

Support for Teaching Assistants: What Needs to Change?

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Introduction

A quarter of the entire school workforce comprise of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in England and Wales (Webster et al., 2010). The role of a Teaching Assistant (TA) has changed over time from a helper role to a more direct role in supporting children's learning process, especially those with special educational needs (SEN). Recent studies found TA input may not benefit pupils' academic progress due to a number of issues such as lack of effective TA management and training (Webster et al., 2010, Groom 2006).

The role of the TA gained research interest over the years. This study will look at the effectiveness of TA support using the COM-B model – a framework for understanding behaviour. The model states that we need **Capability, Motivation and Opportunity** in order to engage in a behaviour (Michie et al., 2014). This will help us understand the barriers and enablers to effective TA support in the classroom.

Aim

1. To investigate the range of training TAs have and perceive they need
2. Apply the COM-B model to TAs to better understand the effectiveness of their support and how we can increase their work place value.

Methods

- Teaching Assistants (TAs) recruited online from across England and Wales (n= 31).
- Mixed-method survey including both closed and open questions (thematic analysis)
- Questions were designed to elicit information relevant to the COM-B model

Demographics

- Over half of the TAs have over 6 years of experience (51.6%) and work with both typically developing (TD) children and children with SEN (61.3%)
- The majority of the TAs work in primary education

Results 1: Training On The Go vs. Externally Provided Training

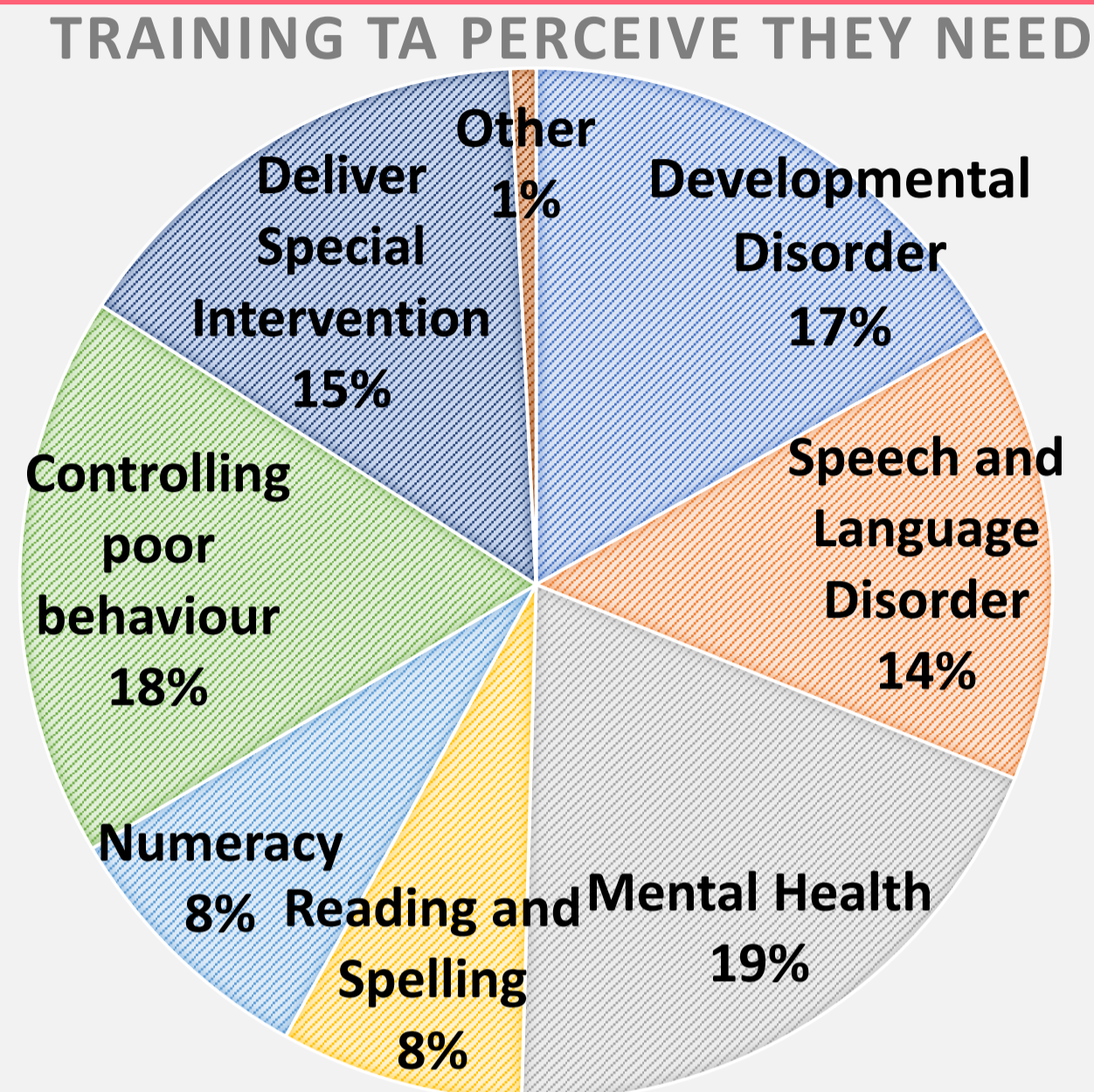


Figure 1. Pie chart of the type of training TAs would like to have

What TAs learn on the job compared to externally provided training

- 1) **Behaviour management**: Dealing with poor/ challenging behaviour
- 2) **Team work**: Collaborating with others to achieve a goal
- 3) **Individual support**: Knowing the needs and strategies to support the individual child
- 4) **Practical skills**: Dealing with real situations
- 5) **Peer learning**: Share strategies, resources and model others
- 6) **Curriculum changes**: Picking up changes in the curriculum

Results 2: COM-B Model

OPPORTUNITY - Physical

- ✓ Majority of TAs have received externally provided training (83.9%)
- ✗ Most TAs **do not** have dedicated time to attend these training (77.4%).

