



Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Students with Dyslexia. A Literature Review

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Abstract

Teaching neurodivergent young learners means being aware of their needs and adapting teaching methods to match those needs. This article is focused on teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to young students with dyslexia, a learning difference that affects the manner in which students process language and which is present from birth. Learning languages can represent a great challenge for these students as a result of reading and spelling difficulties. The current article explores the characteristics of dyslexic learners, specific difficulties encountered during English lessons, as well as successful methods for teaching EFL. This research is focused on schoolchildren and teenagers with dyslexia. A subsection in the introductory chapter is dedicated to students with ADHD and dyslexia, as these can frequently co-occur. Knowledge about neurodiversity can help teachers succeed in teaching students with dyslexia, as these students often suffer from stress in a traditional classroom environment. By developing inclusive learning environments, planning inclusive lessons, and using appropriate assessment methods, teachers can support dyslexic learners in developing strong language skills. The last part of the article investigates the benefits of multilingualism for dyslexic learners, as the recent decades have brought more research on bilingualism in students with special educational needs (SEN). The article aims to support teachers of English as a foreign language, but it may also be of interest to parents or other educators, as well as to dyslexia researchers. Understanding the impact that dyslexia has on language learning can help teachers adapt their teaching strategies in order to help these students in their learning journey. Besides using appropriate strategies, it is important to work on building confidence by focusing on progress and strengths rather than comparing students to their peers. As these learners may struggle with self-esteem, a positive teacher mindset is essential.

1. Introduction

There is increasing interest in neurodiversity (ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, ASD) from the part of teachers. While 15–20% of the population is neurodivergent, the majority of teachers are not trained to teach these students effectively, which can lead to student problems such as dropping out of school, behavioural problems, etc. Despite this increasing interest, dyslexia-related research remains insufficient.

Dyslexia is defined as “a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling

and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction” (Lyon et al., 2003, p. 2).

Another characteristic of dyslexia is problems with short-term memory, which involves difficulties with remembering information. It is a lifetime condition, the symptoms persisting into adulthood, even though their range and severity may vary (Nijakowska, 2010, p. X). Dyslexia affects 4–9% of school-aged children. There is substantial evidence that dyslexia is neurological in its origin (Licha, 2020, p. 6).

According to the time of onset, dyslexia can be classified into developmental dyslexia (or ‘regular’ dyslexia), and acquired dyslexia, resulting from trauma or injury. There are several myths about dyslexia, such as seeing things backwards, that it is a visual or auditory problem, that it is rare, or that dyslexic individuals cannot read (Cimermanánová, 2015, p. 39). These myths stem from a lack of understanding of neurodiversity.

History

Before the start of the 20th century, the term “word blindness” was used instead. From the little historical evidence that we have, it is known that Johannes Schmidt, a German physician, reported the case of a patient presenting reading difficulties caused by a stroke, in 1676 (Mahmoodi-Shahrehabaki, 2018, p. 2). The work of the German neurologist Adolph Kussmaul is also known for drawing public attention to reading difficulties (1887), which he called “word blindness” (Kirby & Snowling, 2022, p. 1).

Adolph Kussmaul influenced the work of another German researcher, Rudolph Berlin. The term “dyslexia” was coined by Berlin, a German ophthalmologist and university professor. Berlin observed difficulties faced by his patients when reading the printed word, but could not identify any problem with their vision (Kirby, 2018, p. 1). Another key moment in the history of dyslexia was the publication by Critchley, in 1970, of his work “The Dyslexic Child”. This is a seminal work on dyslexia, identifying “developmental dyslexia” and emphasising the importance of urgent official attention to this matter.

The emergence of dyslexia coincided with changes in Western society, such as the advent of widespread literacy and the requirement for people to process linguistic information in their everyday lives (Kirby, 2018, p. 5). To gain political purchase for this cause, the complexities of dyslexia research were simplified so that the cause could be widely understood (Kirby, 2018, p. 5).

Causes

As mentioned in the beginning, dyslexia is characterised by a deficit in phonological processing or the ability to identify and manipulate the sounds of speech (Suárez-Coalla et al., 2020, p. 1). To be able to read fluently, it is necessary to acquire grapheme–phoneme conversion rules (G–P). We also need to store the orthographic representations of words (Suárez-Coalla et al., 2020, p. 2). There are languages with deep orthographic systems, such as English (languages with numerous G–P irregularities), and transparent orthographic systems, such as Italian and Spanish, in which G–P correspondences are very easy to learn (Suárez-Coalla, 2020, p. 2). In spite of common neurological origins, the performance of individuals with dyslexia depends on the orthographic system of that language (Suárez-Coalla, 2020, p. 2).

