

Dyslexia-Friendly English Classroom

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work in progress

A Decade of World Class Education

Dyslexia: Meaning and description

ΔΥΣΛΕΧΙΑ?

Regarded as SEN (Special Educational Needs),
yet part of the regular schooling system in
Macedonia

Dr. Aleksandra Ristovska Karevska

“INCLUSION, NOT INTEGRATION!”

What is Dyslexia and what causes it?

The cause of dyslexia has not been fully established, but the effect is to create neurological anomalies in the brain which bring about varying degrees of difficulty in learning when using words, and sometimes symbols. These anomalies can either be acquired (acquired dyslexia) by early ear infections which cause temporary hearing problems, or through congenital and developmental traits (developmental dyslexia).

What is Dyslexia and what causes it?

Common understandings of dyslexia include:

- Dyslexia literally means 'trouble with words'.
- The Oxford English Dictionary defines dyslexia as a disorder involving difficulty in learning to read words, letters and other symbols.
- [International Dyslexia Association](#): Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability.
- [British dyslexia association](#): Dyslexia is Specific Learning Difficulties (or SpLDs) which affect the way information is learned and processed.

Dyslexia Globally

- Research in economically developed countries denotes that in the **English speaking countries 15% of the population is dyslexic**, and in the **Slavic speaking countries 10% to 15% of the population**. In **Croatia**, research denotes that **5% from the children in a single class are dyslexic**. It can be assumed that **Slavic languages have a transparent orthography**, hence the percentage of dyslexia is lower.
- Dr. Alvarado (2009) elaborated on **possible factors** that influence occurrence of dyslexia. She provides a thorough analysis of orthographic systems and how dyslexia is manifested across languages with different orthographies, distinguishing between **opaque and transparent orthographic systems depending on the grapheme-phoneme correspondence**.

Dyslexia Globally

- In **opaque orthographies (English, Portuguese)** this correspondence is difficult to trace, unlike in **transparent ones (Turkish, Italian and Spanish)**. Dr. Alvarado questions whether dyslexia is universal and how it is manifested in these two types of orthographies. She asserts that dyslexia exists in both of them with variations of its manifestation. **Phonological training should be included in the regular curriculum** because it results in improved reading and writing fluency. **Regular curriculum prescribes learning English as an ESL**, which has opaque orthography. This study is very helpful because it gives explanation of types of orthographic systems and how dyslexia can be manifested across languages.

Dyslexia in our country

- In our educational system, dyslexia is not registered as a present problem of a certain number of struggling students. There is a shortage of research on this topic.
- Teachers are not informed on dyslexia signs, i.e. identifying dyslexia.
- According to the results presented in the *Final Report* by “Einstein”, 32% of teachers are averagely motivated to obtain new knowledge in this field, 33% are under the average and 30% above the average. 5% of the teachers did not respond to these statements.
- 32% of teachers believe that the competent institutions give them either limited or insufficient information on this phenomenon.

Dyslexia and ELT

Margaret Crombie explores the topic of “Foreign Language Learning and Dyslexia”:

- Foreign language learning is recommendable for dyslexic students, only provided that they are fully included and engaged in class.
- Very challenging for teachers to include dyslexic learners in the English classroom.
- Teachers should be careful when preparing lesson plans and teaching materials because dyslexics process information with delay, due to difficulties in phonological processing which also results in reduced reading fluency and slower comprehension in general.
- Proposed strategies from multisensory nature, which have proved to be effective for these students.

How to accommodate your English classroom

**“DON’T FOCUS ON PROBLEMS, FOCUS ON
SOLUTIONS!”**

Marie Delaney, SEN Specialist & Author

- Take a positive attitude, willing to help and always learn new things.
- Make learning and reading fun and creative!
Be supportive and don't rush results/Ss.
- Encourage that dyslexia is not to be ashamed of. It should be “diagnosed”, treated, not hidden under the carpet!

Preparing a Dyslexia-friendly English Classroom

1. Celebrate strengths and success across a wide range of activities.
2. Have visual aids available for every lesson, or ask students to create some. Make good use of multi-sensory sources of information.
3. Actively teach study/note taking skills, e.g. key word notes, spider plans and encourage students to use them.

Preparing a Dyslexia-friendly English Classroom

4. Avoid long lists of instructions given verbally and provide a clear lesson structure – use the board to provide information visually.

5. Encourage alternative ways of recording: always have a range of materials available, e.g. individual white/black boards (be aware of glare off the boards) and coloured pens, tape recorders; large sheets of paper and felt pens; writing frames

*This extract is taken from the Dyslexia Friendly Good Schools Practice Guide; Leicester City Council

In Class:

- Break tasks down into small easily remembered pieces of information.
- If visual memory is poor, copying must be kept to a minimum. Notes or handouts are far more useful.
- Seat the child fairly near the class teacher so that the teacher is available to help if necessary, or he can be supported by a well-motivated and sympathetic classmate.
- Instruct this student to keep a checklist of activities, help with organizing material (folders, files)

In Class:

- Give an outline of what is going to be taught in the lesson, ending the lesson with a resume of what has been taught.
- When homework is set, it is important to check that the child correctly writes down exactly what is required. Try to ensure that the appropriate worksheets and books are with the child to take home.
- In the front of the pupils' homework book get them to write down the telephone numbers of a couple of friends.

