
The lived experience of UK undergraduate students with dyslexia to reduce disabling barriers to education

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Purpose of this session



Mechanisms behind dyslexia and the co-occurrence with other neurodevelopmental disorders

What is Dyslexia?

Mechanisms behind dyslexia and the co-occurrence with other neurodevelopmental disorders

The Social Model of Disability

Supporting a tailored approach to individualised academic support for individuals with dyslexia to remove disabling barriers to education

Dyslexia and Education

The impact of the schooling system, early identification, teaching and learning strategies and additional learning support for learners with dyslexia

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Design



Qualitative

Participants



7 UK undergraduate students diagnosed with dyslexia

Recruitment



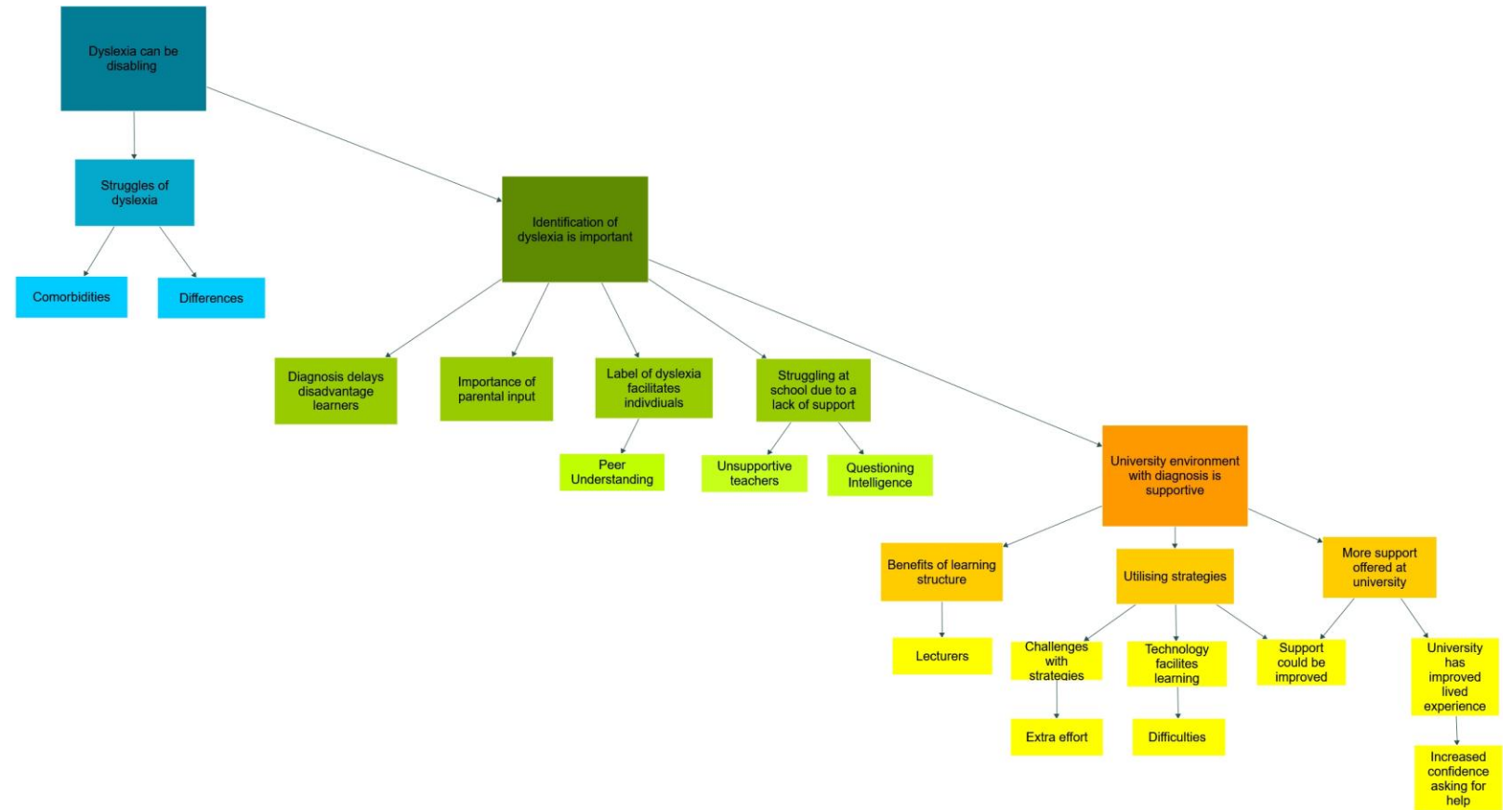
Accessibility Team

Methods and Materials

Online interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically.