Dyslexia has a high prominence in the English language, whereas in languages with a more transparent writing system, such as Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Greek, and German, it is much less frequently identified. Students who speak languages with more transparent orthography as their L1 have much fewer problems with learning to read than those whose L1 is English, as G–P correspondence rules are very easy to learn in these languages (Suárez-Coalla et al., 2020,

p. 2). Dyslexia manifests itself in alphabetic languages, like English, or non-alphabetic languages, like Chinese.

According to dual-process models, reading may be conducted using the lexical route (which makes use of the orthographic representations of the words) and the sublexical route, which uses knowledge about the G–P rules of the language (Suárez-Coalla, 2020, p. 2).

Dyslexia is heritable and it cannot be cured. It is not related to intelligence, age, or other abilities. Early identification is, however, important, as “the brain is much more plastic in younger children and potentially more malleable for the rerouting of neural circuits” (Cimermanánová, 2015, p. 40). Recent advances in functional brain imaging have allowed different theories on the exact nature of the phonological deficits to be examined more closely (Eden & Moats, 2002).

In the literature, there is no consensus regarding the cause of dyslexia. One recent approach claims that difficulties in dyslexia are (at least partly) due to a deficit in procedural learning. According to the Procedural Deficit Hypothesis, the procedural memory system is impaired in dyslexic learners, while the declarative memory system remains intact (Tribushinina et al., 2021, p. 352).

Symptoms and Identification

Dyslexia can manifest differently across the lifespan. Among the symptoms of dyslexia, we can mention that these children are late-talkers, have difficulties with rhyming words, reverse letters and numbers (p and b, 3 and 5), have difficulties with breaking a word into its components, and distinguishing sounds within a word (c-a-t). There are also symptoms which are non-linguistic, such as distinguishing between left and right, before and after, remembering and following directions, problems with motor skills, organisation, attention problems, handwriting, slower processing speed, and working memory problems (Cimermanánová, 2015, p. 40). There may be difficulties with reading and spelling multisyllable words, even omitting entire syllables.

Reading and writing are closely linked skills. In school, dyslexia can manifest as difficulties with text comprehension (and learning information from a text), but also in writing, in difficulties with spelling and text organisation.

Dyslexia can be identified through observation, self-reporting questionnaires, screening, or diagnostic interviews made by psychologists. However, many dyslexic individuals only receive a diagnosis as adults, and this is often accompanied by feelings of shame.

Dyslexia and ADHD

Dyslexia can be comorbid with other neurodevelopmental conditions, such as dyscalculia, Tourette Syndrome, ADHD, and DLD (developmental language disorder) (Jarsve & Tzagari, 2022, p. 157). The following subsection shall focus on the co-occurrence of dyslexia and ADHD.

Like dyslexia, ADHD is highly heritable. ADHD and dyslexia can often co-occur, and the percentage of these children ranges between 25–40% (Boada et al., 2012, p. 265). Researchers try to understand the nature and causes of this comorbidity. Researchers concluded that “the overlap between these conditions is not driven by one condition causing another, but by shared genetic risks” (Bergen et al., 2025, p. 205). Studies on the comorbidity of ADHD and dyslexia reveal that this often means a more serious manifestation of a disorder. Children who meet the criteria for both dyslexia and ADHD face higher risks of academic and social impairment (Boada et al., 2012, p. 267). Also, there is a higher risk for important emotional, behavioural,

and psychosocial difficulties (Boada et al., 2012, p. 266). However, studies show conflicting findings and further research is necessary.

Hämäläinen et al. (2013) estimate that 30–50% of dyslexic individuals are affected by auditory problems (Serrallach et al., 2016, p. 2). According to Serrallach et al. (2016), children with ADHD frequently meet the criteria for CAPD (central auditory processing disorders) (Serrallach et al., 2016, p. 2). Other findings indicate that children with ADHD and dyslexia display more severe impairments in phonological skills, inhibition (Willcutt et al., 2001), rapid automatized naming (Rucklidge & Tannock, 2002), and time estimation (McGee et al., 2004) (Gooch et al., 2011, p. 195).

