

MEANS OF USING ABBREVIATIONS IN SPECIALISED TEXTS

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Abstract: *This article explores the use of abbreviations in the specialised text, namely in the field of education, and highlights the importance of their proper introduction to avoid the reader's confusion. Abbreviations play a vital role in improving readability, conciseness, and comprehension in the technical context besides getting readers' attention and easing the process of writing. The study focuses on the benefits of using abbreviations such as acronyms and initialisms to shorten complex terms and the need to decode abbreviations upon their first use, especially for less common terms, considering the potential challenges faced by the non-native readers and those from different fields. Various approaches to introducing abbreviations are presented, advocating for methods that prioritize precision and the reader's understanding over strict adherence to rules. Ultimately, the correct and strategic use of abbreviations can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the technical communication by promoting clarity, avoiding repetition, saving space, and increasing the reader's engagement.*

Keywords: *abbreviation, acronym, initialism, abbreviation usage, specialised text, full form of abbreviations, education field.*

As society evolved, significant changes occurred in people's vocabulary, affecting how they speak and write to communicate and exchange information. This era is marked by rapid actions, movement, and thought, making it natural for people to adapt their language in order to meet various needs. Abbreviations have long been a part of language, appearing in manuscripts and writings throughout history. Their significance increased notably in the 20th century with advancements in science and technology, and today they are commonly used in nearly every field of human activity. The use of abbreviations in education is a relatively recent development, considering that compulsory education itself only became established in the 19th century.

Furthermore, the evolution of abbreviations has accelerated significantly over the past century, indicating that this trend is still developing and will likely continue for an extended period. In just the last 50 years, over 500,000 abbreviations have been introduced, leading to the creation of specialised dictionaries and the ongoing maintenance of online databases to keep everyone informed. Currently, abbreviations are not con-

fined to any specific field or topic; they are prevalent in both the written and the spoken language.

Abbreviations have become so ubiquitous that they are present everywhere around us, leading to the expansion of dictionaries dedicated to abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms. These dictionaries have grown significantly in size and importance over time. For instance, the first edition of the *Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Initialisms Dictionary*, published in 1960, included 12,000 entries. By the second edition, released five years later, the number of entries had quadrupled. The eighth edition in 1983 featured over 250,000 entries, and by the 16th edition, there were more than 520,000 entries. This surge indicates a substantial demand for such terms.

Currently, over 780,000 definitions cover a broad range of acronyms, initialisms, abbreviations, and similar contractions, facilitating the translation of terms into their full forms or meanings. New terms from diverse fields such as business, politics, education, the Internet, and medicine are regularly included.

Abbreviations which represent the shortened form of a word contribute to saving space and they are frequently seen only as a part of the colloquial speech. Nevertheless, they are very common in the technical writing and the proper use of these devices enhances the reading process, increasing the speed with which they are read and comprehended. When using abbreviation, one is allowed to shorten complex words and phrases and be more concise in their writing. Abbreviations, namely acronyms and initialisms are not meant to make the text hard to understand. However, if they are not used properly, there is a great probability to create confusion. Still there are views that abbreviations make writing cluttered and difficult to understand [7, p.167].

One of the obvious reasons to use abbreviations is the fact that they are efficient and short. Thus, one can say much by using few words. They not only take less space when are written but also require the pronunciation of fewer syllables when spoken. On the other hand, sentences full of abbreviations used in a certain field will be hard to understand for people that are not familiar with this type of speech, for example: ***NCLB** was the main law for **K-12 GE** in the US from 2002–2015*. Therefore, not knowing the concept that stands behind the abbreviation it is impossible to understand that ***NCLB*** means *No child left behind* and *K-12* refers to *kindergarten to 12th grade* or that ***GE*** is actually *general education*. This sentence has meaning for people that work with education policies or who are interested in this domain. That is why all abbreviations must be defined at first mention unless likely to be familiar to most readers. Overuse of less familiar abbreviations can be hindrance to foreign language readers and to interdisciplinary communication [2, p. 145].

Most of the time abbreviations have to be concise, easy to remember and accessible for the user, but at the same time they do not have to be completely understood in order to be used by the English speakers.

As a general rule, there are two approaches regarding the presentation of abbreviations in a text. The first one is related to longer works as books or a thesis in which a glossary of abbreviations is introduced in the beginning of the work. In the shorter texts a simple method is used which represents the immediate description or the long form of the acronym or initialism [9].

