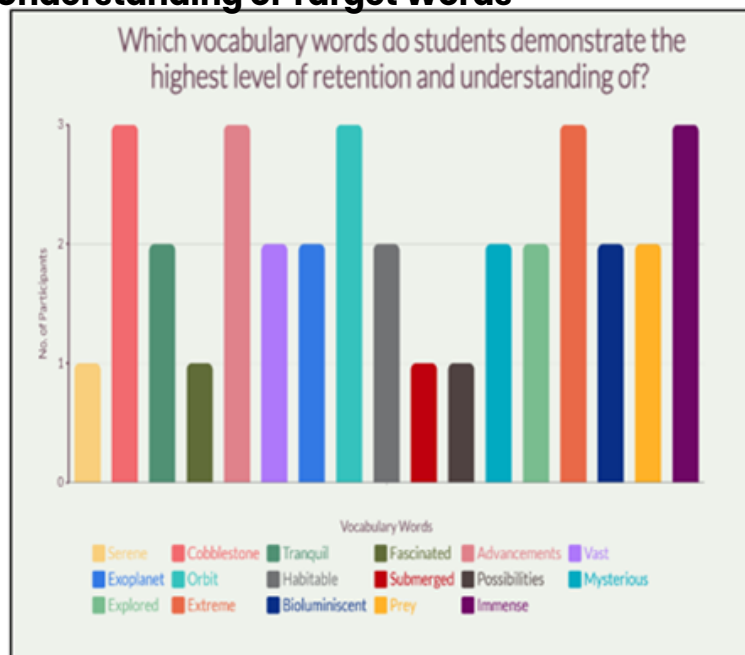
**1. Comprehension Growth:** Figure 1 shows steady improvement in comprehension scores from Week 1 to Week 4 across all students.

**Figure 1**  
**Reading Comprehension Over 4 weeks**



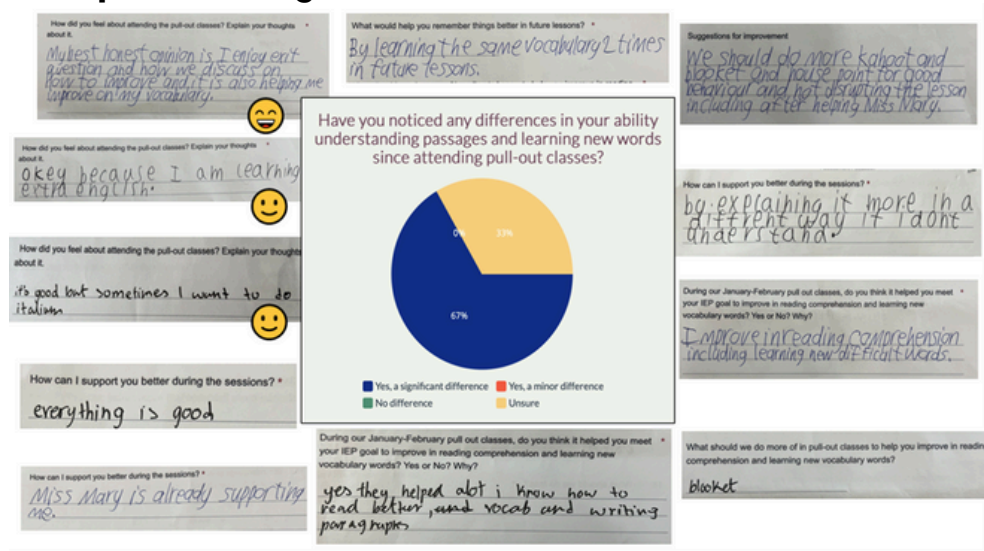
**2. Vocabulary Retention:** Figure 2 indicates strong retention and understanding of target words like cobblestone, advancements, orbit, extreme, and immense.