Copying from the blackboard :

- Use different colour chalks/markers for each line if there is a lot of written information on the board, or underline every second line with a different coloured chalk.
- Ensure that the writing is well spaced.
- Leave the writing on the blackboard long enough to ensure the child doesn't rush, or that the work is not erased from the board before the child has finished copying.

Reading:

- Save the dyslexic child the ordeal of having to 'read aloud in class'. Perhaps give the child advanced time to read pre-selected reading material, to be practiced at home the day before. This will help ensure that the child is seen to be able to read out loud, along with other children.
- Don't ask pupils to read a book at a level beyond their current skills, this will instantly demotivate them. Motivation is far better when demands are not too high, and the child can actually enjoy the book. If he has to labour over every word, he will forget the meaning of what he is reading.

Homework:

- **By the end of a school day a dyslexic child is generally more tired** than his peers because everything requires more thought, tasks take longer and nothing comes easily. More errors are likely to be made. Only set homework that will be of real benefit to the child.
- **DO NOT DISCRIMINATE!** In allocating homework and exercises that may be a little different or less demanding, it is important to use tact. **Self-esteem is rapidly undermined** if a teacher is underlining the differences between those with difficulties and their peers.

Marking of work:

- Credit for effort as well as achievement are both essential. This gives the pupil a better chance of getting a balanced mark.
- Spelling mistakes pinpointed should be those appropriate to the child's level of spelling. Marking should be done in pencil and have positive comments.
- **RED colour can cause anxiety and stress.** There's nothing more disheartening for the child than to have work returned covered in red ink, when they've inevitably tried harder than their peers to produce the work.

Preparing handouts

Set your spell checker to automatically check readability, go to Tools, Options, Spelling, and Grammar, then tick the Readability request. Word will then show your readability score every time you spell check.

Preparing handouts

1. Left justify; it helps a dyslexic person find their place more easily.
2. Ensure line spacing and margins are of an adequate size (1.5 is a good line spacing default on Word).
3. Leave a line between paragraphs as opposed to indenting.

Preparing handouts

4. Black ink on white paper can lead to eyestrain. Cream or other soft coloured paper can reduce 'glare' and be easier to read. Alternately write in blue or grey.
5. Avoid glossy paper and gloss laminates; use paper and laminates with a matt finish.
6. The minimum size font should be 12.
7. Keep the design simple and consistent throughout.

Preparing handouts

8. Dyslexia is a disability, which can be very sensitive to particular typefaces, both in print and on screen. Fonts such as Times New Roman can be too decorative. Fonts such as Ariel, Comic Sans, Verdana and Trebuchet are recommended, although this depends on personal taste.

9. There are free Dyslexia-Friendly fonts such as OpenDyslexic, which may help the 10% of dyslexics who reverse letters, as the letters are thicker in parts to give gravity to the letters and prevent the brain from reversing them. Again this is a matter of preference.

Preparing handouts

10. Use Headings; these should be in **Bold** and any important information should be inside a text box.

11. Use **Bold** to highlight; underlining or *italics* tend to make words run together.

12. If providing information or instructions these should be as numbered points, not bullet points.

13. Use short, simple sentences: 12-15 words per line are recommended

How to “read” a certain text without actual reading

- Visualisation
- The power of sounds (audios, videos, podcasts)
- Comics
- Drama
- Music
- Use of Gardner’s *Multiple Intelligences*
- Games (playing with words, Scribble, Crossword puzzles, Word dominoes)
- Graphic novels
- Tablet Apps and eBooks
- Audiobooks

Ideas:

- ❖ Reading carpets
- ❖ Doing rebuses (illustrating a poem or a given text)
- ❖ Using realia more often
- ❖ Cartoons and comics
- ❖ If applicable, record the lesson and send it via e-mail
- ❖ Prepare digital materials full of pictures
- ❖ Mind mapping
- ❖ Storynory
- ❖ Use of magnetic Alphabet and small whiteboards (for PW, GW)
- ❖ Incorporating different learning styles
- ❖ Dyslexie and OpenDyslexic font
- ❖ Microsoft Quick Access Toolbar
- ❖ Oral dictations
- ❖ Picture dictations
- ❖ Reading games (Scrabble, Crossword puzzles)

Ideas:

- ❖ FB and the digital “friends”
- ❖ Use of colour/ coloured overlays
- ❖ Text-to-speech
- ❖ Word prediction keyboard tools
- ❖ Games
- ❖ Make read&write a fun activity!
- ❖ Vocabulary building (illustrating new words, flashcards, acting out a word, story writing using illustrated vocabulary, dictogloss)
- ❖ Downloadable lesson plans (literature, science, history, drama)