However, if the abbreviation is very well known and it is familiar to the public, it does not require an explanation: *They have adopted a broad range of measures to curb expenditure: many have cut staff costs (BG, EL, ES, FR, HU, IE, LV, PT, RO, SI) or provisions for infrastructure, maintenance and equipment (BG, IE, RO).*

The renewed EU agenda for higher education, adopted by the Commission in May 2017, identifies four key goals for European cooperation in higher education. Pupils' mobility, including through Erasmus+, could become a regular part of the learning process.

The above examples are taken from communications of the European Commission and as they are intended to the countries from the European Union it is not necessary to add a full form of the abbreviations. Moreover, the short names of the country are internationally known and at the same time they are a symbol of the country. *Erasmus +* is another program known worldwide and supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe and gives opportunities to more than 4 million students. The name became so common among people in the field of education and even to the general public that it is not considered an abbreviation anymore even though *Erasmus* stands for *European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*.

According to T. McArthur and others there are 6 ways of presenting abbreviations in a text [6, p. 369] besides adding an extensive commentary:

1. Indirect association

First a term is presented and then in another part of the text the abbreviation is used to make an indirect association to what has been said before, for example:

Technical and vocational education forms part of both the right to education and the right to work (art. 6 (2)). Article 13 (2) (b) presents TVE as part of secondary education, reflecting the particular importance of TVE at this level of education.

TVE refers to all forms and levels of education which provide knowledge and skills related to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life through formal, non-formal and informal learning methods in both school-based and work-based learning contexts. There are some alternative meanings of *TVE* abbreviation: *Total Vertical Error; Thrusted Vector Experiment; Technological and Vocational Education; Total Vascular Exclusion*. In such situations it is the context that identifies the proper meaning.

Vocational education and training is a key element of lifelong learning systems, which equip citizens with knowledge, skills and competences required in particular occupations and on the labour market. VET education is characterised by dual systems which have a high proportion of work-based learning.

VET is an initialism for *Vocational education and training* and refers to schools or courses where people can improve their employment prospects and advance their career. There are others 28 meanings for this abbreviation for example in the field of transportation: *Vehicle Emissions Testing* or as a clipping from *veterinarian*.

Quality assurance is often perceived as focusing on process rather than content. But QA still has untapped potential to support institutions in reaching their objectives.

Quality assurance which represents a systematic process of determining whether a product or service meets specified requirements has *QA* as an initialism and can be

found in the medical, legal and even the scientific field, for instance: *Quota Adaptation*, *Quinolinic Acid* or as an abbreviation for country *Quatar*.

*And finally, as he was forced to admit two weeks ago, before submitting his resignation in **Seoul National University**, that nine of the eleven stem cell lines were not from the clones at all.... On December 7 a group of young professors at **SNU** upped the issue by demanding an investigation...*

*SNU is an abbreviation for **Seoul National University**, which is a national research university in Seoul, South Korea. **SNU** is an initialism that belongs to information and technology field. There are almost 29 definitions for this abbreviation as: *Slide Not Used*, *Southern Nazarene University*, etc.*

2. Full form, bracketed abbreviation

***Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Framework (TPG A on QF)** is frequently used even as title in documents on education.*

*New modes of delivery, such as blended learning or **massive open online courses (MOOCs)**, have the potential to change how education is delivered.*

*The **European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)** and the **European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)** foster cooperation on **QA** at European level.*

*Participating actively in and implementing key messages resulting from major international surveys and studies such as the **Adult Education Survey (AES)**, the **Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS)** and the **Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)**.*

Initialisms and acronyms prevail in the field of education and most of the time they are introduced in a text with the full form and the abbreviation between the brackets. This is the main way of presenting abbreviations in a scientific text. Throughout the document, the acronym or the initialism may replace the full form for a number of times. In the English language there is only one different definition for MOOC (*Moderator Out Of Character*), making this acronym unique in the field of education. On the other hand, there are almost 79 definitions for *AES*, many of them in important domains as computing (*Advanced Encryption Standard*), military (*Army Experimentation Site*) or electronics (*Amateur Electronic Supply*). The initialism *CVTS* can be easily mistaken due to its frequent usage in the field of transportation (*Continuously variable transmission*), however it has 13 meanings and the second most known is from the field of education: *Continuing Vocational Training Survey*.

3. Abbreviation, bracketed full form

*For this reason, additional data compiled in accordance with the classification on **COFOG (Classification of the Functions of Government)** will be examined towards the end of this section (on differences between **UOE** and **COFOG** data, see the Glossary and methodological notes).*

The initialism *COFOG* classifies government expenditure data from the System of National Accounts by the purpose for which the funds are used.

*The EU faces skills shortages, in particular in the **STEM** fields (**Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths**), but also in some medical professions and teaching.*

The acronym *STEM* is mostly used as an adjective and also very often can be found in the given phrase *STEM fields* as it refers to four different academic fields. It also resembles a common word from the English language, but originally the word order was different: *SMET* – *Science, Math, Engineering and Technology*.

