

Abstract

Understanding and utilizing perspective-taking abilities (Theory of Mind, ToM) is vital for successful communication. Previous research has suggested that individuals with language difficulties may also have difficulties or differences with how they interpret and exhibit perspective-taking. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are critical members of the comprehensive team that supports these individuals; however, little is currently known about how SLPs approach intervention and therapy while incorporating ToM topics. We surveyed 86 practicing SLPs about their experiences incorporating ToM into therapy. SLPs reported which students they worked with on perspective-taking, how frequently they targeted various skills, and what they looked for in books to target these perspective skills.

Background

Understanding others' perspectives including thoughts and feelings (also referred to as Theory of Mind, ToM) is an important component of communication, particularly for individuals with communication challenges as language and ToM are highly intertwined^{1,2,3,4}. Westby and Robinson⁵ provided a framework for ToM components spanning both inter- and intrapersonal skills as well as cognitive (thoughts) and affective states (emotions). A number of different populations have shown differences or delays in acquiring and utilizing ToM abilities including individuals who have autism⁶, Down syndrome⁷, and language disorders⁸, and who are Deaf and hard of hearing⁹. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are critical members of the team that supports these individuals; however, little is currently known about how SLPs approach intervention and therapy while incorporating ToM topics.

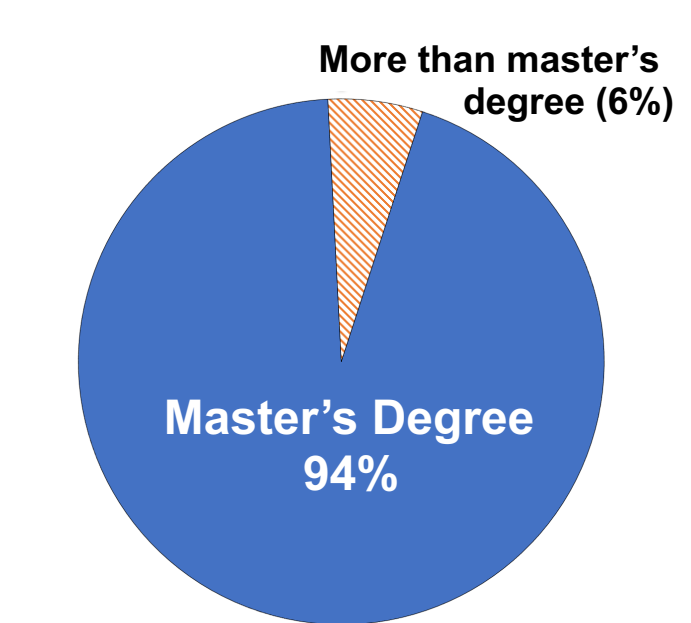
Research questions

1. In what ways do SLPs incorporate ToM topics into intervention?
2. What components of ToM are typically targeted by SLPs in school-based settings?
3. What guides SLPs' incorporation of perspective-taking within children's literature?

