

Navigating Dyslexia: Hurdles Faced by Students with Dyslexia in Higher Education

Ratan Sarkar

Department of Teachers' Training (B.Ed.), Prabhat Kumar College, Karkuli, Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India

Received on: 29 Jan 2024 Accepted on: 06 June 2024

ABSTRACT

This thematic review paper explores the challenges faced by students with dyslexia in higher education, aiming to develop a theoretical understanding of dyslexia and assess the hurdles encountered by these students. The study investigates the impact of dyslexia on academic performance, focusing on difficulties in reading, writing, and time management. Emphasizing the importance of fostering support and understanding among educators and peers, the research highlights the necessity for inclusive practices to ensure the academic success of students with dyslexia. Through a systematic methodology involving literature exploration, data extraction, quality assessment, and theme synthesis, the study provides valuable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers. The findings underscore the need for awareness, resources, and an inclusive culture to enhance the academic experiences of students with dyslexia in higher education.

Keywords: *Dyslexia, higher education, academic challenges, support systems, conceptual understanding, inclusive practices*

INTRODUCTION

A learning disability is a neurological condition that impacts an individual's ability to receive, process, store, respond to, or communicate information effectively (Megari, 2023). These difficulties can manifest in various forms, affecting learning skills such as reading, writing, reasoning, mathematics, and sometimes social skills or emotional development. Individuals with learning disabilities often have average or above-average intelligence, but they may struggle in specific areas of learning due to differences in how their brains process information (Alves Guimarães et al., 2022). There are different types of learning disabilities, including dyslexia (impacting reading), dysgraphia (affecting writing), dyscalculia (impairing mathematical abilities), auditory or visual processing disorders, and non-verbal learning disabilities, among others.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE

The paper on navigating dyslexia in higher education holds significant importance due to the critical need to address the challenges faced by students with dyslexia in academic settings. By delving into the difficulties encountered by these students, the research aims to enhance the understanding of dyslexia and evaluate the obstacles hindering their academic performance.

This study is crucial as it sheds light on the necessity of inclusive methodologies and tailored support systems to ensure the academic success of students with dyslexia. By fostering awareness and providing resources, educational practitioners and policymakers can create a more supportive and inclusive environment that celebrates neurodiversity, ultimately enhancing the educational experiences of students with dyslexia in higher education.

UNDERSTANDING DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia is a developmental disorder that affects an individual's reading, writing, spelling, and sometimes speaking abilities. It is characterized by difficulties in processing sensory input and impaired reading ability (Rimrodt & Cutting, 2007). It is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition, poor spelling, and decoding abilities. Individuals with dyslexia do have trouble with phonological processing, which affects their ability to break down and manipulate sounds in language. Dyslexia is the most common type of learning disorder and can have secondary consequences such as problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience (Ramyasilpa, 2015). It is associated with alterations in genetic, biochemical, physiological, and cognitive levels (Wajuihian & Naidoo, 2011). Functional neuroimaging studies have shown differences in neural activity in specific brain regions involved in reading, such as the left inferior frontal gyrus and right temporoparietal and occipitotemporal junction areas (Bennett, 2011). Educational interventions, particularly those involving phonological training, have been found to improve reading skills and change functional neuroimaging activation patterns (Rubin, 1991). Optometrists also play a role in the management of dyslexia. Dyslexia is a

*Corresponding Author Email: ratanedu@pkcollegecontai.ac.in

Cite as: Sarkar, R (2024). Navigating Dyslexia: Hurdles Faced by Students with Dyslexia in Higher Education. *Journal of Disability Studies*, 10(1), 1-3.

©IS Publications ISSN: 2454-6623 <http://pubs.iscience.in/jds>

specific learning difficulty that affects literacy, mathematics, memory, and organization, and can impact self-esteem and confidence. Moreover, dyslexia is not related to intelligence and does not reflect a lack of intellect or effort. It is a lifelong condition that varies in its severity and can present challenges in academic, professional, and personal life.

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Students with dyslexia face challenges in accessing higher education. These challenges include difficulties in reading comprehension, reading speed, spelling, and text writing (Rolak et al., 2023). Traditional teaching methods, such as lectures, and evaluation methods, such as written exams with open questions, tend to exacerbate these difficulties (Tops et al., 2022). In contrast, dynamic or activating teaching methods, such as excursions or internships, and alternative evaluation methods, such as peer evaluation, are reported to be less problematic for students with dyslexia (Beckett & Darnell, 2020). Personal development and proving their ability to succeed at the university level are important goals for these students (Mazur & Chenu, 2023). However, not all students with dyslexia can demonstrate their knowledge and skills and grow within the educational system (Falzon, 2021). The challenges faced by students with dyslexia in accessing higher education encompass various hurdles that affect their academic journey and social integration. The challenges experienced by students with dyslexia in accessing higher education are depicted below thematically-

Academic Demands: The academic demands of higher education, such as extensive reading and writing requirements, can be particularly challenging for students with dyslexia, impacting their ability to fully engage with the curriculum (Beckett & Darnell, 2020).

