

Introduction

- Globalization and industrialization has changed the role of assessment in education.¹
- Assessment has become increasingly concerned with results to promote economic growth.²
- Results are compared across countries and published in league tables such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).³
- Results are compared to ensure accountability in education in terms of equity and progress.³



Is assessment objective?

- However, others argue that assessment cannot be objective and may further inequity in education.⁴
- Labelling theory: Students with a label of Special Educational Needs (SEN) are at risk of lower teacher expectations.⁵
- In previous studies, teachers had lower expectations and lower ratings of achievement for students with a label of SEN in comparison to similar achieving non-labelled peers.⁶
- Studies have also found that pre-service teachers scored the academic achievement of students with SEN lower than in-service teachers.⁷
- Other studies reported that teacher level did not have a linear relationship with assessment accuracy because experience may have a positive or a negative effect on implicit attitudes.⁸

Assessment Literacy

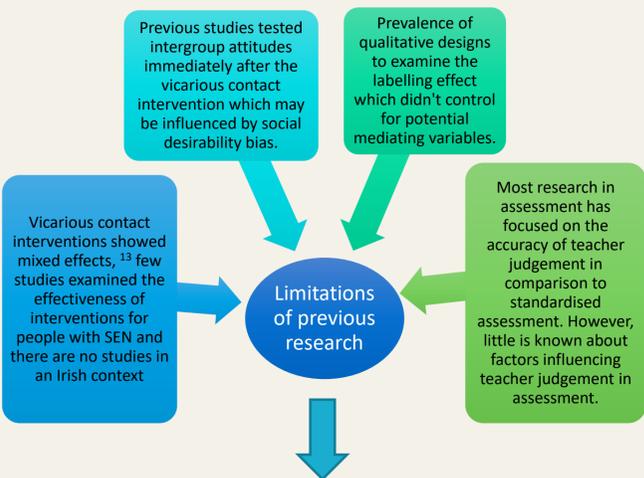
- Assessment literacy developed as a response to assessment for accountability with the aim of developing assessment literate teachers who critically reflect on their own assessment practices in light of the sociocultural context.⁹
- Pastore and Andrade's model of assessment literacy illustrates the sociocultural context of assessment ranging from national education policy to contextual factors like professional practice and the classroom context.⁹



Figure 1. Adapted model of assessment literacy from Pastore and Andrade (2019)

- Researchers recommended that contact with people with SEN would challenge stereotypes and reduce bias in assessment.⁷
- The role of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice has been widely studied in social psychology since Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory.¹⁰
- Contact can occur vicariously through media, which is known as vicarious contact.¹¹
- The media acts as a primary source of information for teachers about SEN.¹²

Limitations of Previous Research



Aims and Objectives

Assessment Literacy

- Adopt a quantitative design to labelling theory to control for potentially mediating variables
- Develop an intervention for reducing bias in assessment

Vicarious Contact

- Examine the effectiveness of a vicarious contact intervention in reducing bias in assessment for students with a label of SEN
- Use a longitudinal design to test the effect of a vicarious contact intervention over a month to reduce social desirability bias

Methods

Design and Measures

- 2 x 2 between subjects experimental design

Independent Variables

- Vicarious Contact** was operationalised by sending participants videos depicting a friendship with a person with SEN over 4 weeks. The control group only watched distractor videos from popular Irish television programmes.
- Label of SEN** was operationalised by including or excluding a label of SEN on a writing sample

Mediator Variable

- Prior direct contact** with people with SEN was measured using the General Intergroup Contact and Quality scale.¹⁵

Dependent Variable

- Writing Assessment Score:** Participants assessed a sample of a child's writing using the Writing Assessment Measure (WAM)¹⁶ which is a rubric developed to score writing objectively

Ethics:

- Participants were told that the study was exploring how technology impacts assessment and completed a technology usage questionnaire after each video
- This deception was needed to prevent social desirability bias
- Ethical procedures were followed including informed consent, anonymizing data and fully debriefing participants after the study

Vicarious Contact Videos:



Participants

- 101 pre-service and in-service Irish primary school teachers



Figure 2. Proportion of participants based on teacher level.



Figure 3. Proportion of participants who had experience in mainstream and special education settings.

Results

Label of SEN and Assessment

- When a label of SEN alone is considered alone, there was no significant difference in writing assessment scores between children with a label of SEN and children without a label of SEN, $U = 1193$, $z = -.222$, $p = .85$.
- However, there was more variation in assessment scores for writing with a label of SEN, which was not found in writing without a label of SEN.

Vicarious Contact Intervention

- The vicarious contact intervention group scored the writing with a label of SEN significantly lower than the control group, $F(1,48) = 5.84$, $p = .019$, partial eta squared = .11.
- Prior direct contact had no effect as a mediator variable

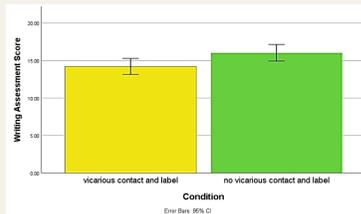


Figure 4. Differences in writing assessment between the vicarious contact condition and control.

Teacher Level and Assessment

- Teacher level had a significant effect on writing assessment scores for children with a label of SEN, $F(4, 45) = 3.71$, $p = .011$, partial eta squared = .25.
- Dunnett's C post hoc tests revealed that:
 - There was a significant difference between first-year student teachers and in-service teachers (mean difference = 4.37, 95% CI = [1.18, 7.57]).
 - There was also a significant difference between fourth-year student teachers and in-service teachers (mean difference = 4.17, 95% CI = [1.41, 6.93]).
 - First and fourth-year student teachers scored the writing the highest
 - Graduated teachers scored the writing the lowest

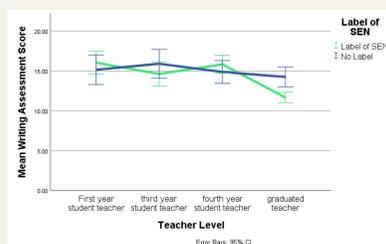


Figure 5. Variation in writing assessment based on teaching level.

Discussion and Conclusion

Label of SEN:

- Previous research has reported the labelling effect in observational studies which did not control for potential mediating variables.⁶
- However, the current study suggest that the label of SEN alone may not result in lower teacher expectations.
- There were greater variations in assessment scores for writing with a label of SEN, based on vicarious contact and teacher level

Teacher Level:

- First year student teachers were engaging in professional placement at the time of the study and fourth year student teachers had just finished their final placement. As these two groups scored the writing the highest, they may have been more conscious of their role as assessors.
- These findings align to a view of assessment literacy as dynamic which changes with experience rather than linear.⁸

Vicarious Contact:

- The media may subconsciously perpetuate negative implicit attitudes towards people with SEN.¹¹
- Prior direct contact may be a more reliable intervention than vicarious contact

Implications

Practical Implications

- As the student population becomes increasingly heterogeneous, there is a need to equip teachers with the skills to teach this new generation.¹⁷
- Need for teacher training modules and continuous professional development to focus on developing assessment literate teachers
- Even standardised assessment methods like rubrics may not be objective
- Consider the context when reporting assessment data



Theoretical Implications

- Labelling theory: Move away from focusing on the effects of a label and start to consider factors which may make a teacher more susceptible to the effect
- Contact hypothesis: Consider conditions where indirect contact may have a negative effect on implicit attitudes



Policy Implications

- Part of Ireland's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes promoting positive portrayals of persons with disabilities on the media.¹⁸
- As part of this commitment, greater attention is needed to the role of the media in shaping implicit attitudes towards people with SEN



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