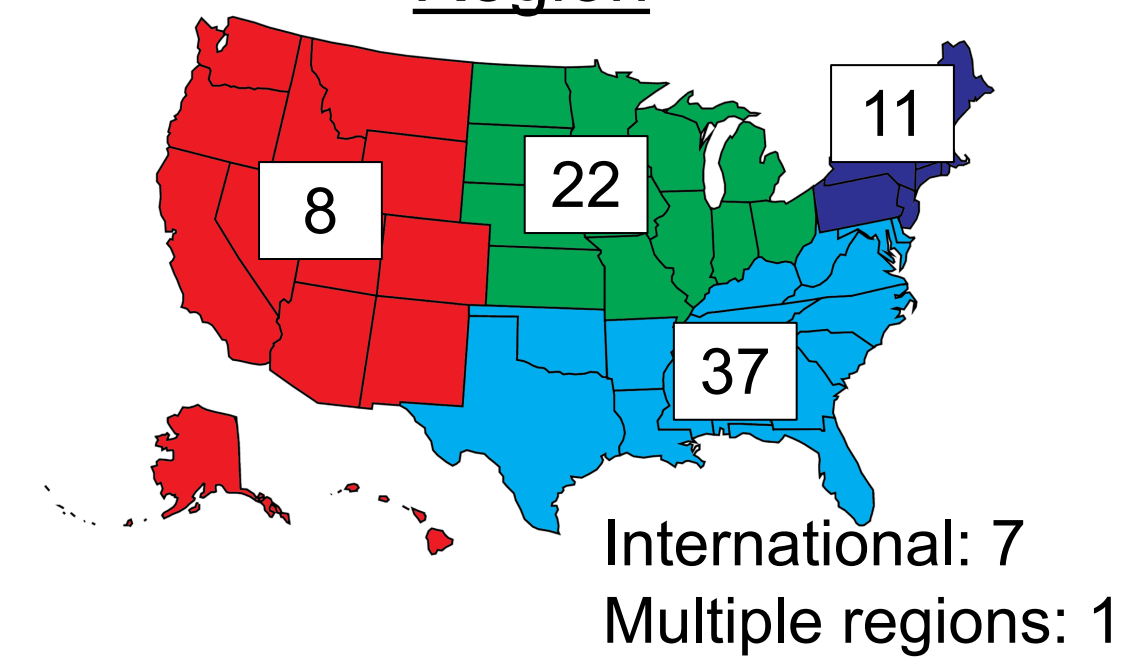
Participants (n = 86)

86 speech-language pathologists

Education Level



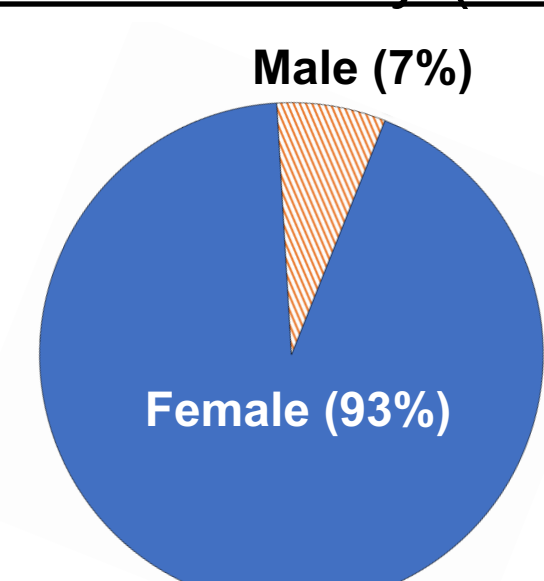
Region



Race/Ethnicity(self-report)

White	77
Mixed race	4
Hispanic/Latino	2
African American/Black	1
Asian	1
Prefer not to answer	1

Gender Identity (Self-report)