Digital Aid

- Reading Apps for Dyslexia
- Writing Apps for Dyslexia
- Note-Taking Apps for Dyslexia
- Multipurpose Apps for Dyslexia

“Einstein” and their research work in Macedonia

- 3 Research Reports Conducted in Primary Schools (1st-5th grade), municipalities: Strumica, Chair and Centar
- 1 Final Analysis of Research Conducted in the afore stated municipalities
- 1 Research Report conducted in 2 Secondary Schools in Skopje



Final analysis of research conducted in the municipalities of Chair, Centar and Strumica

Aim: assessing the dyslexia-awareness/familiarity level among primary school teachers (1st-5th grade) in the municipalities of Chair and Centar in Skopje and Strumica

Hypothesis: After completing the special training on dyslexia, teachers in Strumica, Centar and Chair show increased knowledge as compared to the state prior to training.

Respondents:

Sample of primary school teachers (1st-5th grade) in the afore stated municipalities was used. 419 teachers were interviewed in Phase 1 (147 from Strumica, 117 from Centar and 155 from Chair). In all of the project phases, anonymity was retained.

Participants in this project: all primary schools in Strumica and Chair and 8 primary schools in Centar, total number – 24 primary schools.

- **Instruments used:**

A questionnaire containing 20 statements, offering a four level scale of agreement, designed by professionals and psychologists. Out of the 20 statements, 15 assess teachers' knowledge of dyslexia. Knowledge here implies: recognition, understanding, being well informed on dyslexia. Other items assess teachers' motivation and their opinion on the role of competent institutions. The questionnaire is available in Macedonian and Albanian. The time for responding the questionnaire was unlimited.

The following statements are of particular interest for our topic:

- Teachers can contribute to disappearance of students' dyslexia
- Teachers can help boost self-confidence of dyslexic students
- Grading of written assignments is not an adequate assessment of dyslexic students' knowledge
- Units and lectures supported by illustrations and visualization help dyslexic students learn better

Results

Table 2.1. Teachers' familiarity with dyslexia, <i>before training</i>			
Arithmetic mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Number of respondents (N)	
Centar	36,52	4,94	117
Chair	39,90	6,44	155
Strumica	38,87	5,21	147

Table 2.1. Teachers' familiarity with dyslexia, <i>after training</i>			
Arithmetic mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Number of respondents (N)	
Centar	53,00	4,31	68
Chair	50,30	4,73	141
Strumica	52,27	4,63	130

Results

CONCLUSIONS:

- Level of knowledge of primary school teachers is not satisfactory as compared to the level of knowledge in economically developed countries.
- There is no organized approach to recognize dyslexia of students
- Teachers lack instructions by competent institutions to be able to act accordingly in cases of identified dyslexia.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Proceeding with informative activities connected to dyslexia
- Starting preparation of educational material, curricula and syllabi for teachers, which will contain instructions how to identify dyslexia
- Institutionalizing the approach to dyslexia as an educational problem

Situation in secondary schools

- Despite lack of any research in this field, dyslexia is present among secondary school students
- More than 10% Macedonian dyslexic students and more than 20% Albanian dyslexic students, due to orthographical transparency/opaqueness
- Innate state that cannot be totally overcome, probably they also had it in primary school
- Alarming results which must increase the level of awareness/familiarity
- Competent institutions must dedicate more time, allocate assets and create training programs, especially to instruct school psychologists and pedagogists

Interviews with English teachers of dyslexic students

- Interview containing 39 questions pinpointing major weaknesses and improvements to be done
- 2 teachers from Skopje were interviewed: 1 primary and 1 secondary school teacher
- Both teachers are aware of the dyslexia phenomenon
- Both teachers claim that they are not qualified and trained to work with dyslexic students
- They need more training
- The ELT curriculum is not adjusted at all
- Primary school teacher: teachers must try to adjust the ELT classroom

- Secondary school teacher: no methods are used since they are not qualified and not informed
- Primary school teacher: adjusts the reading sections (shorter paragraphs, prepares wordlists), use of TPR, colour codes
- Both teachers: dyslexic students lack self esteem
- No extra time is left to copy from the board
- Secondary school teacher: impossible to adjust working space of 35-37 students in a single class
- Both teachers try to integrate them effectively
- No multisensory approach is used in secondary schools unlike in primary schools
- No motivation in secondary schools, unlike in primary schools

- No special format for handouts for secondary school students
- Primary schools use technology, in secondary schools it is rare or scarce
- Both teachers state no spidergrams/mind mapping techniques have been introduced in the form of note taking
- Both teachers use a red pen when marking Ss' work
- English is not taught through Drama in secondary schools, whereas rarely in primary schools
- Both teachers give extra time for thinking and processing

Interviews with publishers

- Still waiting for a response by Pearson Longman in Belgrade

Conclusions and recommendations



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Thank you!

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