**Research article**

# Language teaching methods to dyslexics acquiring English as a second language

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## Abstract

Dyslexia is a language learning disorder that results in deficits in reading, spelling…. (Balise, Black, Nussbaum, Oakland Stanford 1998). The primary question in the scientific community is "What causes dyslexia?" However, medical science has discovered that dyslexia is not a disease with a cure. Keeping those conditions, it highly demands that only teachers can assist students with dyslexia at its early stage. The research focuses on the specific English language teaching techniques to understand the process and linguistic abnormalities of Indian dyslexic students. The study was undertaken in a reputed school in Ahmedabad district, India composed of 20 male voluntary dyslexic students, ages ranging from 12-15. It mainly investigated the teaching provision and performance differentiation of Indian dyslexics. In order to understand teaching as well as learning behaviour within the organizational systems, the researcher has chosen the Phonological Deficit Hypothesis (PDH) and Activity theory as a theoretical framework for the data collection and analysis. The main purpose of this research is to investigate how Indian students with dyslexia can get better provisions from teachers and also informing ESL teachers with improved teaching strategies.

## Keywords

## For citation

## INTRODUCTION

In India not much has been developed or catered for dyslexics' special learning needs. However, due to the Bollywood movie, 'Taare Zameen Par', there have been an increased acceptability and interest of knowing this disorder. "There are few schools in the capital now like Educare, Orchid and Action Dyslexia, but the states have no such facilities" Delhi-based Meenakshi Dave explains that schools have less facilities and do not spend great amount of time in knowing and giving genuine solution for students with dyslexia. Dyslexia is neither an illness nor a disease. It is about learning disabilities. Researchers have been carried out that there is no consensus on the definition of dyslexia and its underlying cause (Smythe and Everatt 2002).

Learning disabilities, also named as specific learning difficulties, is a generic term that "refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities" (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities 1987, 108). Ten years ago, in schools teachers hardly dealt with students' learning disabilities or any training were given to overcome student's disability. The researchers say that only 10 percent of children in India suffer from learning disabilities, but the number is growing because of parents' expectations and faster lifestyles. This research focuses mainly on teacher's strategies and intervention on understanding dyslexics. Knowing teachers' perceptions on dyslexia is important. Firstly, how teachers perceive dyslexia directly affects dyslexic students' self-image (Humphrey 2003). Wadlington and Wadlington (2005) states it is necessary that there should not be any discrepancies exist between teachers' view on dyslexics' disabilities, as it would cause them to have social and emotional problems. Secondly, teacher's perception of dyslexia can influence teacher practice at school (Guskey 2002; Richardson 1996)

Thirdly, to examine the positive or negative result of activity tasks and phonological awareness tests conducted by ESL teachers among students with dyslexia. For example, tests such as Vocabulary, Repeated Words, Describe the scene have been used in a way to understand the sound production, occurrence and spelling barriers of dyslexics. In conclusion, the researcher's contribution is to provide help to ESL teachers through Phonological coding and help them to understand the cognitive, mental and visual processes of dyslexics.

Children with dyslexia encounter difficulty in reading through conventional methods. Owing to that, this paper has focused severe dyslexic problems of constructing, maintaining and retrieving phonological representation with key emphasis on their lack of sensitivity to the sounds of words. Additionally, the researcher uses the broad framework of Activity theory which is a collective task of oddity task, blending task, syllable splitting task, phoneme manipulation task and phoneme segmentation task from teachers, dyslexic students and their parents.

However, through the process, the researcher has observed a tremendous change in the student's achievement with better grades, self-esteem and confidence.

*Rationale of the study*

The purpose of this study is to identify the teaching techniques and learning improvement of dyslexics of a reputed dyslexic school with parameters such as:

- to recognize the differences based upon how much time the teachers have taught, with respect to the demographic information such as gender and age;
- to understand teachers' feedback whether they are deliberately teaching students with dyslexia, if they feel knowledgeable to teach students with dyslexia or control group;
- to develop strategies in a way to increase an awareness of dyslexia and utilize new parameters in assisting teachers in learning dyslexics;
- to investigate how students with dyslexia differ from other control group in terms of their performance on phonological tasks and reading comprehension;
- to find the gaps in phonological skills through experimental studies and get to the root of it with first course of action.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "dyslexia" comes from Greek words – dys (difficulty with) and lexicos or lexis (words). In recent years, the field of knowledge about dyslexia has undergone significant changes as a result of considerable scientific and educational research (Reid 2001). Number of hypotheses and symptoms have been made and studied to understand this impairment. According to Reid (2001) there are a number of hypotheses which can be associated with dyslexia, as Phonological Deficit hypotheses, Temporal Processing hypothesis, Working Memory hypothesis and Intelligence and Cognitive Profiles hypothesis. This research has been based on Phonological Deficit Hypotheses and other models proposed by predecessors in the field of special learning disability students.

