

The Pull-Out Model in Special Education: The Social and Emotional Effect on Students

Katie Logee

Honors Program, Anna Maria College

HON 490: Honors Senior Seminar

Professor Craig Blais

April 28, 2023

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the education world, it has been standard practice for many years to take students out of the classroom who need special education services. These students would be pulled from the general education classroom and taken to a special education classroom where they would receive specialized instruction in whatever subject area they were struggling with. This is now referred to as the pull-out model. Many schools are moving towards using the inclusion model, where students remain in the general education classroom for as much of the day as possible and receive accommodations while in the general education classroom. However, this move towards inclusion may not have been done early enough.

Even though the pull-out model has been the standard practice for many years, this does have some harmful consequences to the students being pulled out of the general education classroom. These students are being pulled from the general education classroom typically when they would be working, and building relationships, with their peers. This can create some social-emotional problems for those students receiving special education because their peers may view them differently or not as smart as them, and they could struggle to make friends with their non-special education peers. The specific research question that will be addressed is: How does the pull-out model affect students' social-emotional lives?

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to discover existing research on the effects of the pull-out model in special education on students socially and emotionally. Conducting this research will allow others to understand what the pull-out model is and how it might affect someone they know. School districts could use the information found in this study to show why they should be moving away from the pull-out model and towards the inclusion model. Teachers can use the

information found in this study to see how their students might be struggling, which will allow them to find ways to build a stronger classroom community.

This study will be a meta-analysis that looks at different studies conducted on the same or a similar research question centered around how the pull-out model in special education has affected students socially and emotionally. In order to dive deeper into this research question to discover how the pull-out model is used in schools, I searched across different databases that my institution had access to get my sources.

The outcomes I expected to find were that there is a large effect on students who are pulled out of the general education classroom on their peer relationships in and outside the classroom. I expected these results would be shocking for both myself and the public, especially those in the education field. I expected to find many studies that were conducted using questionnaires and self-report studies.

Significance to the Field/Significance of the Study

This study is significant in many ways, including that people in the education field could use it to change their policies and routines regarding special education. This study can also help parents advocate for their children by providing them with information on how their child being pulled out of the classroom can negatively affect their peer relationships and their self-concept. Overall, this study could provide people in the education field with the information they could use to create the best environment possible for children to learn.

Definitions

Pull-out model: “removing students with special learning needs from regular classes” (Wang et al., 1986)

Inclusion model: an approach to education “where all students have *access* to and can *participate* in the general education environment, given the appropriate *supports*” (IRIS).

Self-concept: “individual’s belief about himself or herself, including the person’s attributes and who and what the self is” (Lawrence & Vimala 2013).

Special Education: “instruction that is designed specifically to respond to the learning needs of an individual with disabilities regardless of environment, whether in a classroom, home, or hospital” (Francisco et al., 2020)

Limitations

Some limitations of this study were that I only had access to a certain number of sources based on what my institution had access to and what they could get for me. This means I was unable to look at all the research that is out there on this topic, so my analysis is not an analysis of all the research there is to read on this topic. Another limitation was that I had a hard time finding studies conducted in the United States, so many of my sources include information from other countries. Finding the right combination of words to use in keyword searches was also a challenge for this study, as the volume of results when using singular keywords was too broad.

Chapter 2: Methodology

To gather my information and resources for this thesis, I reviewed many different databases that my institution had access to. I looked through Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and SocINDEX. Most of my sources came from Google Scholar, as that database had a larger source pool. In each database, I used different combinations of the following search terms: pull-out model, social-emotional, special education, classroom, inclusion, peer relations, and self-concept.

Each source had to meet certain inclusion/exclusion criteria when determining whether it could be used for the study. Each source had to be published within the past 20 years to avoid getting information that was too far out of date. Each source also had to be peer-reviewed, which allowed me to be sure that the information presented was accurate and had been reviewed by other professionals in the field. Finally, as many sources as possible had to be from within the United States because this research would be most relevant for most of my readers and myself.

One pitfall or challenge of my methodology was that my institution only had access to a certain number of sources, meaning that I could not read every source. On top of only having access to a certain number of sources, even if I had access to every source on this topic, I would be unable to read all of them based on the time restraint of only having a semester to complete the research. Another challenge I faced was that I could not find enough sources on this topic that were strictly from the United States, so many of my sources have come from other countries. One success of my methodology was that for some sources I wanted to look at but did not have access to through my institution, I was able to do an interlibrary loan and gain access to the articles.