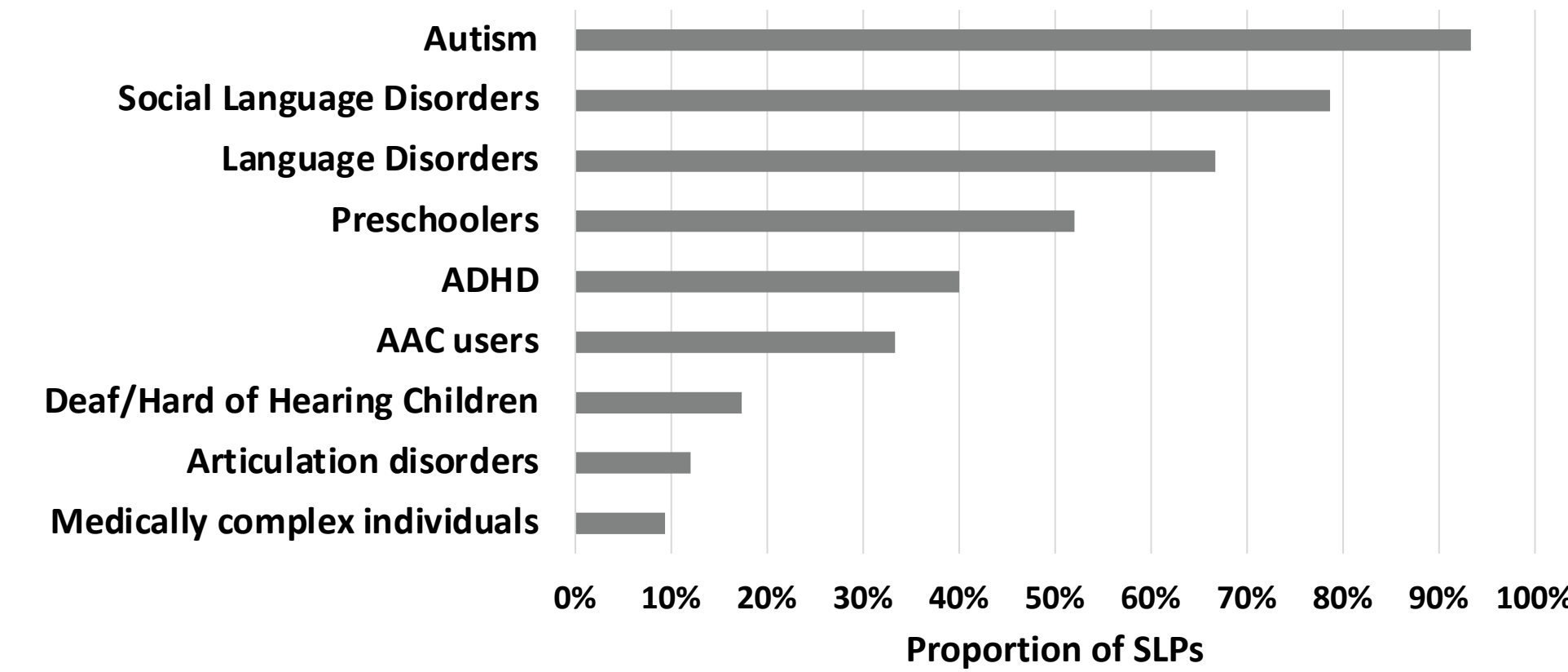
Method

Participants completed an online survey consisting of 26 questions asking about their clinical experiences, perceptions, and definition of Theory of Mind. Participants were recruited using flyers posted to social media and word of mouth.