Research Questions

As today's society assigns a high value to foreign language teaching and learning, English classes are essential parts of the curriculum in many countries (Reraki, 2020, p. 212). Even though there is a plethora of literature on dyslexia, there is insufficient literature on teaching foreign languages to dyslexic students (Cimermanánová, 2015, p. 39). English as a foreign language (EFL) was chosen, as it is the most widely taught foreign language and it serves as a lingua franca between speakers with different L1 (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 158).

Despite increasing interest in dyslexia and neurodiversity in general, there are no up-to-date literature reviews on dyslexia and English as a foreign language teaching (EFL) to young learners. A study was published in 2025 by Wang, and it included studies published between 2000–2025, but it focused on teaching English to Chinese students with dyslexia (Chinese being a non-alphabetic language, with different particularities than English or European languages). The study focused on strategies, tools, and accommodations relevant to the Chinese context (Wang, 2025, p. 1). Therefore, a literature review on teaching English to dyslexic students is necessary. The necessity for this study also stems from the fact that dyslexia and foreign language learning and teaching are less thoroughly studied compared to dyslexia and first language learning (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 157; Nijakowska, 2010).

The current article aims to fill this research gap and discuss dyslexia related to teaching English as a foreign language to young learners. The following research questions were asked:

- (1) What methods and approaches are suitable for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to young students with dyslexia?
- (2) How does dyslexia influence writing skills in children learning English as a foreign language?

While there is increasing interest in dyslexia, there are no up-to-date literature reviews on dyslexia and English as a foreign language teaching. The main purpose of this literature review is to discuss dyslexia-friendly teaching strategies and the link between dyslexia and writing.

A study was published in 2025 by Wang, but it focused on teaching English to Chinese students with dyslexia. The study focused on strategies, tools, and accommodations relevant to the Chinese context (Wang, 2025, p. 1). The current article aims to support EFL teachers and be of use to other researchers interested in dyslexia or simply in neurodiversity.

2. Methodology

The current article is a review of the literature on dyslexia and English as a Foreign Language Teaching. The electronic databases PubMed and Google Scholar were screened for records with the terms: “dyslexia”, “children”, “English as a Foreign Language”, “ADHD”, “English teaching”, “multilingualism”. Along with terms related to dyslexia and EFL teaching, the term “multilingualism” was also used, as in recent years dyslexia research has started to focus on multilingual participants. The search was conducted for the period 2000 to present. This period was chosen because the aim was to include recently published articles. The

bibliographies from the retrieved sources were searched for extra sources. The last day searched was 15 March 2026.

The inclusion criteria for this literature review were:

- (3) Peer-reviewed articles published in English;
- (4) Peer-reviewed articles that focus on teaching English as a Foreign Language to students with dyslexia;
- (5) Books, doctoral dissertations, and master's theses on the topic of dyslexia and English as a Foreign Language;
- (6) Peer-reviewed articles that examine dyslexia in children and teenage students.

The exclusion criteria were:

- (7) Peer-reviewed articles published in other languages;
- (8) Peer-reviewed articles on dyslexia which do not focus on English as a foreign language teaching and learning;

After removing the duplicates and articles in other languages, the abstracts were screened. During the screening phase, titles and abstracts were assessed and irrelevant studies were discarded. Fourteen studies met the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The articles which investigate methods and approaches are: Jarsve & Tsagari (2022), Licha (2020), Kormos & Nijakowska (2017), Bodnar (2015), Kałdonek-Crnjaković & Fišer (2017), Fišer & Kałdonek-Crnjaković (2022), Mohamadzadeh et al. (2020), Troeva-Chalakovska (2015), and Suárez-Coalla et al. (2020). Regarding teacher training needs, the following articles research the need for teacher training regarding teaching students with dyslexia: Nijakowska et al. (2018) and Nijakowska (2013).

The articles which investigate writing skills in students with dyslexia are: Álvarez-Cañizo & Suárez-Coalla (2023), Tribushinina et al. (2021), and Łockiewicz & Jaskulska (2019).

3. Results

Dyslexia-friendly Teaching Strategies

The fact that students with dyslexia face problems with foreign language learning is associated by Nijakowska (2010) with native language learning (Nijakowska, 2010, p. VII). According to this author, “difficulties in reading, writing, listening and speaking, be they subtle or overt, existing in the native language are responsible for similar difficulties in foreign language learning. The most noticeable deficit concerns the inability to consciously isolate and manipulate the sounds of language and relate them to the appropriate written symbols – letters” (Nijakowska, 2010, p. VIII).