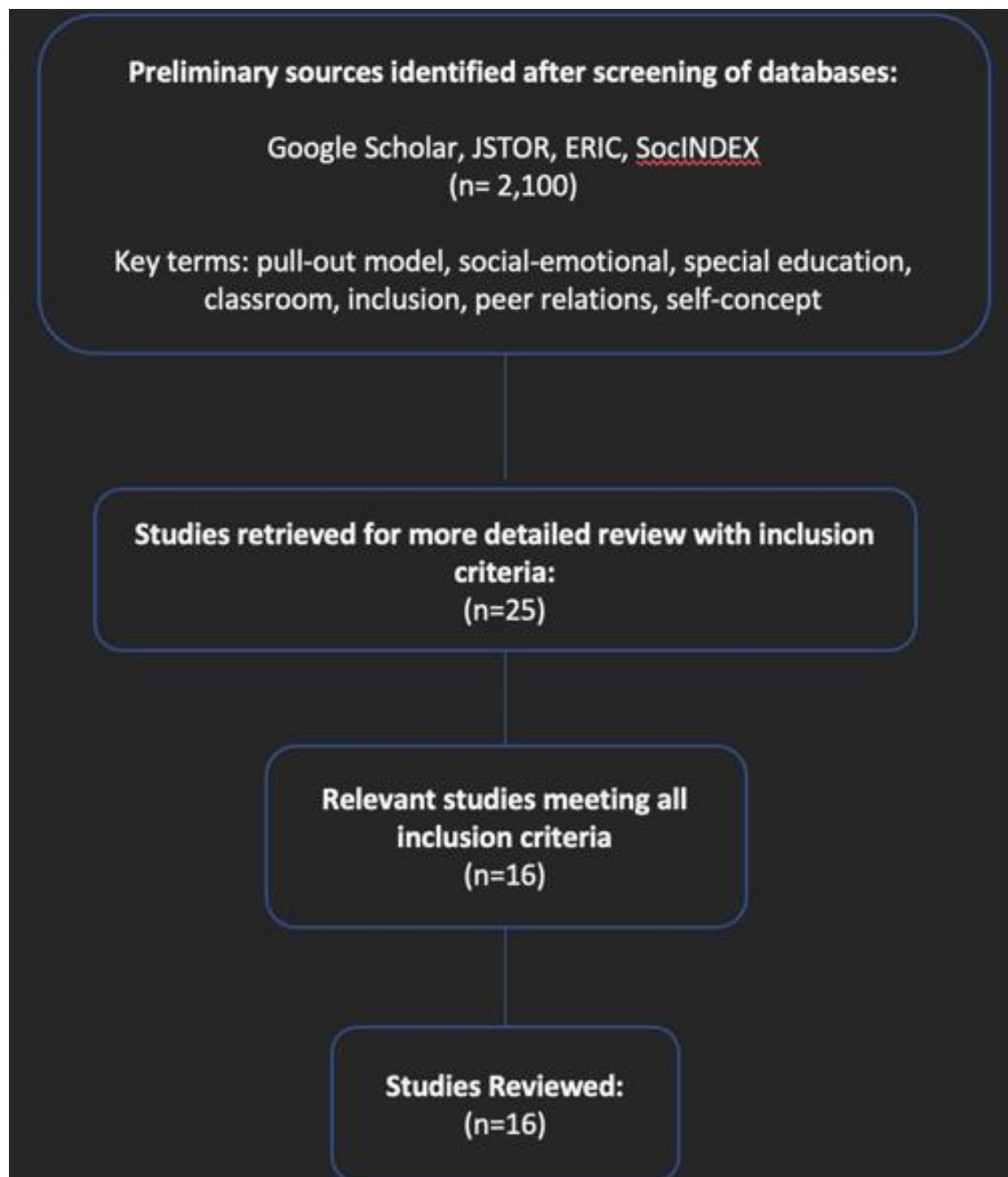


Figure 1

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Special education has been seen largely as a type of education that both includes and excludes children with educational disabilities from the type of schooling their peers might receive who do not have educational difficulties (Florian, 2008). In special education, there are different placements that students with special educational needs (SEN) can be placed into. One of those placements is an inclusion classroom, where special education students remain in the classroom and are not pulled out for extra support services. Another placement that can occur is the pull-out model, which is when students are in the general education classroom for a large portion of their day but are pulled out for special education services that cannot be done in the general education classroom. This is the focus of this thesis, how this pull-out model affects the social-emotional lives of students with SEN.