4. Using “(stands) for”

Erasmus stands for European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students.

The working groups cover the various fields of education, from ECEC which stands for early childhood education and care to higher education, as well as adult learning and transversal key competences.

Erasmus is an acronym created from different letters of a longer phrase and is a program funded by the European Union which organises student exchange. The term was created at the same time with the program in 1987 and due to a high frequency of usage and convenience of pronunciation in various languages it became well established in English and there is no other phrase that would have the same acronym. *ECEC* is an initialism for *Early Childhood Education and Care*, a field that becomes more and more important in each society. On the other hand, this initialism is used only in the written form, whilst in the oral speech the long form is pronounced.

5. Using full form “or”

Thirty-two countries endorsed the progress made in building a European Qualification Framework (or EQF) at last February’s meeting in Budapest, although they called for simplification and clarification of some of the building blocks.

The *European Qualification Framework* is a common framework which covers qualifications at all levels and in all sub-systems of education and training. It is a programme developed by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training or also known as *Cedefop* and currently is involved in 39 countries. The abbreviation has other meanings but they are not so well known: *Estimation Quality Factor*.

Peer Learning Activities or PLAs are one of the main tools for passing on expertise in policy development of the Education and Training 2010 work programme.

Peer Learning Activities are considered very important nowadays because they offer students the opportunity to learn from each other. Moreover, various events are held on this topic where different activities are presented. This initialism has other 72 definitions in English and almost 27 are from the field of education in different English-speaking countries, for example: *Pre-school Learning Alliance (London, UK)*, *Participatory Learning Approach, Pennsylvania Library Association*.

The Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe or EPAL is the latest development in the EU’s long-term commitment to promoting high quality adult learning in Europe.

EPAL is a special abbreviation, with no other definitions in the English language and with a mixed pronunciation: [ee-pail]. The platform was created in April 2015 and it proves how productive are the acronyms in the 21st century, being used at large scale by multi-national organisations.

6. Using “as it is known”

By challenging the traditional research paradigms and discourses of small business participation in TVET, this study examines a construct of learning ecologies, or

capabilities for social partnerships for embedding sustainable development in learning communities in vocational education and training (VET as it is known in Australia).

Since 2014 nearly 10,000 Northern Essex Community College students have realized close to a \$1.5 million in textbook savings thanks to Open Educational Resources or OER as it is known on college campuses.

Unlike other exams, the PISA, as it is known, does not assess what teenagers have memorized.

This method is not very often met in the official documents submitted to specialists from the field of education as it sounds very colloquial and its aim is to introduce a new term or remember the public about a term that was previously used. In the case of experts, they already know the term, thus this specification is not necessary. The abbreviation *TVET* is more known in the European region whilst *VET* is specific for Asia-Pacific region, especially in Australia. During the time, *VET* became an umbrella term to encompass education and training activities. *OER* is considered any digital asset used for the benefit of educators and learners everywhere. This initialism has other 29 definitions in different fields and one is from the field of education: *Office of Educational Research*. As it was previously stated *PISA* is a programme funded by OECD and it provides the most comprehensive and rigorous international assessment of student learning outcomes every three years.

As it has been noted there are different ways to introduce abbreviations in the text, but many of them are related to the style or formality of the paper. There is no rule that indicates which method to use, but whether abbreviations are explained or indicated in the brackets or preceded by a certain word, they must not create confusion or mislead the reader. The abbreviations have to increase the reading speed and the understanding of the text.

Abbreviations represent a significant and major part of today's specialised terminology in numerous fields, in some of them playing an essential role. Due to the fact that they are so convenient, abbreviations tend to appear more and more frequently even in a non specialised field, like literature. It is worth mentioning that abbreviations facilitate communication and they are language universals. Therefore, many international organisations use acronyms for their names to link different parts of the world. A great number of abbreviations are created by businesses, enterprises or even organisations. Shortened words may draw attention and interest and nowadays they are preferred over the long names by the new generation, this is why companies adjust their official name and sometimes an abbreviation plays an important part in a company going international.

Abbreviations function as polysemous lexical entities, wherein identical letter combinations may represent multiple meanings. In certain instances, the specific interpretation of an abbreviation cannot be inferred from the contextual information and must instead be memorised. Acronyms frequently exhibit homonymy and homophony, requiring contextual clues for accurate interpretation; furthermore, acronyms with similar phonetic sounds can lead to confusion. The interpretation of abbreviations entails a comprehensive analytical approach, primarily involving the use of abbreviation dictionaries alongside contextual analysis.

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Source of examples:

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