Research on dyslexia and English as a foreign language teaching shows that appropriate teaching methods can improve reading skills and boost student self-confidence (see Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022). Accommodations concerning testing, pairing students, presenting material, and using appropriate teaching materials are necessary. Teachers themselves report the need for guidance on how to work with dyslexic students (Nijakowska, 2013, p. 131). There is, indeed, little training related to dyslexia even when it comes to highly qualified teachers. Aspects related to methodology and teacher training will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. It is significant to mention the multisensory approach in dyslexia-friendly teaching: “as they combine the simultaneous or sequential involvement of the auditory, visual, oral, kinaesthetic–tactile sensory modalities, they enhance memory and facilitate the achievement of automaticity” (Walker, 2000; Troeva-Chalakovska, 2015, p. 65). Additional phonics classes are also recommended. One of the recently published studies that evaluate the impact of multisensory techniques on motivation and spelling skills is Jarsve & Tsagari (2022). A study by Mohamadzadeh et al. (2020) investigates EFL teaching using multisensory phonics instruction to students whose L1 is Persian.

In addition, creating a calm and safe environment is essential. Clear instructions and transparent routines are necessary, both with neurotypical and neurodivergent students. This can contribute to increasing students' motivation and self-esteem.

Writing and Dyslexia

Reading and writing are closely linked skills. This means that many dyslexic students also struggle with writing skills, both in their L1 and L2. A significant body of literature has shown that dyslexic learners have problems when trying to produce a high-quality text (Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 130).

Reading and writing, despite being different processes, are known to be bidirectionally related (Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 131). Differences have been found between text composition from persons with dyslexia and those of typically developing individuals (Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 132). As a result of having to concentrate on spelling retrieval, which may take time and cognitive resources, individuals with dyslexia produce shorter and lower-quality pieces of writing (Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 132).

In a study conducted on Spanish 4th-grade and 6th-grade children with dyslexia, a great number of writing errors were found, as well as deficits in punctuation, morpho-syntactic structure of sentences, shorter sentences, and less lexical diversity (Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 132).

Vocabulary proficiency will also play a role in the quality of writing. But as vocabulary is related to the amount of reading experience (Wise et al., 2007; Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 132), and reading experience is often limited for individuals with dyslexia, this might result in less varied vocabulary and, consequently, it might prove to have a negative impact on written production (Olinghouse & Leaird, 2009; Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 132).

Another article, Tribushinina et al. (2021), investigates the outcomes of explicit spelling instruction in a group of 40 secondary-school children with dyslexia. The results reveal that explicit instruction has a facilitative effect on the development of spelling skills.

4. Discussion

Dyslexia-friendly Teaching Strategies

There is little research on dyslexia addressed to foreign language teachers. Authors on dyslexia in the foreign language classroom admit that foreign language teachers have rather low awareness of developmental dyslexia, while those who are more knowledgeable become discouraged by the lack of materials for teaching foreign languages to dyslexic learners (Nijakowska, 2010, p. VIII). A method proposed in Nijakowska (2010) is the Multisensory Learning Approach (MLS). This means the integration of visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile stimuli and simultaneous presentation of information coming from various senses (Nijakowska, 2010, p. VIII). MLS techniques may “compensate for impairments in auditory or visual sensory channels through the stimulation of other senses” (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 159). Various MLS-intervention studies have been conducted in Europe (see Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, in Norway).

Crombie (2000) states that “dyslexic students are likely to benefit from a multisensory approach to the learning of a foreign language, and it seems likely that they will need to utilise similar strategies to those used for learning their first language” (Crombie, 2000, p. 112). Visual aids, such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and spidergrams support memory and offer structure (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 67). Studies like Nijakowska (2010) in Poland or Lim & Oei (2015) corroborate these findings, even though these are small-scale MLS-intervention studies.

The approach was tested by Jarsve & Tsagari (2022) in order to observe the impact of multisensory techniques on motivation and spelling. Five students with dyslexia (5th and 6th grades) were used as participants. The study proved that motivation and attitude towards EFL learning improved as a result of using the MLS method. The participants reported reluctance to participate in EFL activities prior to the intervention (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 171). The study also shows that comorbid disorders render the intervention more complicated.