This debate has been going on for decades, and the research that has already been done on this topic seems to be conflicting in that there is not one answer that all researchers support on whether the pull-out model is harming students' social-emotional lives or not. This thesis will focus on different aspects of students' lives that the pull-out model could affect. First, the discussion will go deeper into the differences between the pull-out model and the inclusion model. Then the importance of peer relations early on in children's lives will be examined. Finally, the participation between students with SEN and non-SEN students will be looked at.

Inclusion Model vs. Pull-out Model

The two models explored in depth are the pull-out model and the inclusion model, which are very different placements for students with SEN. The inclusion model has become the standard practice in the education field today; however, students are still being pulled out of the classroom for special education services that the general education teacher cannot provide.

Inclusion gives students with disabilities the ability to “receive the same education and support in the general education classroom based upon their IEP’s” (Barton, 2016). A large goal of the inclusion model is to have those students with SEN in the general education classroom and to “reduce prejudice and increase social interaction among children” (Avramidis, 2010). For students with SEN “general class placement is often deemed favourable because of its assumed social benefits” (Whitely, 2008). In other words, the inclusion model allows students to build relationships with one another and allows those students with SEN to feel included.

However, even though the inclusion model carries a positive message, it has created a challenge in the education world. The push for inclusion has created a “rejection of special needs education” (Florian, 2008). Although inclusion can benefit many students, it does not benefit all students, which is where a term known as the Least Restrictive Environment comes into play.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA), there is a requirement for children with disabilities to be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This means that, to the largest extent appropriate, children with disabilities must be educated with

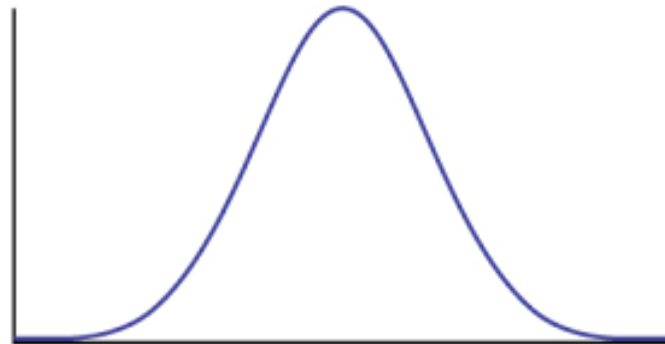


Figure 2 (LePine 2022)

children who are not disabled, making it the least restricting. As Figure 2 shows, inclusion practices benefit most students, which is shown by the top of the bell curve. However, there are some students who do not succeed in an inclusive environment, which is represented by the ends of the bell curve.

The IDEA is a law that “makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children” (IDEA). In other words, schools should create equal opportunities for the entire student population, including those students with SEN (Karin et al., 2012). The IDEA goes on to say that removing students with SEN from the general education classroom should only occur when “the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (IDEA). Across previous research, it has been seen that “inclusion effects positively on children’s development, regardless of the need for support” (Kuutti et al., 2021).

Even though inclusion is the standard practice today, and the goal is to have as many students as possible with SEN in the general education classroom, there are times when a child’s disability is too much for the classroom teacher to accommodate on their own or puts other students at risk, by creating distractions in the classroom. This is when the pull-out model is put into place. The pull-out model can be explained as a separate classroom where students are given extra support specific to their individual needs. The pull-out model is typically in math or ELA, where students have fallen below grade level. The pull-out model does have some benefits, but they are typically linked to educational and academic benefits. The pull-out model is “less appreciated for social reasons, referring to general feelings of segregation from other students” (Barton, 2016). The pull-out model also creates more educational challenges for those students that are removed for portions of the day. These challenges occur when they return to the general education classroom from the special education services they are receiving.

Typically, students with SEN are removed from the general education classroom during English Language Arts (ELA) or math. These services can vary in length, meaning students are

likely to return “in the middle of instruction or classwork generally lost and unsure” (Barton, 2016). Also, the students who remain in the classroom notice those students coming and going, and while they might not say anything, there could be an unconscious bias to how they treat those students in the future.