The preliminary aim of this literature review is to systematically put all studies that have examined teacher knowledge of "basic language concepts" which includes the elements of English language such as phonology giving a better understanding on how words should be spoken and broken. Minimal work has been carried out in India on teaching and learning intervention of students with dyslexia.

i) Snowling, an influential proponent of Phonological Deficit Hypothesis (2000), asserts that phonological skills in dyslexics are selectively impaired while other aspects of their language are intact. During the late twentieth century, PDH has been the dominant descriptive framework for Dyslexia. Taking this hypothesis, the researcher has postulated this theory in the research by consciously recognizing the phonemic and poor phonological skills. Keeping PDH as a key framework, the researcher has drawn sessions for dyslexics in a way to scan their phonological abilities and intervene if necessary.

ii) Siegal and Vanderwelden (1997) contributed on the use of phonological techniques in helping children how to read. This has been designed in the research to facilitate the usage of letter- phoneme relationships of dyslexics in early reading and spelling.

iii) When it comes to Activity theory, Turner and Pughe's classroom mechanisms are the key principle to understand and modify the teaching strategies of dyslexics. Turner claims, that good dyslexic teaching practice is a good teaching practice (Turner 2001). In other words, Turner claimed that dyslexics highly learn only in mainstream classroom. Dyslexics should have access and can only improve their reading abilities in classroom. Understanding this theory, the researcher has applied Turner and Pughe's technique throughout the sessions.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Participants

The primary method is to understand the process and linguistic abnormalities of Indian dyslexic students. This study composed of 20 male voluntary dyslexic students ages from 12-15 of a reputed dyslexic school in Ahmedabad, India. The study conducted within three months of 25 non-consecutive sessions.

### 3.2. Procedures

The researcher was much keen on understanding the tasks performed in the school and later using researcher's method. It mainly investigated the teaching provision and performance differentiation of Indian dyslexics. In order to understand teaching as well as learning behaviour within the organizational systems, the researcher has chosen Phonological Deficit Hypothesis (PDH) and Turner and Pughe's Activity theory as a theoretical framework for the data collection and analysis. In order to make the research easier, the researcher has divided the task in two different parts as Pre Task and Core Task

### 4. Pre-Task: *Experiences with the school and children with dyslexia*

In this particular school, students are taught in group, only in special case individual learning is given. The teaching sessions are carried out with a basic plan and curriculum. Each chapter sometimes took five sessions but every session unveiled new learning and teaching parameter of students' and teachers' respectively. The segregation of the activities has been divided as per the researcher's study and observation.

These are the basic activities carried in an English Language Classroom for dyslexics:

a) Basic Vocabulary

Teachers prefer taking this activity in the initial session of any chapter by giving 10 frequent words used in the chapter. This is done pre-hand before the lesson starts. This is an easy tool for grasping new words.

b) Sing-Song

"Children with learning disabilities are able to learn 5-7 words a lesson. It is better to choose songs, games or kinetic activities to remember the words (Bartoňová 2004, 108)." Sing – song is the best technique to make difficult activities simpler. But this does not work for all students as some students may be less interested in music.

c) Read Aloud and Dictation

Read aloud is an active approach performed in the class during the chapter. The teacher allows the child to read passage from the chapter and analyze the mistakes individually. This task is not done in all sessions because it proves to be time consuming. But it is effective and teacher can easily know the problem of each and every student. In this, firstly the teacher reads and later the student repeats or sometimes the student reads and teacher explains.

d) Check grammar

This is an effort which is done by the teacher without the student's conscious effort. This is a deliberate effort shown by the teacher through writing skills. A single passage is given with appropriate gaps and students fill in the suitable grammatical structure. For example, Ram __ a good boy. Usually Pronouns and Tenses are used to make their concepts clear.

e) Teaching Spelling

Making learn spelling to a dyslexic is a biggest challenge for a teacher because that is the key weakest area. Spelling is an encoding process which requires recalling words, identifying sound and sound symbol correspondence but dyslexics fail to recognize those factors. Turner and Pughe believe that improvements and accuracy in spelling could be achieved by teaching the reasons why words are spelt in a certain way to all pupils, not only the dyslexic ones. This does not seem to be conducive to large number of students because of the time and effort to be put by the teachers.