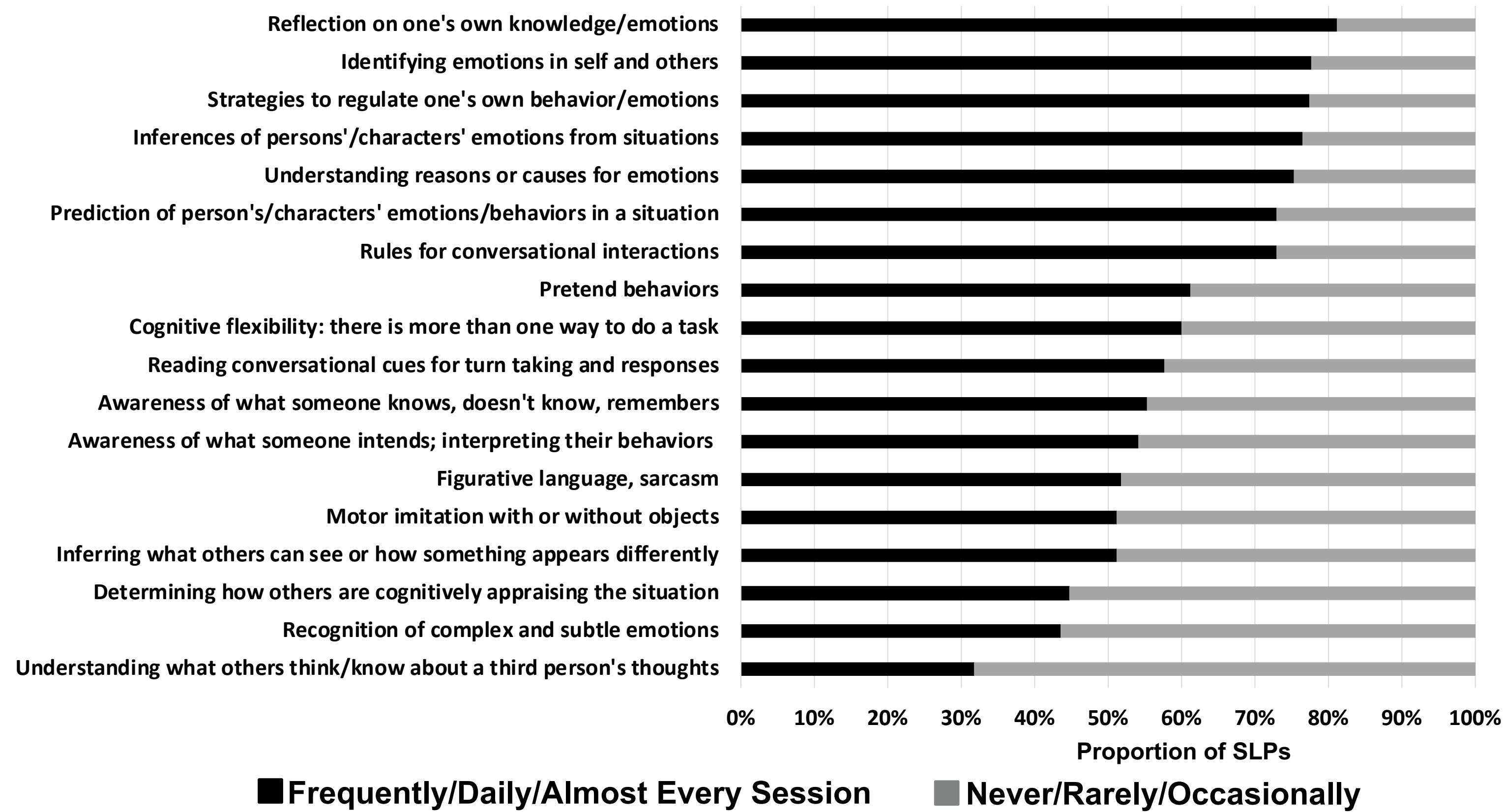
Ethics approval statement: The UTK IRB approved this research.

Results

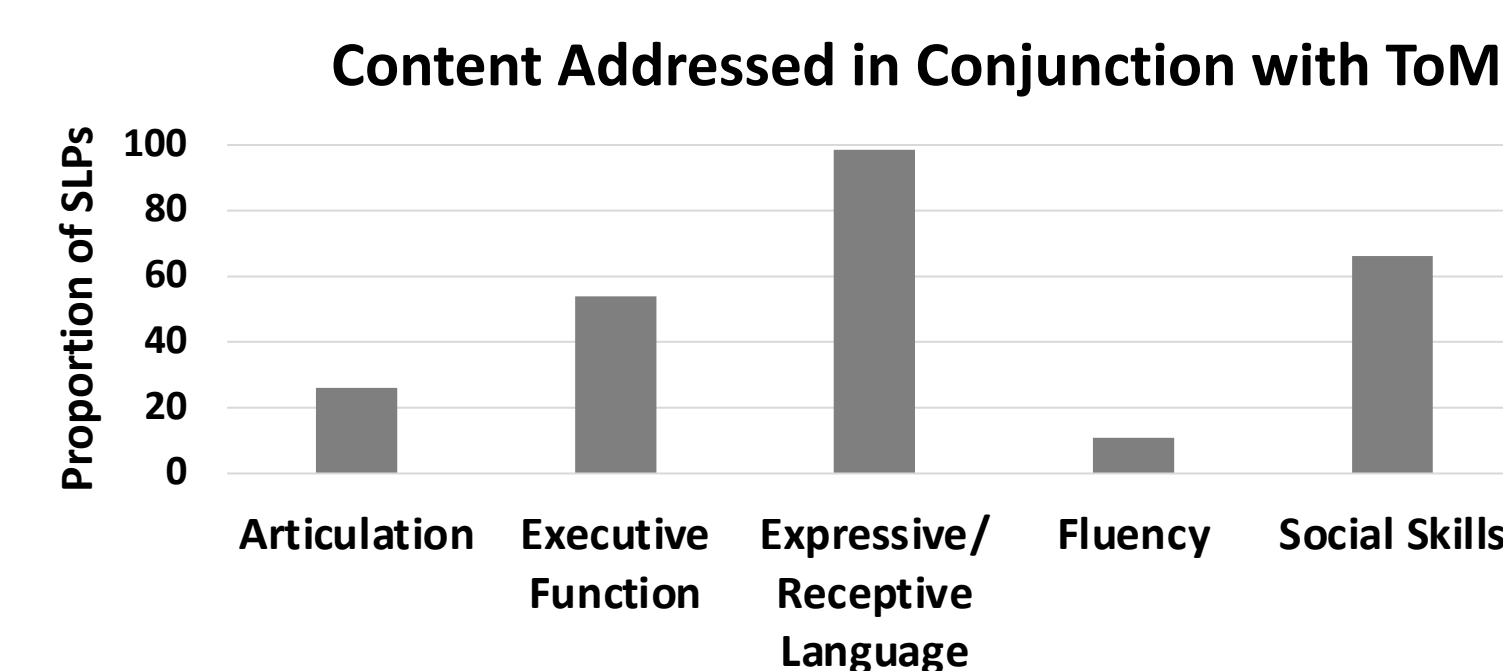
1. What students do SLPs work on perspective-taking/ToM concepts with?



