

The use of technical terms in exemplar EP reports and factors affecting trainee teachers' and Newly Qualified Teachers' (NQTs) access of the language used.

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Rationale:

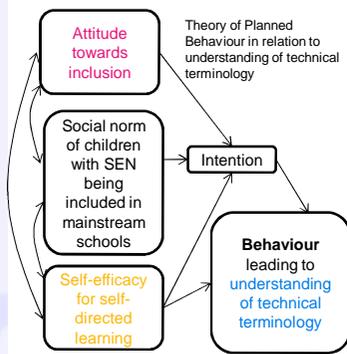
An article on the Times Educational Supplement (TES) website written in 2011 opens with the statement:

"The running joke about what educational psychologists do is: "they tell you what you already know - but using words you don't understand"."

EPs spend significant time (and money) writing reports and so their accessibility is important. In addition, EPs no longer have to have trained as teachers and therefore may not have an idea of what level of technical terminology should be easily accessible to this group. Furthermore, New legislation (Code of Practice 2014) has changed the technical terminology used (school action, school action plus) and the way in which reports are written (statements, Education Health Care Plans, outcomes).

Previous Research:

Most was conducted a long time ago (1950s – 1980s) and so the language is out of date (e.g. "educational retardation"; Rucker, 1967). Largely, studies looked at other types of psychology reports (not EP reports; e.g. Dietz et al. 1983; Cuarda & Albaugh, 1956). Rarely investigated trainee teachers, who could be considered a baseline of understanding (with the exception of Rafoth & Richmond, 1983; and Shively & Smith, 1969). Many confounded report length and readability with the use of technical terminology (e.g. Wiese et al. 1986). Most research was not completed in the UK (with the exception of Cranwell & Miller, 1987). In addition, none had considered what factors may affect readers' understanding.

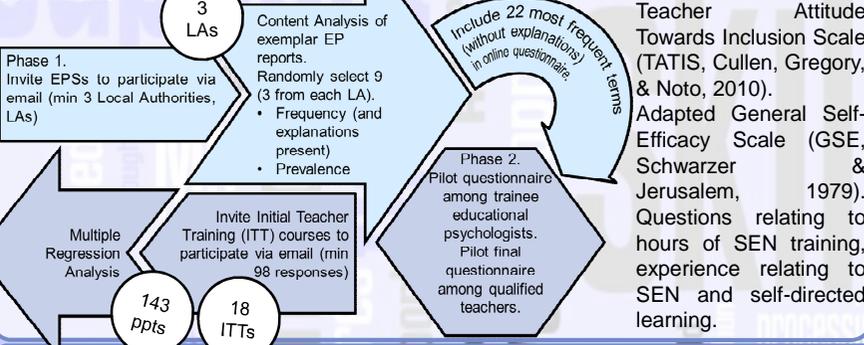


Research Questions:

1. To what extent are technical terms used in exemplar Educational Psychologist (EP) reports?
2. To what extent do trainee teachers and Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) perceive they understand technical terms used in exemplar EP reports?
3. Is trainee teachers' and NQTs perceived understanding of technical terms predicted by previous relevant experience, hours of SEN training, self-directed learning experiences, attitude towards inclusion and self-efficacy relating to self-directed learning? (Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Ajzen, 1991).

Bespoke definition of technical terminology: "Any word, phrase or acronym which is specific to education or psychology and has not been explained fully within the report".

Procedure:



References:

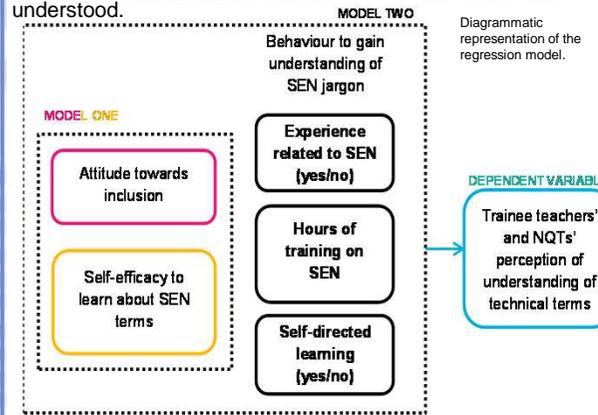
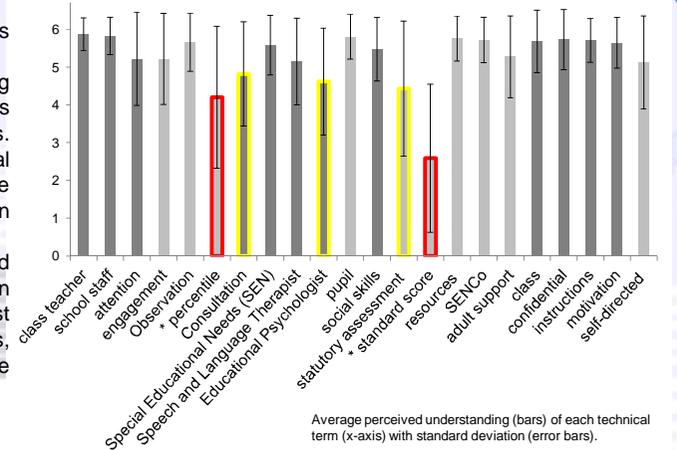
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Results

There were 1387 distinctive technical terms used 2459 times across the 9 reports.

Perceived understanding could range from 0 to 6 with 0 being no understanding and 6 being complete understanding. Terms with an asterisk (*) included explanations in some reports. Terms with dark grey bars were present in all three Local Authorities' reports and terms with light grey bars were present in two Local Authorities' reports. Standard deviation bars are shown.

Overall, trainee teachers and NQTs rated their perceived understanding as high. The least understood terms on average are highlighted in red (lowest) and yellow. The least understood terms had been explained in some reports, suggesting some EPs may be aware of terms less likely to be understood.



Diagrammatic representation of the regression model.

Average perceived understanding (bars) of each technical term (x-axis) with standard deviation (error bars).

Regression model two (black dashed box) was significant ($F_{(5,129)} = 3.511$, $p = 0.005$, $MSE = 674.114$) and accounted for 8.9% of the variance. As the revised model had an adjusted R^2 greater than 2% of the original model the interpretations were based on the revised, full model.

In model two self-efficacy for self-directed learning (orange box) remained a significant predictor for perceived understanding of technical terms ($\beta = 0.238$, $p = 0.007$). On average as self-efficacy for self-directed learning increased by one unit, perceived understanding increased by 0.708.

Experience relating to SEN (top black box) was a significant predictor for perceived understanding of technical terms used in exemplar EP reports ($\beta = 0.205$, $p = 0.017$).

On average if the trainee teacher or NQT had experience relating to SEN rather than the no experience relating to SEN, their perceived understanding increased by 7.462. Comparing the standardised betas (β) shows that self-efficacy for self-directed learning is the stronger predictor of the two significant predictors in model two.

Conclusions:

Although a large number of technical terms were found, and many used only once in the sample, the most frequently used terms were perceived by trainee teachers and NQTs as well understood. Self-efficacy for self-directed learning and experience relating to SEN were significant predictors for perceived understanding of technical terminology. The limitations of this study were the low response rate and likelihood that participants were highly conscientious and therefore more likely to engage in practices to improve their understanding. The model did not explain most of the variance, but a "social norm" factor was absent. Strengths include the use of exemplar reports which may be considered best practice and lack of researcher interpretation on terminology.

Implications for EP practice:

It is important to gain a shared understanding of the terminology used by EPs. This may be achievable within consultation and by including behavioural examples of the terminology used to avoid ambiguity. Value placed on experience differed between participants which may have implications for the confidence gained. Therefore, trainee teachers may need support in being able to reflect on how their experience improves their practice and this may be a role for the EP.

Implications for future research:

Do trainee teachers and NQTs understand technical terminology which is less frequent, or when it is presented within a whole report? Do young people, parents, people with low literacy, or people who speak English as an additional language understand technical terminology used in exemplar EP reports? How may difficulties with understanding be overcome, does increasing self-efficacy for self-directed learning help? Which alternative models predict a greater amount of variance in the model?

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