Bodnar (2015) and Nijakowska (2010) also point to overlearning, which means that the new skills acquired should be practised in various tasks in order to lead to automaticity (Bodnar, 2015, p. 50). In some cases, students might also need some individual classes (with the teacher or with another teacher) in order to overcome learning difficulties. We also need to consider the need for additional time. Especially during the early stages of English acquisition, it is important to present language at a slower speed, so as to allow students who process more slowly more time to tackle phonological tasks (Crombie, 2000, p. 118).

ICT can provide students with an opportunity for overlearning, as stated by Jarsve & Tsagari (2022). “When the teacher is unable to provide dyslexic pupils with the amount of overlearning that they require, ICT can be beneficial” (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 160). Apps such as BookCreator, with a font designed for dyslexic learners (OpenDyslexic), can serve as a substitute for notebooks. Further research and experiments can provide a clearer account of the use of technology for practising spelling.

We could also consider differentiation when it comes to tasks, especially in a group project. Good readers and writers can contribute by writing the text of a presentation, while dyslexic students can present orally or contribute in another way (layout, graphs, etc.). Differentiation can also be applied when it comes to homework.

Also, language games can increase student engagement. The use of games can be a way to use a multisensory approach and it makes learning languages fun. Furthermore, making learning realistic is essential, by using tasks such as ordering food in a restaurant, making a reservation, finding their way in a town, or buying a theatre ticket.

Modelling can also be helpful, which means having a model of written work. Vocabulary can be presented using picture and word cards. Moreover, watching videos with subtitles has proven to be effective, according to Crombie (2000). In many European countries, students can watch programmes in English, subtitles being also available (with the exception of some regions/countries in Europe). While reading the subtitles might be challenging for dyslexic students, even a small amount of information taken in is still beneficial.

To enhance word decoding skills, one recommendation is to make these students participate in additional phonics classes. “Phonics involves developing phonemic awareness and knowledge of grapheme–phoneme correspondences and spelling patterns” (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 65). However, as Troeva-Chalakov (2015) and Rose (2009) point out, teaching phonics does not automatically imply progress in reading comprehension. The reasons given by Troeva-Chalakov (2015) are the following: the effort put into reading words accurately may hamper comprehension, insufficient syntactic awareness, poor strategies for reading comprehension, low vocabulary level, etc. (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 65). In addition to these activities, learners should be given reading comprehension tasks (and made familiar with the techniques of skimming and scanning a text), and given exposure to a rich language environment (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 66). Overusing simplified books is not advised, as it might disrupt the acquisition of more sophisticated vocabulary (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 66).

Mohamadzadeh et al. (2020) study the use of multisensory phonics instruction, meaning the use of direct phonics instruction while engaging different senses (Mohamadzadeh et al., 2020, p. 5). The particularity of this study is that it was conducted in Iran, with students whose L1 was Persian. The study found that this type of instruction in L2 influenced students’ reading

performance in both English and Persian, which was their L1 (Mohamadzadeh et al., 2020, p. 1). The study addressed parents' concerns about whether the study of English as a foreign language has any negative effects on reading in students' native language, Persian.

Printed handouts are to be used instead of students copying from the board, as this might take too much time and accuracy might be a problem (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 68). Worksheets should contain well-spaced information, and the British Dyslexia Association recommends using a plain, evenly spaced sans-serif font (for instance, Arial or Comic Sans) (Yoliando, 2020, p. 34). Using a sans-serif font could improve reading speed and accuracy for people with dyslexia. The recommended font size is 12–14 points.

Accommodations in the EFL Class

Foreign language learning is extremely challenging for dyslexic students, which means that these students require accommodations. Cimermanánová (2015) states that the teacher should avoid making students' struggles known in class and thus humiliating the child (Cimermanánová, 2015, p. 43). One way in which the teacher can do this is by avoiding asking the child to read aloud in class, participate in Spelling Bee, or come to the board to write homework answers, etc. (Cimermanánová, 2015, p. 43). Also, if possible, the student should use the audio version of the textbook.

Other accommodations concern testing. Researchers suggest allowing students to take oral exams instead of written ones, evaluating essays based on content and ignoring spelling. Tips from dyslexia researchers also include allowing the use of erasable pens (or pencils), allowing sufficient time to process the task, making sure that students understand the task instructions, having a peer buddy, providing models for exams/tests whenever possible, using colour to support learning, and using different learning channels simultaneously, etc.

Fišer & Každonek-Crnjaković (2022), in a study conducted in Croatia, mention as accommodations presenting the material at a slower pace, using pictograms and graphs, avoiding 'busy' pages, worksheets with an enlarged font, colour-coding, etc. (Fišer & Každonek-Crnjaković, 2022, p. 141). As these learners struggle with poor auditory memory, instructions should be written down (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 67).