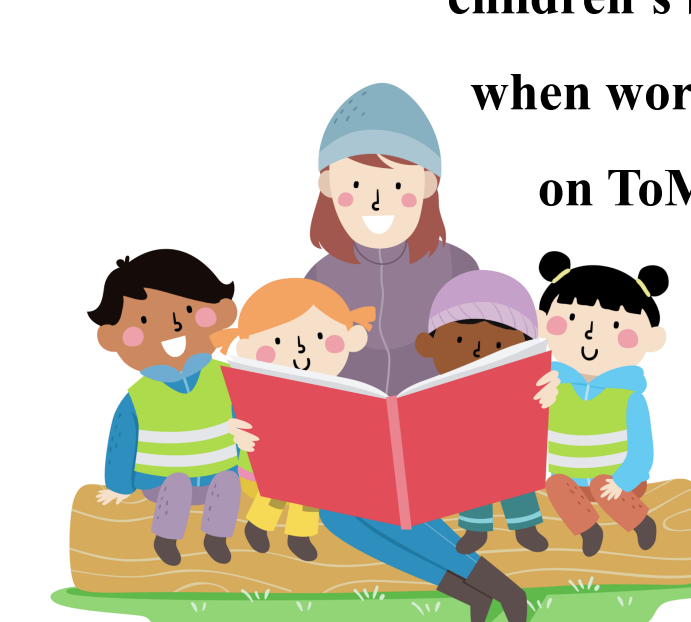
2. How frequently do SLPs target various ToM skills within therapy activities?