Figure 1

Thematic Coding Map of the Lived Experience of Undergraduate Students with Dyslexia

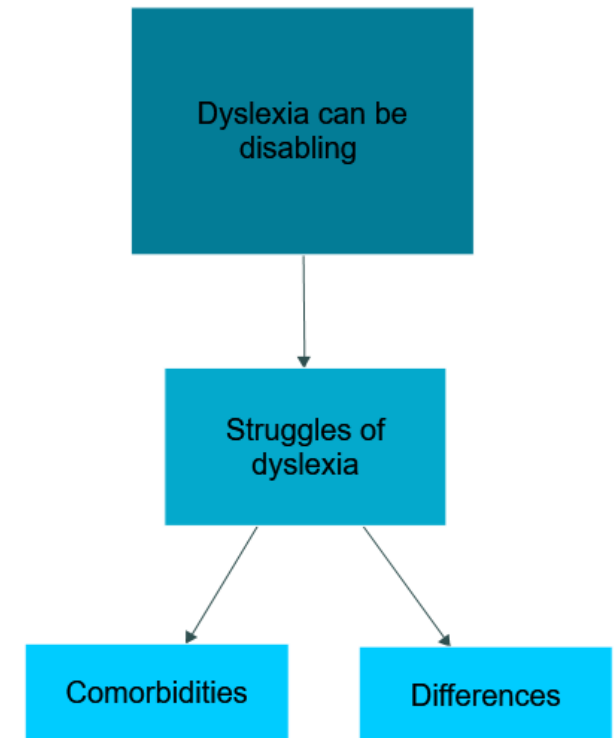


Findings

Note. Map shows how the identification of dyslexia and support impact the lived experience of undergraduate students with dyslexia to become less socially disabling.

Theme 1: Dyslexia can be disabling

Overview



Sub-theme: Struggles of dyslexia

- Hopelessness
- Self-blame
- Frustrations
- Sadness
- Stress
- Clumsiness
- Forgetfulness
- Powerlessness
- Fatigue
- Painfulness

Code: Comorbidities

- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- ADHD
- Autism
- Irlen Syndrome

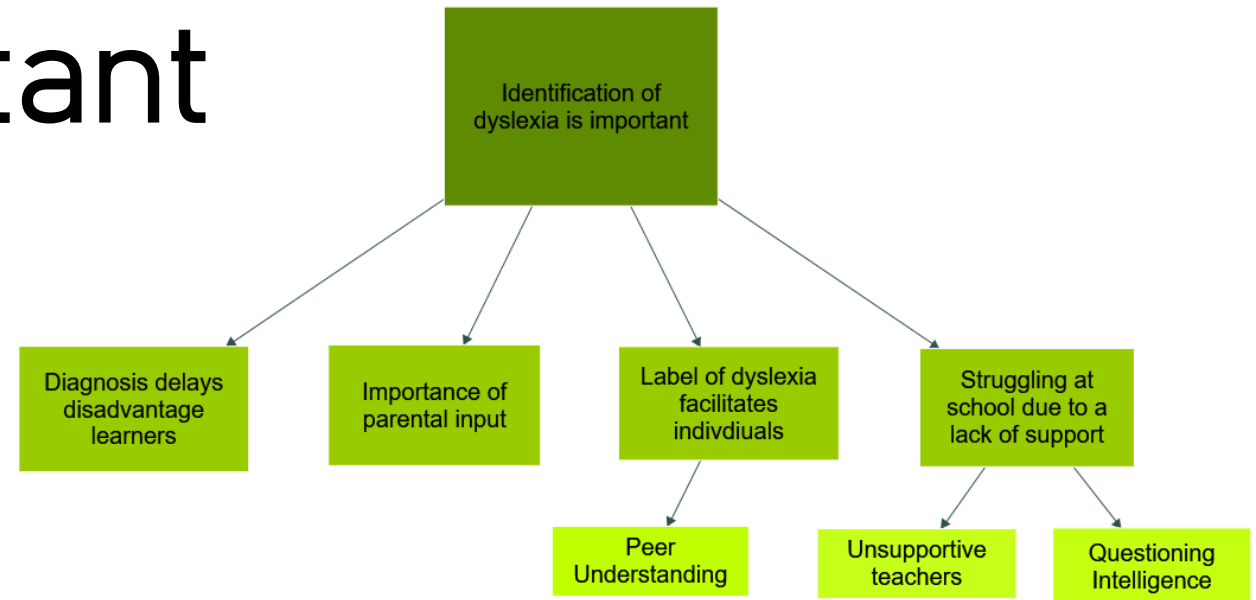


Code: Differences

- Severity
- Symptoms/effects

Theme 2: Identification of dyslexia is important

Overview



Sub-theme: Diagnosis delays disadvantage learners

- Struggling with academic work
- Not being able to access support
- Confusion
- Self-directed anger