Students with dyslexia might need help with organisation and time management, so checklists and "to do" lists might be useful. Notes taken during lessons are also advised, as well as keeping track of their tasks by using a personal diary (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 67).

Boosting students' self-confidence can be done by involving them in activities which do not require a significant amount of reading: role-play, fieldwork, quizzes, creating posters, drawing pictures, computer work, etc. It is important that these students experience achievement in their school tasks (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 69).

Writing and Dyslexia

Spelling is frequently overlooked in intervention research (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 157). Studies like Jarsve & Tsagari (2022), conducted in Norway, aim to fill this research gap. The study showed that interventions based on the MLS approach can yield positive results, not only with reading but also with spelling (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 172). However, it is noteworthy that the study by Jarsve & Tsagari (2022) includes a small sample size (5 participants), and studies with at least 30 participants would be more relevant.

According to the Linguistic Coding Deficits Hypothesis (LCDH) and the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, L1 skills support L2 learning, so writers who struggle with good-quality writing in L1 will also struggle in L2 (Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 133). There are also differences in exposure between L1 and L2, as L2 exposure happens most of the time only at school, while students get L1 exposure in different everyday situations (Álvarez-Cañizo et

al., 2023, p. 133). The research by Álvarez-Cañizo et al. (2023) on similarities and differences in text composition between Spanish children speaking English as L2 shows a similar performance in both languages, and the authors believe that it could be the result of a language transfer effect from L1 to L2 (Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 140). In line with previous studies on the relationship between reading and writing, it was found that children with a better reading performance made fewer spelling errors (Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 141). However, the study includes a small sample size, and therefore a larger study would be necessary to confirm the patterns identified in Álvarez-Cañizo et al. (2023).

Tribushinina et al. (2021), in a study on 40 Dutch-speaking secondary school students, found that explicit spelling instruction based on cross-linguistic comparisons between L1 (in this case, Dutch) and English (taught as a foreign language) spelling led to better spelling outcomes. There is scientific evidence that students with developmental dyslexia have deficits in procedural learning (implicit learning), which involves the “unconscious detection of statistical regularities and supports the acquisition of rule-based aspects of language” (Tribushinina et al., 2021, p. 352). Therefore, explicit spelling instruction was found to lead to positive outcomes concerning spelling performance.

Łockiewicz & Jaskulska (2019), focused on comparing linguistic transfer patterns between students with dyslexia and a neurotypical control group. In a free writing task, researchers analysed lexical, morphological, and orthographic patterns for evidence of Polish-language interference. Results revealed that students with dyslexia showed more orthographic and morphological interference. The article promotes explicit teaching of English spelling and morphological structures (Łockiewicz & Jaskulska, 2019, p. 119). The authors support a comparative approach to explaining morphosyntactic rules (explaining the similarities and differences between native language and foreign language).

Moreover, providing scaffolds such as sentence starters and paragraph frames can help to reduce the cognitive load of organising ideas. All in all, teaching writing to dyslexic learners also requires adapted methods.

Concerning the methodology of these studies, Álvarez-Cañizo et al. (2023) compare the differences in writing between L1 and L2 (Spanish children with dyslexia). It could be interesting to have a group of participants without dyslexia, to check if the differences between languages exist in neurotypical participants (Álvarez-Cañizo et al., 2023, p. 143).

Multilingual Learners with Dyslexia

So far, research on bilingualism has focused on neurotypical participants. Also, dyslexia research and work on good practice in the field usually included monolingual participants. Research on dyslexia in multilingual settings is less extensive, and many of these studies focus on ESL (English as a Second Language). As a result, these studies have not been included.

It has been reported that metalinguistic awareness and morphological skills are particularly enhanced in bilingual individuals (Vender et al., 2018, p. 2). According to Bialystok (1986), bilingual children are more competent than monolinguals regarding accepting grammatically well-formed but anomalous sentences (Vender et al., 2018, p. 2). Vender et al. (2018) researched the way in which dyslexia interacts with bilingualism, focusing on morphology. Following a task assessing their morphological skills, Vender et al. (2018) found a positive effect of bilingualism (p. 14). The study shows a better ability to apply morphological rules not only compared to monolingual dyslexic students, but also with respect to monolingual typically developing children (Vender et al., 2018, p. 14).