One thing that both educators and researchers need to keep in mind is that one model of special education placement will not work for every child with SEN. The inclusion might work for many children, but not for all. Much of this depends on the severity of the child’s SEN and whether it would only make experiences worse being in the general education classroom.

Early Peer Relations

Several studies have been done to examine the importance of children’s peer relations early on in their life. They have found clear links between early peer relationships and the relationships that occur later in childhood. In a child’s life, “peers are important socialization agents” (Nordstrom, 2011) in their social and identity development. Another predictor of later peer relations is acceptance from their peers in early childhood. This link between early peer relationships and those children make later in childhood has led to the conclusion that early problems “with peers have negative consequences for the child’s later social and emotional development” (Hay, 2005).

Early peer relationships can be challenging enough for children without SEN, but for children with SEN, healthy peer relationships can be hard to come by. It has become “clear that peer relations pose special challenges to children with disorders and others who lack the emotional, cognitive and behavioural skills that underlie harmonious interaction” (Hay, 2005). These challenges increase as the children get older and begin experiencing peer rejection. In the inclusion model, there is an assumption that “it is beneficial for such children [those with SEN]

to spend their days with typically developing peers” (Hay, 2005). If this experience is positive, then there will be positive peer relations, but if this experience is negative, then there will be negative peer relations, and it may even interfere with a child’s educational goals.

Early problems with peers can have negative consequences on a child’s later social and emotional development. These early problems can harm a child’s “socioemotional development and increases risks for behavioural problems” (Kuutti et al., 2021). Especially for children with SEN, having social relationships is a huge part of their lives and their future development. It has been said that “social relationships are the basis for well-being” (Kuutti et al., 2021). This means that if children with SEN don’t start creating these relations early on and become isolated, there is a serious risk of harm to their well-being and development. It has also been seen that as children get older, there is an increase in social exclusion (Nordstrom, 2011). When children were asked about their thoughts on peer relationships, it was seen that even they see “peer relationships as a fundamental part of everyday life” (Kuutti et al., 2021).

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international human rights treaty, all children have the right to “active participation, care, protection, and peer relationships, regardless of their need for special education” (Kuutti et al., 2021). Meaning there needs to be more done to help children with SEN build these peer relationships and have that sense of belonging, as that is an important part of development.

Participation Among Students with SEN and Non-SEN Students

When looking at how students with SEN interact with those students who don’t have SEN, studies have revealed a difference in the interactions between the two groups. Even with the goals of inclusion and wanting to decrease prejudice against those students with SEN, “research has consistently shown that pupils with SEN remain less accepted by and may

experience greater loneliness than their non-SEN peers” (Avramidis, 2010). When looking at peer acceptance among children with SEN and children without SEN, children with SEN are “usually accepted, but not in the way children without disabilities are, not as play-mates” (Nordstrom, 2011). Several studies have shown that children typically only interact with those at the same ability level as them, meaning those students with SEN are more likely to only interact with other students with SEN. It has also been seen that there is little interaction between those with SEN and those without SEN. This means “functional differences obviously result in low and gradually decreased levels of peer interactions and relations” (Nordstrom, 2011). This could be because those students with SEN could have negative or non-adaptive self-perceptions. If this is the case, they might “manifest this image in social situations and may not be accepted by their peers” (Demchuk, 2000).

However, just placing students with SEN in the general education classroom is not going to make them accepted by their peers automatically. Explicit instruction from the teacher is needed on how to have a safe environment for all students and create an inclusive environment from the beginning of the year that can transfer out to the schoolyard. In other words, “students with LD may benefit from increased opportunities for meaningful engagement with their classmates in both academic areas as well as non-academic domains” (Whitely, 2008).

When looking at the interaction between these two groups of children in schoolyards, it can be seen that “children with intellectual disabilities interact only with each other” (Nordstrom, 2011). Children with SEN are also known to be left out of activities and play situations on the playground. Relations between children tend to be characterized as horizontal and equal in “social status, power and influence” (Nordstrom, 2011); however, on the playground, this is not

the case, as children without SEN tend not to include those with SEN in their activities and take a more dominating role.

