

Supporting Dyslexic Students' Well-Being in the EFL Classroom: Teacher Preparation and Cultural Influences

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ABSTRACT

The well-being of students with SEN is linked to teachers' preparedness to instruct them, which is primarily developed in teacher preparation programmes. Thus, the study assessed dyslexia awareness and misconceptions among English Department students at a Polish university in both TEFL and translation specialisations. The results were later compared with data from the Spanish-speaking sample reported in the initial study (Soriano-Ferrer et al., 2016). Using a modified version of the Knowledge and Beliefs About Developmental Dyslexia Scale (KBDDS), the study examined participants' understanding of dyslexia, including symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and misconceptions about dyslexia. The findings revealed key knowledge gaps and persistent myths, supporting revisions to dyslexia-related content in EFL teacher education within the TEFL track from which participants were recruited.

OBJECTIVES

- To determine the level of awareness of dyslexia among Polish English Department students majoring in TESOL and translations.
- To identify gaps in knowledge and common myths about dyslexia to inform future TESOL programme curricula.

METHODS

Research questions

RQ1: What is the level of awareness of dyslexia among Polish English Department students?

RQ2: What misconceptions do English Department students have about dyslexia?

Research sample

The sample comprised 46 final-year MA English students, including 22 specialising in TEFL and 24 in translation studies. Among the respondents, 71.74% reported prior contact with individuals with dyslexia, including 83.33% of translation students and 59.08% of TEFL students; 34.78% reported feeling unprepared to teach students with dyslexia, including 45.83% of translation students and 22.73% of TEFL students.

Design

A close replication (cf. McManus, 2023) of Soriano-Ferrer et al.'s (2016) research conducted in Spain and Peru.

Instrument

The Knowledge and Beliefs About Developmental Dyslexia Scale (KBDDS), developed by Soriano-Ferrer et al. (2016), which measures participants' knowledge and beliefs about dyslexia. The KBDDS is a 36-item instrument that collects data on (1) general knowledge about the nature of dyslexia (17 items), (2) symptoms and diagnosis (10 items), and (3) treatment and interventions (9 items), rated on a three-point Likert scale (True, False, I don't know, I don't understand).

RESULTS

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of the Teaching and Translation groups

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
General Information Scale Score	Translation	24	8.29	8.50	2.80	0.573
	Teaching	22	9.05	9.00	2.17	0.463
Symptoms/Diagnosis Scale Score	Translation	24	5.46	5.50	1.67	0.340
	Teaching	22	5.14	6.00	2.10	0.448
Treatment Scale Score	Translation	24	4.04	4.00	1.92	0.392
	Teaching	22	5.14	5.50	1.73	0.368
Total Score	Translation	24	17.79	18.00	5.17	1.055
	Teaching	22	19.32	18.50	4.92	1.049

Table 2. Independent samples T-test comparing awareness of dyslexia between Teaching and Translation groups

	Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference	
General Information Scale Score	Student's t	-1.013	44.0	0.317	-0.754	0.744
Symptoms/Diagnosis Scale Score	Student's t	0.578	44.0	0.566	0.322	0.557
Treatment Scale Score	Student's t	-2.025	44.0	0.049	-1.095	0.541
Total Score	Student's t	-1.024	44.0	0.312	-1.527	1.491

Note. $H_{a\mu}$ Translation \neq μ Teaching

Table 3. The most common misconception about dyslexia in Teaching and Translation groups

Statement	Correct answer	Teaching group (N=22)	Translation group (N=24)	Average (N=46)	Sub-scale
		No of incorrect answers			
Intelligence tests are useful in identifying dyslexia.	Yes	91%	92%	91.5	Symptoms/Diagnosis
Dyslexia is hereditary.	Yes	86%	92%	89	General Information
Most children with dyslexia usually have emotional and/or social problems.	Yes	68%	96%	82	General Information
Reversing letters and words is the main characteristic of dyslexia.	No	82%	67%	74.5	Symptoms/Diagnosis
Students who have reading disabilities without an apparent cause (e.g., intellectual disabilities, absenteeism, inadequate instruction) are referred to as dyslexic.	Yes	77%	67%	72	General Information

Table 4. Comparison of the most common misconceptions about dyslexia between the current and initial studies

Misconception	Type	Current study (Polish)	Initial study (Spanish/Peruvian)
Reversing letters and words is the main characteristic of dyslexia.	Overlapping	74.5%	67.25%
Students who have reading disabilities without an apparent cause (e.g., intellectual disabilities, absenteeism, inadequate instruction) are referred to as dyslexic.	Overlapping	72%	49.2%
Intelligence tests are useful in identifying dyslexia.	Different	91.5%	Not listed
Dyslexia is hereditary.	Different	89%	Not listed
Most children with dyslexia usually have emotional and/or social problems.	Different	82%	Not listed
Dyslexia is caused by visual perception deficits resulting in reversals of letters and words.	Different	Not listed	28.8%
The brains of people with dyslexia are different from those without dyslexia.	Different	Not listed	38.8%
Students with dyslexia need structured, sequential, direct instruction in basic skills and learning strategies.	Different	Not listed	49.2%

CONCLUSION

- Pre-service teachers demonstrated slightly greater awareness of dyslexia than translation students, but knowledge gaps were still present in both groups.
- The lack of statistically significant differences between the groups suggests that dyslexia-related training should be strengthened in the TESOL programme.
- Translation students showed greater variability in their understanding of dyslexia, which may be problematic because many may later work as private tutors or EFL teachers in a private sector.
- Teaching students performed better on the Treatment Scale, suggesting that practical training helps future teachers develop more effective strategies for supporting dyslexic learners.
- Misconceptions about dyslexia remain common, especially regarding its hereditary nature, diagnosis, and emotional and social consequences.
- The misconception that dyslexia does not often lead to emotional or social difficulties is particularly concerning, as it may limit teachers' academic, emotional, and psychological support for dyslexic students.
- Teacher education programmes should include more practical, hands-on preparation for working with dyslexic students in the EFL classroom.
- A mandatory course on neurodiversity in language learners could be beneficial, especially in translation programmes where students may also pursue teaching roles.
- Better preparation would benefit both dyslexic students and teachers by promoting inclusive learning environments, reducing stress, and supporting the well-being of all participants in the educational process.