OPPORTUNITY - Social

- ✓ Around half of the TAs are assigned a mentor/ supervisor at work for support (54.8%).
- ✗ Most of the TAs **do not** have joint planning and feedback time with a teacher (74.2%).
- ✓ Just over half of the TAs feel supported by the members of staff they work with (64.5%).

CAPABILITY - Psychological

- ✓ Most TAs felt that they have the knowledge and skills to support the children they work with (71.0%).

CAPABILITY - Physical

- ✓ Majority of TAs felt that they are physically capable of supporting the children they work with (83.9%).

MOTIVATION - Reflective

- ✓ Almost all TAs believe their work is making a difference to the children's education and wellbeing (96.7%).
- ✓ Almost all TAs find working with children personally rewarding (93.6%).
- ✓ Majority of TAs think attending training is important to their effectiveness in the classroom (87.1%).

BEHAVIOUR
Effectively support children in the classroom

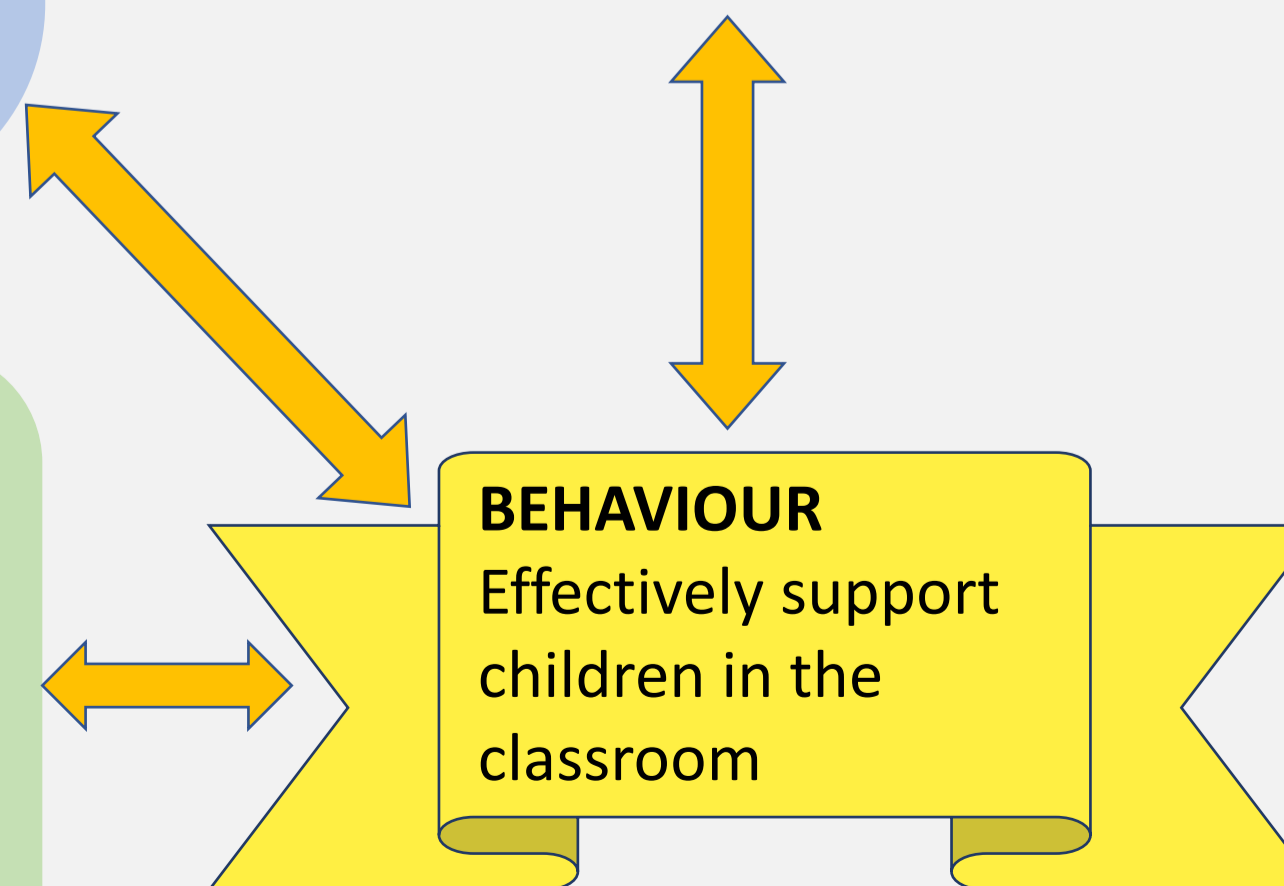


Figure 2. The COM-B model of behaviour change in the context of Teaching Assistants

Discussion

- The COM-B model suggests that TAs have the **motivation** and **capability** which enables them to effectively support children in the classroom
- However, they lack some physical and social **opportunities**
- The model indicates a lack of joint planning and feedback time between TAs and teachers, even though previous studies showed that it improved pupil's engagement in class (Groom, 2006; Webster et al., 2010)
- TAs are generally provided with training, but the lack of dedicated time to attend these training appears to be a barrier to access these resources

Conclusion and Recommendations

- Teaching Assistants find on the job learning equally if not more, valuable than externally provided training
- TAs would benefit from dedicated time for planning and feedback with a senior member of staff
- Their increased clarity of their role and expectations will subsequently benefit the children they work with
- Schools should provide dedicated time for TA training, especially training in areas of mental health, controlling poor behavior, delivering special intervention and speech and language disorder

Acknowledgments

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