When looking at their interactions in an inclusive classroom, there was more interaction between the two groups, but it was not on an equal level. In the classroom, adults play a larger role in participation and interaction among students, which could partially explain the increase in participation from students with SEN in the classroom. As mentioned before, students without SEN notice when students are pulled out of the general education classroom for special education services. This impacts how they treat those students when they return to the general education classroom, whether they realize it or not. It has been seen that children without SEN “tend to adopt dominating caring positions, if they at all recognize the presence of the functionally disabled peer” (Nordstrom, 2011). This could be something children without SEN do unconsciously or something that they do consciously.

What Children Think

There have been several studies conducted on the social-emotional effects of special education placements. Several of these studies considered what the children themselves think of the placements and how that affects them in the classroom and on the playground. Many children with SEN “stated that they would prefer the inclusion classroom to resource room settings because it was better for making friends” (Wiener, 2004). This is important to note because, as mentioned previously, children see relationships with their peers as a fundamental part of everyday life. Those children with SEN in a general education classroom following the inclusion model reported that “their school friends were better companions, that they were less lonely, and that their behavior was less problematic” (Weiner, 2004). Many children with SEN are

concerned with making friends, and being pulled out of the general education classroom for extra support inhibits these students from building relationships with their peers.

Specifically, there was a study conducted where children with SEN in grades 4, 5, and 6 were interviewed and asked about their attitudes toward their special education program. Many students explained that they perceived they were “excluded and victimized for receiving special education support” (Demchuk, 2000). These perceptions of exclusion and victimization triggered feelings of anger and sadness in these children, and many of them expressed that they “longed to be more included and integrated” (Demchuk, 2000). This caused Demchuk and researchers to explain that if there was a greater consideration for children with SEN viewpoints, there may be a more positive impact on their academic success as well as their social-emotional development.

Another study asked children both with SEN and without SEN, “Which way helps kids learn better?” (Barton, 2016). These results showed that those without SEN believed the pull-out model helped kids learn better, but those with SEN believed the inclusion model helped kids learn better. This could be important to note as those without SEN seem to believe that their peers with SEN should be removed from the general education classroom for the extra support they need, and this could lead to future issues of exclusion and stigmatizing those with SEN.

Another aspect that must be considered when looking at special education placements and social-emotional development is a child’s self-concept. Research has shown that children with SEN reported themselves as “having more negative global self-concepts than their peers without disabilities” (Demchuk, 2000). This could be caused by any of the things previously mentioned, such as stigmatizing, exclusion, or victimization, but one thing that has not been mentioned is the effects of the labels placed on children with SEN. Many educators and researchers believe that a reason why these students with SEN have lower self-concepts is

“partly due to their identification as having special needs and their separation from the larger school population” (Demchuk, 2000). Placing this label on children can cause them to feel like they are less than the other students and not seen as equal, which can cause more problems with their social-emotional development as they age. It has also been seen that children’s peers view children with SEN differently and see them as “being significantly less capable than similar students placed in regular classrooms” (Demchuk, 2000). Having their peers view them differently and not as equals can lead to problems forming relationships with them, as mentioned previously, and if these problems occur early on in a child’s life, it can lead to larger issues as they continue to grow older.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Summary

It has now become standard practice for classrooms to follow the inclusion model; however, there are still students that get pulled out of the general education classroom for special education services. Although schools are trying to move to the inclusion model, the pull-out model was standard practice for many years and has not been completely taken out of schools. Even though the pull-out model was the standard practice, there was the possibility that it had some negative consequences on the social-emotional development of those students that were being pulled out of the classroom.

The purpose of this study was to see if the pull-out model affects the social-emotional development of students being pulled out of the classroom and to see what studies have already been conducted on this research question. This was done through a meta-analysis that looked at different studies already conducted on a similar research question. The meta-analysis was done by using several different databases my institution had access to.

Conclusions

Although the results from the meta-analysis vary differently in the conclusions, many explain that pulling children out of the general education classroom for special education services harms their social-emotional development.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this meta-analysis is that pulling children out of the general education classroom for special education services can harm their ability to build relationships with their peers. It was seen that when children are pulled from the classroom, the other children notice, and conclude that the students being pulled out are not equal to them. This

leads to those students with SEN being left out of activities and a majority of their friends being other students who also have SEN.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this meta-analysis is that the pull-out model can harm a child's self-concept both socially and academically. Being pulled out of the general education classroom can cause those students to feel like they are not smart enough to stay in the general education classroom, which can harm their academic success in the future. Being pulled from the general education classroom can also cause students to feel like they do not belong with the other students and have a lower self-concept, which will make it more difficult for them to make friends with their classmates.