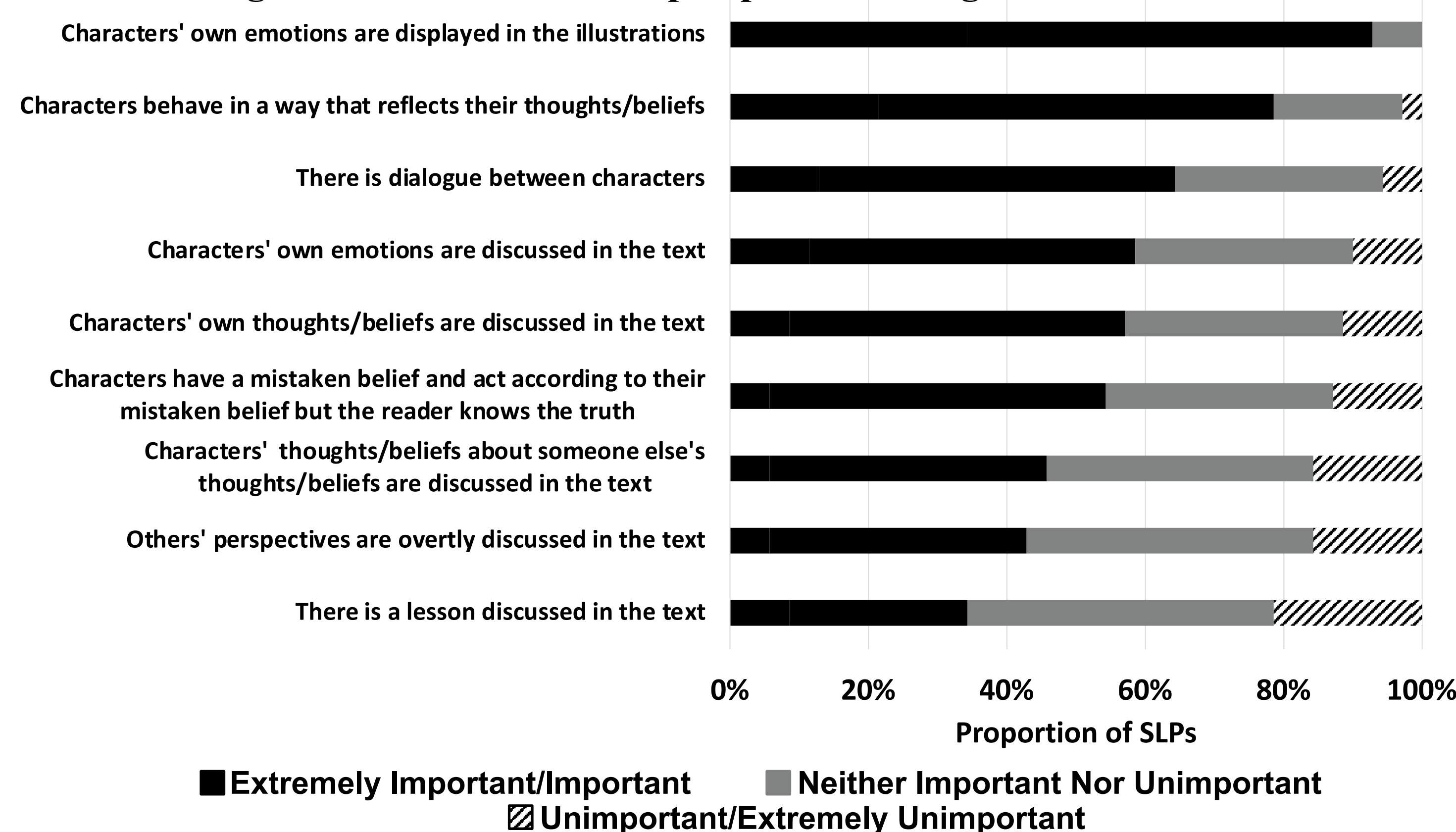
3. Most SLPs work on ToM in conjunction with other skills (86%).



68% of SLPs use children's books when working on ToM.



4. What components of children's literature do SLPs report are the most important when selecting books to work on ToM/perspective-taking?



Discussion

- SLPs work on perspective-taking and understanding emotions (and thoughts/beliefs to a lesser extent) with students who have many different disabilities (not just autism).
- The majority of SLPs use children's books to target these skills using the following criteria for selecting books:
 - Emotions displayed in pictures
 - Behaviors reflects thoughts/beliefs
 - Characters have dialogue

Applications

Children's books provide a great platform to discuss various perspective-taking skills. Instructors can:

- Select books in which illustrations clearly depict characters' emotions. Discuss causes and effects of their emotions.
- Explicitly point out characters' thoughts and beliefs and draw connections between those mental states and their actions or dialogue.
- Incorporate books that depict multiple perspectives and point out these differences. Examples:



Limitations and Future Directions

- Online survey responses obtained through snowball and convenience sampling may not be representative of all SLPs.
- Participants had limited opportunities for elaboration due to multiple choice question format.
- Future research should examine the evidence for using storybooks in interventions to target perspective-taking with individuals who have language/ToM difficulties.

Contact Information & References

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Scan QR code for references