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Sub-theme: Label of dyslexia facilitates individuals

- Increased academic performance
- Increased confidence
- Enhanced self-perception
- Understanding from others
- Getting necessary accommodations in place



Code: Peer Understanding

- Sense of community
- Commonality
- Support
- Help

Sub-theme: Struggling at school due to a lack of support

- Lack of awareness and understanding of educational needs
- Lack of individualised support
- Negative impact on grades

Code: Unsupportive Teachers

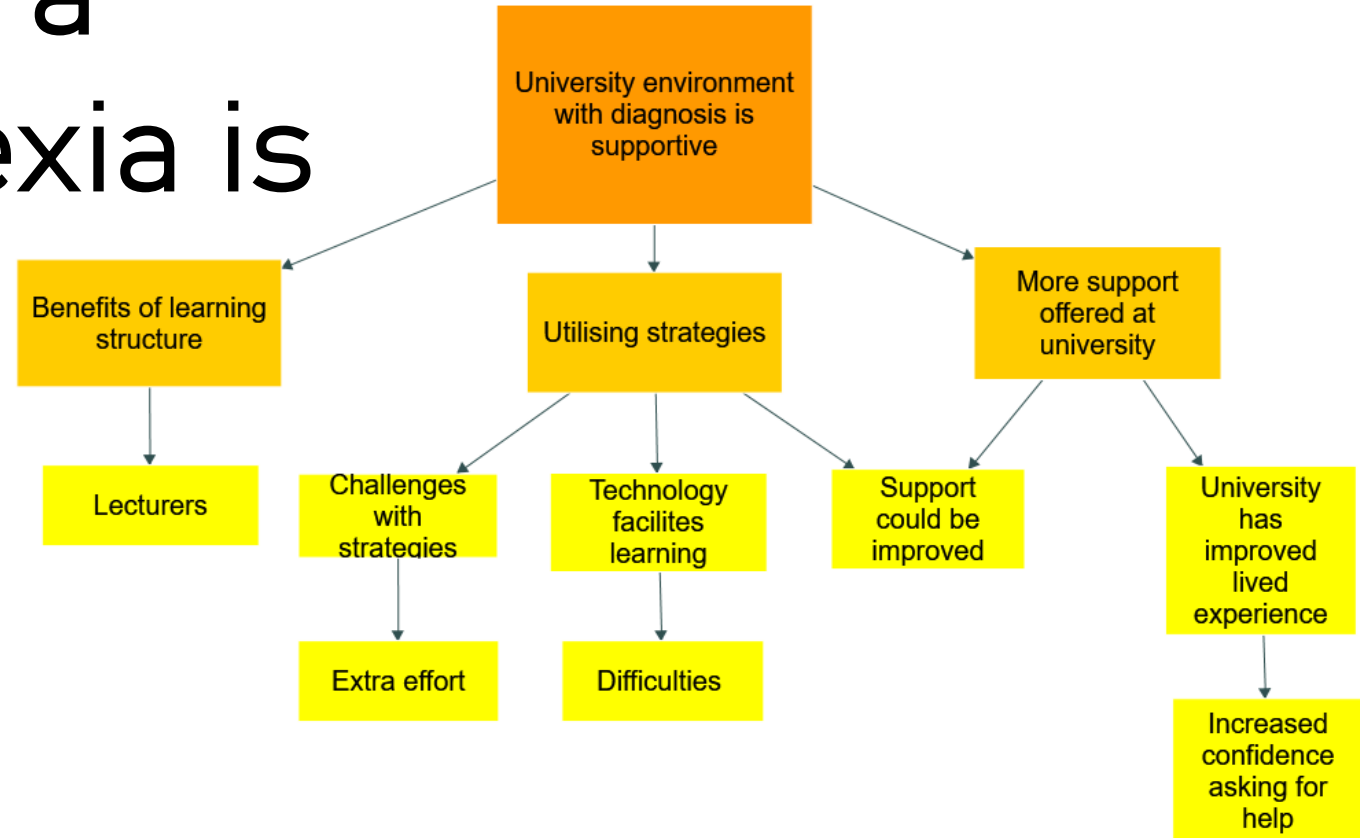
- Misunderstanding of additional needs
- Unclear explanations
- Lack of clarification
- Divided attention

Code: Questioning Intelligence

- Feeling stupid
- Unknown dyslexia

Theme 3: The university environment with a diagnosis of dyslexia is supportive

Overview



Sub-theme: Benefits of learning structure

- Extract 12: “Yeah, it's much better now. I think I've got a lot more consistency at university in terms of work. You've got the same amount of time between essays roughly, and especially with law, it's straightforward. It's so much easier. I know the plan, and my one method works for all three assignments. Whereas, ack at school, they could have asked me to do anything—it could have been an essay or a poster. I would never know what to expect, which was very stressful...” [Thea, L238–249].