These conclusions show that implications in actions and policies need to change. The first implication is a change in policies. Although there are some students with SEN where being pulled out of the general education classroom in the least restrictive environment, there are far too many children being pulled from the classroom when the least restrictive environment for them is inside the general education classroom. This is where the policy needs to change in that, in a perfect world, there should be a general education teacher and a special education teacher in each classroom every day. This would eliminate the need to pull children out of the classroom.

Another implication is a change in actions and attitudes. Teachers and administrators changing their actions and attitudes surrounding the pull-out model and inclusion can greatly improve a child's educational experience. If teachers and administrators had a more positive attitude towards students with SEN, it could change the classroom environment and create a more positive experience for all students. Having a more positive attitude can also influence teachers' and administrators' actions in the school to help those children with SEN. This change in actions and attitudes can have a very positive impact on children's educational experience.

Limitations

As mentioned previously, there were some limitations to this study. One of those limitations was that many sources I found were not from within the United States, making my conclusions ones that are internationally based and not ones from inside the United States like I had originally wanted to investigate. Another limitation of this study was that different researchers refer to different education aspects differently, so it was hard to find the right combination of keywords to get the sources I needed. For example, some researchers referred to students as those with special educational needs, and others referred to students as those with learning disabilities. Some researchers also referred to the inclusion model as the push-in model. This made it difficult to find sources that discussed the correct topic. Another limitation I came across was that I did not have access to every source out there about this topic and I also did not have time to go through every source out there on this topic as there was a time constraint.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study could be continued or expanded by conducting more student surveys about how they feel about the pull-out model and their relationships with their peers. This would give more concrete data about how the pull-out model is affecting students. I would also suggest that more observations be done in different classrooms, one following the inclusion model and one following the pull-out model. This can give some insight into how students behave with each model and how students interact with one another. This could also reveal if teachers' attitudes play a role in how students are treated by their peers.

References

- Avramidis, E. (2010). Social relationships of pupils with special educational needs in the mainstream primary class: Peer Group membership and peer-assessed social behaviour. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 25*(4), 413–429.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2010.513550>
- Barton, K. (2016). Pull-out or push in? Impact on students with special needs social, emotional, and academic success.
- Demchuk, L. J. (2000). *Children's perceptions and attitudes about special education* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Florian, L. (2008). Inclusion: special or inclusive education: future trends. *British journal of special education, 35*(4), 202-208.
- Francisco, M. P. B., Hartman, M., & Wang, Y. (2020). Inclusion and special education. *Education Sciences, 10*(9), 238.
- Hay, D. F. (2005). Early peer relations and their impact on children's development. *Encyclopedia on early childhood development, 1*(1), 1-6.
- IDEA Topic Areas*. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25, 2023, from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/topic-areas/#LRE>
- Karin, H., Ellen, V. A., Evelien, C., Mieke, H., & Katja, P. (2012). Don't pull me out!? preliminary findings of a systematic review of qualitative evidence on experiences of pupils with special educational needs in inclusive education. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 69*, 1709–1713. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.12.118>

Kuutti, T., Sajaniemi, N., Björn, P. M., Heiskanen, N., & Reunamo, J. (2022). Participation, involvement and peer relationships in children with special educational needs in early childhood education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 37*(4), 587-602.

Lawrence, A. S., & Vimala, A. (2013). Self-Concept and Achievement Motivation of High School Students. *Online Submission, 1*(1), 141-146.

LePine, M. (2022, July 1). *Chapter 6.3: Using the normal distribution*. College Statistics.

Retrieved April 16, 2023, from

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/sccstatistics/chapter/using-the-normal-distribution/>

Nordström, I. (2011). Inclusion and participation in peer relations. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 13*(1), 71-87.

Wang, M. C., Reynolds, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (1986). Rethinking special education. *Educational Leadership, 44*(1), 26-31.

What is inclusion and why is it important? IRIS Center. (n.d.). Retrieved April 16, 2023, from

<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/inc/cresource/q1/p01/>

Whitley, J. (2008). A model of general self-concept for students with learning disabilities: Does class placement play a role. *Developmental Disabilities Bulletin, 36*(1), 106-134.

Wiener, J., & Tardif, C. Y. (2004). Social and emotional functioning of children with learning disabilities: does special education placement make a difference?. *Learning disabilities research & practice, 19*(1), 20-32.