A major problem for educators is identifying the cause of slowness in literacy acquisition (specific learning difficulty or limited knowledge of the language), which can lead to a delayed diagnosis and delayed support (Nijakowska, 2011, p. 97). There is often a misdiagnosis and

difficulties are linked to reduced knowledge of the language in which the children try to read (Nijakowska, 2011, p. 103). Early diagnosis provides opportunities for early intervention both in monolingual and multilingual settings. Another important challenge when working with multilingual students with dyslexia is finding the right strategies for involving families in playing an active part in the child's journey towards literacy (Cline, 2000, p. 11).

Bilingual learners can experience reading and writing difficulties in both or only one of their languages. Shakory et al. (2023), in a study on English–French bilingual children, found persistent reading difficulties in both languages. As the scope of this paper is to focus on English as a foreign language, the topic of bilingualism in dyslexic learners will not be explored in depth here.

Motivation

Poor psychological well-being is often reported for students with dyslexia. Dyslexic students are often labelled as being lazy, or it is said about them that they do not try hard enough. For these students, maintenance of self-esteem is likely to be problematic. As a result of difficulties encountered, there is a lower level of motivation which can manifest through the avoidance of school-related activities (Donolato et al., 2024, p. 3). Thus the necessity for support in dyslexia is not only related to their reading impairment, but also for preserving a positive self-image (Donolato et al., 2024, p. 13). Jarsve & Tsagari (2022) support the use of MLS in increasing student motivation and attitude towards learning EFL (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 172). Crombie (2000) mentions that attitude and lack of motivation are the result and not the cause of foreign language learning difficulties (Crombie, 2000, p. 117).

Written assessment can lead to language learning anxiety and undermine students' self-confidence (Licha, 2020, p. 12). Therefore, teachers should consider the most appropriate form of assessment when working with dyslexic learners.

Support for English Language Teachers

“Research has shown that an alarming number of EFL teachers seem insecure concerning their abilities to accommodate the language needs of their dyslexic pupils and have expressed a need for training and support” (Kormos & Nijakowska, 2017; Nijakowska et al., 2018; Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 157).

In many European countries, the teacher training curriculum for teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) does not contain a module on dyslexia and other speech and language disorders and their approach (Fišer & Kałdonek-Crnjaković, 2022, p. 139). This means that teachers of EFL are not familiar with the methods and techniques necessary to teach these students. In particular, Nijakowska et al. (2018) and Jarsve & Tsagari (2022) found that teacher training programmes in Greece, Poland, and Cyprus were inadequate in providing training for integrating dyslexic students (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 158).

In Nijakowska (2013), the teacher respondents of an online questionnaire assessed their knowledge regarding teaching dyslexic learners as rather poor (Nijakowska, 2013, p. 129) and expressed their need for further professional development through training courses. Teachers might lack knowledge of basic concepts such as phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle/phonics, and morphology, which can be attributed to insufficient initial training (Nijakowska, 2013, p. 130). The lack of knowledge about dyslexia translates itself into insecurity and lack of confidence on the part of teachers. One country in which there is a strong contrast between the high status of the English language and the limited inclusive approaches for teaching dyslexic students is Greece, as mentioned by Reraki (2020) (Reraki, 2020, p. 212).

One important project on EFL teacher training for teaching dyslexic learners has been the DysTEFL project, a Comenius multilateral project undertaken by a consortium of seven

partners from six countries (Poland, the UK, Austria, Germany, Hungary, the Czech Republic), aiming to enhance the quality of language teaching offered to these students (Nijakowska, 2013, p. 133).

5. Conclusion

The paper aims to provide an overview of dyslexia and English as a foreign language teaching, both in its theoretical and practical aspects, and to offer a comprehensive answer as to how dyslexic EFL learners should be supported. Dyslexia and foreign language learning and teaching has been less researched than dyslexia and first language learning (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 157). It is addressed to foreign language teachers, unlike other publications prepared for psychologists, teacher-therapists, native language teachers, and kindergarten teachers.

Recent research is focused on dyslexia as a “learning difference” instead of seeing dyslexia as a disability. It is also important for parents and teachers to understand that a student might not display all the characteristics of dyslexia (Licha, 2020, p. 7).