**Figure 2**  
**Retention and Understanding of Target Words**



**3. Student Perception:** 67% reported significant progress; 33% noted some improvement in reading and vocabulary skills (see **Figure 3**). Reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing were the most improved skills. (see **Figure 4**)

**Figure 3**  
**Student Perception on Progress**



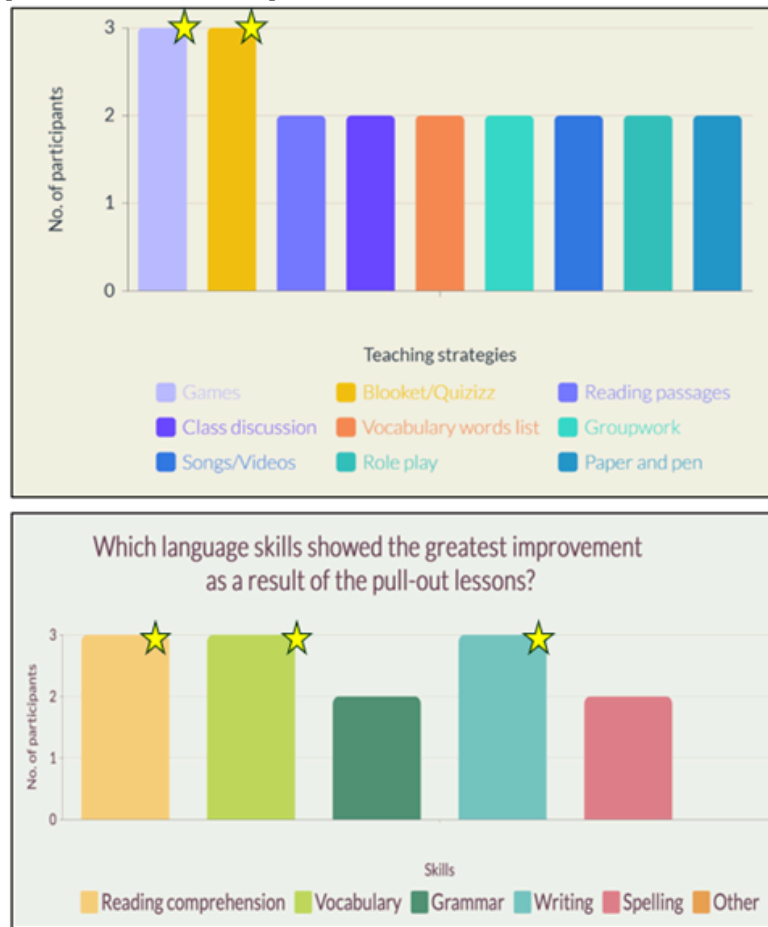
**4..IEP Progress:** Tracking Sheets confirm that most IEP targets were partially or fully achieved by February 2025 (Term 2) (see **Figure 5**).

**Figure 5**  
**Teacher's feedback from termly IEP plan review and HLTA's feedback from IEP tracking sheet.**



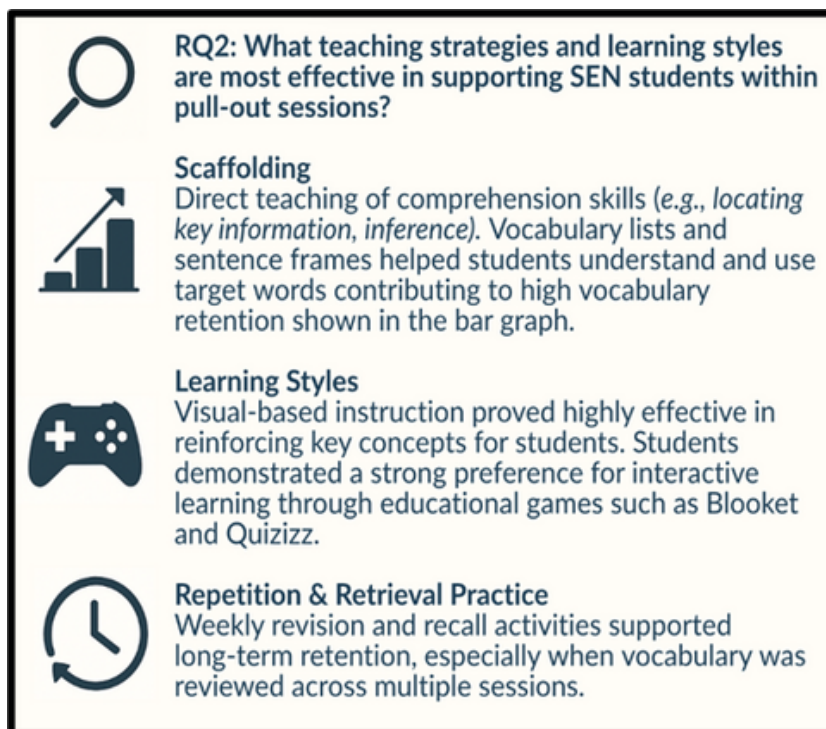
**4.Student Wellbeing:** Learners expressed satisfaction with receiving additional pull-out support, while also showing openness to exploring new opportunities such as participation in foreign language classes (see **Figure 4**).