Sub-theme: Benefits of learning structure

- Greater understanding of the learning process
- Freedom in the choice of study methods
- Consistent structure minimises task switching
- Minimises time spent processing new tasks
- Focussing on what they need to learn

Code: Lecturers

Extract 13: "...lecturers and I guess advocates who are, really advocating for dyslexic and neurodivergent learners to be included in education." [Arla, L771-773].



Code: Lecturers

Create a relaxing learning environment through understanding of dyslexia:

- Patience and time to understand materials
- One-to-one support to those who need it
- Providing alternative formats of learning materials

Sub-theme: Utilising strategies

Extract 14: "I'm sort of forced to experiment ((with strategies)) compared to a lot of people..." [Lucy, L574-565].



Sub-theme: Utilising strategies

- Time management
- Trial and error
- Exam arrangements – extra time, own room, computer
- Chunking
- Different systems for different tasks

Code: Challenges with strategies

Extract 15: “I think it's helpful in some ways of umm kind of like the new hope of like, “Okay, this will, this should be able to help.” and then seeing if it does or doesn't. But the fact I'm still trialling things kind of implies it doesn't really, nothing's been found yet. So that's a bit disheartening!” [Arla, L245–249].

Code: Extra Effort

Extract 16: "It's sort of like how I feel as though people who have don't have it. They just assume reading and writing's innate, whereas for me it's a skill that I really had to learn and put a lot of conscious thought into. I also think that like stuff like they assume that I there's an assumption they don't understand that how much tools and support I need." [Lucy, L1076–1083].

Code: Technology facilitates learning

Extract 17: "I use Grammarly, Glean, Um ChatDoc, UPDF, Word as well." [Lara, L253].



Code: Technology facilitates learning

SOFTWARE

- Glean – Audio note taking
- Read&Write – Reading text out loud, understanding unfamiliar words, researching assignments and proofing written work
- Grammarly – AI-assisted spelling and grammar check software
- ChatDOC – AI chat with PDF documents
- Word – Word processing software
- Mind View – AI-assisted mind mapping software
- FindMyFlow – Study and accessibility tools
- UPDF – AI-integrated PDF generator
- Blackboard – PowerPoint
- Panopto – Lecture recordings

HARDWARE

- Computer
- Printer
- Keyboard

Code: Difficulties with technology

Extract 18: ...spell check is not designed for people with dyslexia it's designed, for people who can r—who don't have that. So yeah... Yes, they can. They can see that it's wrong. And also spell check is designed for mistakes that they make, not mistakes I make, which is stuff like words being the wrong way round or missing letters or spaces in the middle of stuff that shouldn't be. This is when typing. [Lucy, L265–275].

Code: Support could be improved

Extract 23: "Umm I have I-I do have some problems with some of the PowerPoints? But it's like minor cases like I sometimes. With the Irlen side, I struggle reading black and white and white, white and black. And then sometimes the lectures will just put like a black side with white text on it. So I'm sort of, like, there squinting at the screen going. "What's that saying?" So it does take a bit of a hassle of downloading it, converting all the pages to a neutral colour, then rereading it through." [Rob, L453-460].

Extract 24: "A lot of universities would just say, yeah, come with us with a diagnosis, then we can help you. They didn't really give a lot of resources for (..) getting the diagnosis or any kind of signposting for it?" [Lara, L225-228].

Sub-theme: More support offered at university

Extract 19: "It's so much better than ((laughs)) what I've received before. It's been absolutely amazing. Going. From like place to place, not knowing what I get and then like getting all of these resources." [Lara, L306-308].

Extract 20: "Like b-b-before even talking to my tutor, I went down to support and go, "Hi, I'm Rob, this is all my problems please help!" And they've just been wonderful. Like they've taken the time to help to sit down and go, OK, you need this tutor and all that." [Rob, L266-273].

Sub-theme: More support offered at university

- One-to-one support tutor
- DSA
- Software & training
- Diagnosis support
- Frequent communication

Code: University has improved lived experience


Extract 21: I think knowing myself better and knowing myself in the context of people supporting me to find that out, um is nothing but invaluable really. ...It's less so about the knowledge from my degree and more about understanding myself—how to work with myself to get the best out of me, if that makes sense. [Arla, L788–792].

Code: Increased confidence asking for help

Extract 22: "...I think university has made me more confident in being able to express that I am not confident in something." [May, L805-807].

Summative Findings

Practical application, Implications



How can we use this?

The Take-Away



Any questions?