Access to Resources: Access to appropriate resources, such as assistive technology, specialized tutoring, and accommodations, can be limited in some higher education institutions, making it difficult for students with dyslexia to receive the support they need (Fernández-Alonso & Sigona, 2020).

Assessment and Examination Issues: Traditional assessment formats, such as timed exams or extensive written assignments, might not be conducive to the needs of dyslexic students. The pressure of timed tests or the volume of written work can exacerbate their challenges (Tops et al., 2022).

Lack of Awareness and Support: Some higher education institutions may lack awareness or adequate support systems for students with dyslexia. This includes limited access to assistive technologies, accommodations, or specialized support services. Many higher education institutions may not have sufficient awareness or understanding of dyslexia, leading to a lack of appropriate support and accommodations for students with dyslexia (Fernández-Alonso & Sigona, 2020).

Limited Resources: Access to specialized resources, such as assistive technology, trained tutors, and accommodations, may be limited in some higher education settings, making it difficult for students with dyslexia to receive the support they need (Beckett and Darnell, 2020; Fernández-Alonso and Sigona, 2020).

Reading and Comprehension Difficulties: Dyslexia often impacts reading fluency, comprehension, and information processing. Higher education requires extensive reading of complex texts, which can pose significant challenges for dyslexic students (Mazur & Chenu, 2023).

Self-esteem and Confidence: Students with dyslexia may struggle with low self-esteem and confidence, especially in an environment where their difficulties are not well understood or accommodated (Jacobs et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2023). They may feel frustrated, inadequate, or ashamed when compared to their peers, leading to a negative self-perception that can impact their academic performance, social interactions, and overall well-being (Liu et al., 2023).

Social Stigma and Misunderstanding: Dyslexic students often face social stigma or negative attitudes from peers and instructors due to their learning differences, impacting their self-esteem and sense of belonging in the academic environment (Dyslexia-Friendly Environment - Yale Dyslexia, 2022; Callens et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2009; Ghisi et al., 2016). Students with dyslexia may face stigma and misunderstanding from peers, faculty, and staff, which can impact their sense of belonging and inclusion in the academic community (Waters & Torgerson, 2020; Association, 2023).

Time Management: Students with dyslexia often require more time to complete reading assignments, write papers, and study for exams, which can make time management a significant challenge (Jacobs et al., 2020).

Transition Support: The transition from secondary education to higher education can be challenging for students with dyslexia, as they frequently struggle to adapt to the increased independence and academic demands (Mortimore & Crozier, 2006; Olofsson et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2009). Providing support and resources during this transition period can be crucial for the success of students with dyslexia (British Dyslexia Association, n.d.; Jacobs et al., 2020).

Writing and Note-Taking Challenges: Dyslexia habitually affects writing abilities, making note-taking and essay writing more laborious. This can hinder the ability to effectively convey ideas or demonstrate knowledge within the academic setting (Mazur & Chenu, 2023).

Rigid Traditional Teaching Methods: Students with dyslexia often experience more problems during traditional teaching methods, such as lectures, and traditional evaluation methods, such as written exams with open questions, compared to dynamic or activating teaching methods and alternative evaluation methods (Rolak et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that to establish a higher education environment that is more embracing and accepting towards students who face challenges with dyslexia, educational institutions have the potential to enhance the consciousness and comprehension of dyslexia among their faculty, staff, and students. Moreover, by granting students with dyslexia access to appropriate resources and accommodations, such as assistive technology, note-taking support, and extended time for

examinations, these institutions can effectively level the educational playing field for these students. Furthermore, fostering a nurturing and comprehensively inclusive campus culture that wholeheartedly celebrates neurodiversity has the potential to greatly enhance the academic experiences of students with dyslexia, as they will feel more esteemed, included, and valued within the broader academic community.

FUNDING

This author has not received any funding or sponsorship for this work from any institution or funding agency.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author gratefully acknowledges and sincerely credits the scholars and experts whose works have been consulted and referenced in the preparation of this research paper.

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