**Figure 4**  
**Student's improvement and preference in classroom strategies**



RQ2: What teaching strategies and learning styles are most effective in supporting SEN students within pull-out sessions? (See **Figure 6**)

**Figure 6**





## Personal Reflections

This study looked at (1) how pull-out sessions affect SEN students' IEP reading goals and (2) which teaching strategies and learning styles were most effective. Data from pre/post-tests, IEP tracking, student feedback, and teacher reflections showed that well-organized, targeted pull-out sessions can positively support progress in reading comprehension and vocabulary development.

All three students made measurable academic progress and had a positive attitude toward learning. These results connect with Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller et al., 2011), as smaller groups and focused teaching reduced cognitive strain, making it easier to reach learning goals. Likewise, Tomlinson's (2001) Differentiated Instruction showed in the use of individualized materials and flexible pacing.

Key elements of Universal Design for Learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002), including different ways of representing information and expressing understanding, helped improve accessibility and engagement. Teaching within each student's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1986) also supported effective scaffolding and skill transfer.

Finally, the study emphasized the importance of better alignment and communication between support and mainstream teachers. While there is some collaboration, the findings suggest it could be more organized to ensure consistency between classroom and intervention sessions. This supports Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) call for inclusive practices based on shared responsibility.

### **How have I changed my practice?**

This research has motivated me to go beyond just providing support during pull-out sessions. I now view these lessons as important parts of classroom instruction, rather than separate activities. I am more thoughtful about how I introduce and reinforce learning targets, resources, and skills in both environments. Interventions are now carefully designed to meet each student's needs.

### **How have I changed the way I think about my practice or ideas?**

Before this study, I thought we could measure progress in pull-out classes just by looking at task completion or engagement. Now, I see the importance of tracking progress with consistent and structured assessment tools like IEP trackers, pre/post-tests, and student feedback. I also consider more carefully how student voice matters and how their insights influence the effectiveness of teaching.

### **What knowledge or practices have I created that others in my school will find of value?**

This project shows the benefits of short-term, measurable actions that match students' IEP goals and the regular curriculum. It involves sharing the pull-out session planning and tracking tools with colleagues and adapting these methods into our inclusion practices. The focus on student voice has encouraged a movement toward more reflective teaching across the school. What knowledge or practices have I created that other education action researchers might find of value?

Other researchers may find the mixed-methods approach I used helpful. This approach balances quantitative tools, such as comprehension tests, with qualitative insights, like student questionnaires. The project also shows the importance of using Universal Design for Learning principles in small-group interventions, not only in mainstream classrooms.

## What did I learn about action research that might help others?

Action research is not about waiting for perfect conditions. It's about responding to real needs as they arise, reflecting continuously, and being open to change. I learned that small-scale research can lead to big shifts in thinking and practice when the process is intentional and reflective.

## Conclusion

This study found that well-planned pull-out sessions, which meet IEP targets and follow inclusive frameworks like Universal Design for Learning, can significantly improve outcomes for SEN students. These sessions led to measurable progress in comprehension and vocabulary. They also boosted student confidence, showing the value of targeted, flexible support. However, the research highlights the need for better cooperation between mainstream and pull-out teachers to ensure consistent instruction. Future research will explore a short-term intervention aimed at improving this cooperation. The goal is to align support more closely with individual IEP goals to achieve a greater impact.

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