

DYSLEXIA

INTRODUCTION

Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty that affects reading and writing due to challenges in processing information. It falls under Additional Learning Needs [ALN], a term used to describe children who struggle to learn compared to their peers and require extra support (Snap Cymru, no date). *The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018* recognises ALN as any learning difficulty or disability that requires additional learning support, regardless of its cause.

According to Wales Dyslexia (no date) one in five students has a language-based learning disability with ten percent of the population diagnosed with dyslexia, though many cases remain undiagnosed. Being dyslexic comes with both challenges and strengths that shape how individuals process and interact with the world (Dyslexia UK, 20205).

Challenges include difficulties reading, writing and processing information which can affect academic performance and self-confidence. However, dyslexia also brings strengths such as problem-solving skills, creativity and innovative thinking. Famous people such as Richard Branson, Steve Jobs and Albert Einstein have used their dyslexic thinking to achieve great success.

Without proper support, dyslexic individuals may face academic failure, employment difficulties and social exclusion, impacting self-esteem and confidence (British Dyslexia Association, no date). Early intervention, inclusive teaching methods and greater awareness are essential to ensuring that dyslexic learners receive the support they need to succeed (Welsh Government, 2015).

IDENTIFYING DYSLEXIA

Signs (NHS, 2022)

- Read and write slowly
- Confuse order of letters in words
- Confused by letters looking similar
- Poor or inconsistent spelling
- Understand instructions verbally, difficulty understanding when written
- Find it hard to carry out a sequence of directions
- Struggle with planning and organisation



Figure 1. What dyslexic users see

Dyslexia behaviours (British Dyslexia Association, no date)

- Work avoidance tactics such as sharpening pencils
- Seems dreamy, not listening
- Easily distracted
- Class clown or disruptive or withdrawn
- Excessively tired due to amount of concentration

Dyslexia can present in young children through speech delays, difficulty pronouncing long words and struggles with sentence formation. While these signs do not necessarily indicate a learning difficulty, ongoing observations are essential if progress remains slow (Wales Dyslexia, no date). By primary school age, dyslexia symptoms may be more evident, including challenges in learning letter names and sounds, poor spelling and confusion between similar letters. Children may read slowly, make frequent errors and struggle with handwriting and sequencing tasks. According to Helen Arkell Dyslexia Charity (2021) diagnosis can be complex since symptoms vary for everyone and may overlap with other conditions like ADHD or vision problems. If no other health issues exist, learning difficulties may indicate a need for different teaching approaches.

Formal dyslexia assessments measure cognitive processing, reading, spelling and comprehension, typically conducted after age seven. NASAN (2020) state early identification is important requiring communication between teachers and families. Frequent observations and strong parental engagement help ensure children receive tailored support to boost their learning potential.

THE IMPACTS AND BARRIERS

Dyslexia presents barriers to both mental health and education, particularly affecting reading development and self-esteem. According to the British Dyslexia Association (no date), dyslexic children struggle with decoding words, making academic progress difficult. Peng *et al.* (2022) highlight that cognitive deficits, such as challenges in processing speed, memory and attention, further disrupt learning. Despite having normal or above average intelligence, dyslexic learners often face academic underachievement (Evans *et al.*, 2013; Watson, 2023). Gibby-Leversuch, Hartwell and Wright (2019) note that dyslexia is sometimes stigmatised, leading individuals to be misunderstood or labelled as unintelligent, impacting confidence and self-worth.

A key challenge for dyslexic individuals is low self-esteem, which can lead to withdrawal from class discussions and anxiety about asking for help (International Dyslexia Association, no date). Nachshon and Horowitz-Klaus (2018) found that reading difficulties often lead to anxiety and depression, further affecting classroom participation. Additionally, Nalavany *et al.* (2015) argue that dyslexic individuals possess strengths, such as creativity and problem solving that are often overlooked due to societal misconceptions.

The medical model of disability treats dyslexia as an impairment, requiring diagnosis and intervention (Zaks, 2022). However, this model may reinforce stigma (Gibby Leversuch *et al.*, 2019). The social model in contrast, argues that barriers in education, employment and society cause difficulties (Scope, no date).

In Wales, the *ALNET (Wales) Act 2018* and *ALN Code (2021)* integrate both models to provide individualised support and inclusive education policies adapting disability frameworks to promote equality and independence (Welsh Government, 2021).

AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY TO SUPPORT A CHILD WITH DYSLEXIA

MULTISENSORY LEARNING

Multisensory learning is an effective strategy for supporting learners with dyslexia, as it engages multiple senses - visual, auditory, tactile and kinaesthetic to strengthen learning and retention (Dyslexia Direct Services, no date). According to Almahrag (2011) dyslexic readers often struggle with traditional reading and writing methods that rely solely on visual processing, but incorporating hands on activities, movement and auditory cues helps reinforce information in different ways. For example, students can trace letters in sand while saying the sounds aloud or use different coloured text to differentiate phonemes (Romero, 2020). This approach improves phonological awareness, spelling and reading fluency by creating stronger neural connections.

Additionally, multisensory learning helps students develop confidence in their abilities, as they can interact with materials in ways which suit their learning preferences. According to Montessori (1912) children learn best when they use all of their senses. Therefore, teaching methods and materials should reflect this ensuring children's needs are met (Ogbemudia, Alasa and Ikenyiri, 2024).

Multisensory learning offers significant benefits for dyslexic students, enhancing academic performance, self-esteem and motivation (Gulati, Kakkar and Chauhan, 2024). Studies show a 25% improvement in reading, writing and maths due to multisensory instruction, which strengthens neural connections through visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and tactile engagement (Kamala, 2014). Specific multimodal approaches such as visual-auditory integration, tactile learning and interactive digital tools have been effective in reinforcing comprehension and fluency. Additionally, structured phonics, movement-based activities and individualised interventions foster inclusive learning environments (Ngong, 2019).

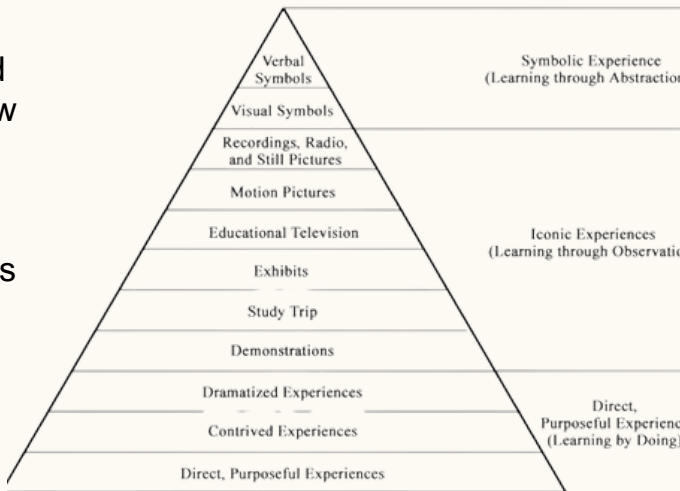


Figure 2: Cone of Experience (Dale, 1969)

However, there are also challenges to multisensory learning. A key difficulty is the variation in individual responses, with some students struggling to integrate multiple sensory inputs effectively (Fujita, 2024). Resource limitations, including insufficient funding, specialist training gaps and time intensive nature, hinder widespread implementation (Almahrag, 2021). Furthermore, standardised assessments often fail to accommodate multisensory techniques, making progress difficult to measure (Boardman, 2019). Dyslexic learners also experience cross-sensory processing challenges, affecting automatic letter-sound associations (Hahn, Foxe and Molholm, 2014). Dale's Cone of Experience (1969) and Bruner's Three-Tiered Model (1966) highlight the importance of progressive learning, advocating for a shift from concrete to abstract representation. (Gulati, 2024).

Multi-sensory Activities

- Sand or shaving cream writing
- Coloured text or highlighting
- Letter tiles and magnetic letters
- Clap or tap out syllables
- Storytelling with movement
- Text to speech and audiobooks

CONCLUSION

Addressing the barriers faced by dyslexic individuals requires a comprehensive approach that supports both academic development and emotional well-being. Cognitive challenges, such as reading difficulties, slow processing and memory deficits must be tackled through structured interventions, including multisensory learning, phonics-based instruction and assistive technology. However, low self-esteem and stigma also present significant obstacles, impacting confidence, classroom participation and overall mental health.

To ensure equity and success, a balanced strategy is essential, one that integrates academic accommodations, emotional resilience building and greater awareness of dyslexia's diverse impacts.