When discussing dyslexia, it is important to take into account differences in terminology between different countries. Within the UK, the following definition of dyslexia was proposed: “Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty” (Peer & Reid, 2014, p. 13). In Russia, dyslexia concerns only a reading disorder, while dysgraphia is a writing disorder. However, in Italy, dysgraphia refers to motor difficulties concerning writing, while disorthographia refers to spelling difficulties (Peer & Reid, 2014, p. 14).

Regarding the most appropriate EFL teaching methods, the multisensory method has proven to be effective and has recently been the object of research for many master’s theses and articles (see Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022). Intervention studies support the role of a highly structured phonics instruction. Besides phonological instruction, the development of reading comprehension skills and presenting a rich language curriculum are also important (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 70). Another frequently mentioned method is overlearning, which means the practice of new skills in different tasks and ways. ICT use has proven to be useful in providing an opportunity for extra practice and repetition. Different methods and accommodations aim to increase motivation and change attitude towards EFL learning. In addition to different approaches in teaching, research also recognises the need for time, task, and materials differentiation (Troeva-Chalakov, 2015, p. 63).

It is important to note that comorbid disorders may impact the effectiveness of interventions (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 157). The most frequently encountered comorbidity is the one with ADHD.

Studies such as Álvarez-Cañizo et al. (2023) show that dyslexia does not only impact reading, but also spelling accuracy and lexical diversity, which are linked to the quality of writing. Concerning writing, it is advised to teach spelling in an explicit manner. Research so far has mainly addressed the effect of various educational methods on learners with dyslexia, spelling being generally overlooked in intervention research (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 157).

Besides finding remediation solutions for dyslexia, it is pivotal to work on students’ self-esteem, as this can improve not only psychological well-being but also academic achievement. The students’ preferred learning styles can also be considered.

Another aspect to take into account is access to dyslexia specialists for children coming from less-wealthy socioeconomic categories. We must highlight that a great percentage of students with dyslexia remain undiagnosed, and many receive a diagnosis as a result of their struggles with school. As dyslexia may affect academic success, early intervention is important.

In light of the above, the need for adequate teacher training and support becomes evident. Jarsve & Tsagari (2022) found that EFL teacher training programmes that train teachers to include students with dyslexia need improvement (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 158). The large

participation in a four-week online course on this topic illustrates the high demand for teacher training, as it was pointed out by Kormos & Nijakowska (2017) (Jarsve & Tsagari, 2022, p. 158). Teacher training courses can not only help teachers to understand and recognise dyslexia (and ADHD) and become familiar with teaching strategies, but also help them to adapt and create dyslexia-friendly materials. This article offers practical solutions to teachers working with dyslexic young learners and paves the way for further research. It also aims to highlight the importance of research on neurodiversity, not just related to dyslexia, but also other specific learning differences, such as dyscalculia, dyspraxia, autism, etc.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

It is important to consider limitations when conducting research on dyslexia and foreign language teaching. An important limitation is the impossibility of including in this paper studies written in other languages than English. As multilingualism is increasingly more common, more future research can be conducted on bilingualism and dyslexia. Studies such as Álvarez-Cañizo et al. (2023) could be replicated with a larger number of participants. These studies should confirm previously identified trends. The current paper paves the way for further research on dyslexia, such as multilingualism and dyslexia, and the use of technology and dyslexia.

Another line of research is teaching a first language vs. teaching a second language to students with dyslexia. Further research is necessary to determine if methods used for teaching a first language to dyslexic learners would also be successful when teaching foreign languages (Crombie, 2000, p. 121).

Mobile apps are now used as a resource for retrieving data about children with dyslexia and ADHD. One such project is Neurogame, a mobile app used to assess motor skills and concentration in these children, as shown by the study of Loleska & Pop-Jordanova (2023). Further similar research is possible, even with language-learning apps.

While the paper offers real-world solutions for teachers working with dyslexic learners, there are certainly other dyslexia-related aspects that could benefit from further investigation. Among these are the use of ICT in teaching students with dyslexia, or the use of AR (Augmented Reality) in spelling interventions. There is, at this point, research on foreign language teachers' preparedness to cater for the educational needs of learners with dyslexia (see Nijakowska, 2019) and the use of multisensory methods, but less research on aspects like spelling interventions. There is a lot of recent research on dyslexia, with most articles analysed in this systematic review being published in the last 15 years.

It is noteworthy that most research on dyslexia includes participants whose L1 is Dutch, Norwegian, or Spanish, and that there is less dyslexia research in some European countries (especially countries from Eastern Europe). We hope more studies will be undertaken in different educational systems in order to help children with specific learning difficulties.

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