

**Students with dyslexia at university**

**Study patterns, challenges and potential solutions**

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**Introduction**

Approx. 1 in 15 people worldwide are dyslexic

BUT less than 1 in 200 university students report a reading difficulty

AND many drop out before they complete their degrees

**Aims**

To explore learning experiences of university students with dyslexia:

Describe their study patterns

Determine the challenges they face

Uncover potential solutions

**Method**

- n = 12 students with dyslexia, n = 21 peers
- Dyslexia defined as: prior diagnosis and/or ≥ 1 SD below the mean on the Castles and Coltheart 2 Adult (CC2A) reading test
- Qualitative and quantitative data collection
- Face-to-face semi-structured interviews on university learning experiences
- Transcripts coded and thematically analysed.

**Results**

### Study patterns

- **Frequent engagement**
  - Routinely viewing lectures up to 3 times

- **Selective reading**
  - Strategy: Mostly printed

- **Value face-to-face interaction**
  - On campus lectures, tutorials and discussions

- **Find videos**
  - Less benefit from recorded lectures compared to non-dyslexic peers

### Challenges

- **Study skills**
  - Difficulty with note-taking, reading and organisation

- **Course materials**
  - Readings: too many, online, cost and time to print. Videos: not enough, slides: too much text

- **Teaching**
  - Dull speaking style. Poor explanations. Cluttered slides

- **Physical spaces**
  - Large, noisy, brightly lit

- **Technical features**
  - Poor sound quality. Unreliable internet

- **Staff responses**
  - Variable feedback and assistance. Occasional teasing

- **Disability services**
  - Poor suitability. Long times to arrange

### Potential solutions

- **Staff training**
  - Speaking skills. Tutorial facilitation. Slide design

- **Course materials**
  - Readings: fewer, shorter, cheaper printed copies. Videos: more. Slides: more images, less text

- **Physical spaces**
  - Improve acoustics and lighting. Create group study spaces for talking, whiteboards, laptops, charging AND eating

- **Disability services**
  - Studies groups for students with dyslexia. Dyslexia specific services. Timely waiting times

- **Recorded lectures**
  - Better audio quality. Add video of lecturer

**Summary**

The following key patterns emerged regarding students with dyslexia:

- Work much harder
- Experience multiple challenges
- Realistic solutions available

**Conclusions**

Universities can make reasonable changes to improve experiences and success:

- University systems
  - Assessments, study spaces, Course materials, Recorded lecture format, Technical investment

- Support services
  - Staff and student training. Dyslexia specific services including study groups, Timely delivery

**References & images**


Readings were often unnecessarily long, better quality audio recording not online readings. Examination design is rigid and artificial. Provide more group study spaces where services seemed poorly suited. One student reported staff teasing. Greater need for new support options. Learning technologies can be difficult to use. Poor systems for staff training, quality assurance. High assessment weighting stifle creativity. Improve staff assistance. Only 1 out of the 12 students with dyslexia. Add a video of the lecturer talking. Teach study skills as a compulsory core. Include explicit instruction on public. Improve acoustics and lighting. Long assistance. Results in greater depth

Study patterns

1. Intensive engagement
Students with dyslexia used numerous strategies performing their learning tasks.

“I re-write all my lecture notes using pictures and diagrams”

2. Frequent engagement
For example, some students with dyslexia viewed each lecture up to three times as part of their regular note-taking routines.

3. Selective reading
Tended to read very strategically, and preferred printed readings such as textbooks and course readers.

“I only read when absolutely necessary.”

“I like printed readers because they don’t hurt my eyes and they’re organised into weeks so I know what I’ve got to read and when”

4. Find their own resources
Nearly half (5 of 12) of the students with dyslexia found online videos to supplement or replace course readings. Only 1 of 21 non-dyslexic peers found resources online.

“Mostly I just try to find something on the topic on YouTube. ... It makes more sense to me, hearing someone being interviewed, as opposed to reading about it.”

5. Value face-to-face interaction
Most expressed strong preference for face-to-face learning interactions including on-campus lectures and tutorials.

“In a subject where there was good face-to-face interaction I got a high distinction, but my average marks in the others were passes and low credits.”

6. Less benefit from recorded lectures
Strong trend towards lower ratings of enjoyment and learning benefit by dyslexic students compared to non-dyslexic peers.

Challenges

1. Study skills
Students with dyslexia had particular difficulty with note-taking, reading, planning and organisation and spent longer on these tasks.

2. Teaching
Some lecturers or tutors have a dull or stilted speaking style, provide poor explanations and/or use cluttered, text-heavy slides.

3. Course materials
- Readings were often unnecessarily long, complex, and only minimally relevant
- Online readings were difficult to read and expensive to print
- Not enough videos, diagrams, graphs

4. Physical spaces
Students with dyslexia tended to struggle in large, noisy spaces with bright lighting or glare.

5. Technical features
- Poor sound quality in recorded lectures
- Poor internet quality and speed on campus
- Learning technologies can be difficult to use

6. Staff responses
- Assistance and feedback varied greatly
- One student reported staff teasing

7. Disability services
- Only 1 out of the 12 students with dyslexia received note-taking and tutoring help and only 3 had special exam conditions
- Services seemed poorly suited to their needs
- Long delays were also reported

8. University systems and processes
- Examination design is rigid and artificial
- High assessment weightings stifle creativity and increase stress
- Systems for staff training, quality assurance and complaint handling were inadequate

Potential solutions

1. Study skills
- Teach study skills as a compulsory core subject at the start of every degree
- Include explicit instruction on public speaking and use of learning technologies
- Offer evening and weekend options

2. Staff training
- Provide specific training in speaking skills, tutorial group facilitation and slide design

3. Course materials
- Readings should be fewer, shorter, clearly written, relevant and succinct
- Affordable print-on-demand course readers
- Lecture slides with more pictures, diagrams and graphs, made available before lectures

4. Physical spaces
- Improve acoustics and lighting
- Provide more group study spaces where students can talk, draw on whiteboards, charge laptops AND eat all in one place

5. Technical features
- Invest in internet quality and technical support

6. Recorded lectures
- Better quality audio recording
- Add a video of the lecturer talking

7. Disability services
- The disability service has already started study groups for students with dyslexia
- Need new support options – dyslexia is not the same as blindness, low vision or illiteracy
- Shorter waiting times for services

8. University systems and processes
- Greater range of assessment options
- More frequent, smaller assessment tasks
- Improve staff training, quality assurance and complaint handling systems

Other resources

Available at www.FreeDyslexiaResources.WordPress.com