## 5. Core Task

Core tasks are entirely led by students and conducted by the researcher based on the curriculum planned. It includes observation, analysis, result and conclusions. The core aim is to observe students' performance. In this task, the researcher will analyze the behavioural and cognitive aspects of reading skill as they have been taught in Pre-task. Through the pre-task, the researcher got an idea on the teaching techniques used in the classroom.

The researcher has used the Turner and Pughe model for core task. These are matched the reading types with the different purpose of reading and different types of text.

| Skimming | -pleasure<br>-gist<br>-global<br>-titles, captions, pictures |
|---|---|
| Scanning | -specific facts<br>-directories<br>-dictionaries<br>-internet search engines |
| Detailed reading | -questions<br>-instructions<br>-proof reading |

| Reading for pleasure | -novels<br>-newspapers<br>-magazines<br>-comics |
|---|---|

The researcher conducted 25 sessions divided as per the completion of the each planned task. The basic aim is to understand their reading performance skill through their teaching pattern resulting improvement in learning methods. However, each student varies from each other in terms of their age, family background and exposure to the English language. But the researcher has put their specific language difficulty within the continuum from mild to severe. Research has shown that exact nature of these problems may vary, depending on the degree of dyslexic difficulties as well as the language being acquired (Crombie 2000).

*Exercise: 1 <u>Counting the number of syllables or phonemes of a word</u>*

This exercise has been carried out in two consecutive sessions. Each class had twenty male dyslexic students aging from 12-15. The students fall within the continuum of mild and severe language difficulty. The following exercises were distributed to the students are as follows.

| SESSION | EXERCISE |
|---|---|
| 1 | Count the syllable |
| | 1.Blow |
| | 2.Glow |
| | 3. Call |
| | 4. Ball |
| | 5. Sail |
| | 6.Pale |
| | 7.Doll |
| | 8.Call |
| | 9.Skill |
| 2 | 10.Sleep |
| | 11.Slip |
| | 12. Felt |
| | 13. Belt |
| | 14. Sell |
| | 15. Bell |

*Result*

This exercise was conducted in a group setting. The task were administered and it was observed that only one child in the entire group knew how to do the syllabification with minimal error. Students were able to figure out the word but manifested trouble in breaking it into syllable. Some students developed poor decoding skill resulted into understanding the meaning of the word. Thus, further this exercise had been modified and developed a new activity to understand their cognitive ability.

*Exercise 2 Two to Five Syllable (Non-word repetition):*

This exercise is similar to the session 1 and 2 but in this session the researcher has used non-word repetition than rhyming words. One of the challenging areas of dyslexics is to make them aware of the sounds of the language. Keeping those in mind, the researcher's preliminary aim of this activity is to make them aware that sounds making up a word are represented by combinations of letters. It is considered that dyslexics with poor phonological awareness find it difficult to apply grapheme-phoneme conversion rules (Beaton 2004; Catts and Kamhi 2012).

| SESSION | EXERCISE |
|---------|----------|
| 2 | 1.Brush |
| | 2.Special |
| | 3.Something |
| | 4.Purpose |
| | 5.Broken |
| | 6.Vegetable |
| | 7.Grocery |
| | 8.Computer |
| | 9.Suddenly |
| **3** | 10.Successful |
| | 11.Read |
| | 12.Play |
| | 13.Speak |
| | 14.Exercise |
| | 15.Sophistication |

*Result*

Students showed varied results. Some students are slow readers and some cannot retrieve the word. Words like 'Sophistication' and 'Successful' are making them "slow, energy-demanding and high demands on the...mental resources that there is no room left to carry out interpretation"

*Exercise 3: Deleting the rhyming word*

Children with dyslexia generally have good listening comprehension, but tend to struggle with accurate and fluent single word reading, usually due to poor phonological processing

(Adams 1990; IDA 2007; Lyon 1998; Lyon et al. 2003; Spear-Swerling and Sternberg 2001). This task is performed to understand whether the students have grasped the Exercise 1. In this session, the researcher steps further ahead through interaction with each student by asking them to delete the rhyming words and add new word irrespective of their meaning but the students should be aware of the corresponding sound in the passage. The data in this task are structured resource from Great schools website especially created to help teachers with worksheets and activities.

Passage-1

*Happy Trails To Cancer Shirt*
It was purchased just for you,
when you're happy or you're blue,
you can wear it on your head,
'round the house or in your bed,
you can wear it in the dark,
while you're strolling in the park.
You can wear it going to Church,
or by the tele watching Lurch,
you could wear it to do the wash,
or when cooking stew or squash

Passage-2

*The More it Snows*
*A. A. Milne*
The more it
SNOWS- tiddely-pom,
The more it
GOES- tiddely- pom
The more it
GOES- tiddely pom
On
Snowing.
And nobody
KNOWS-tiddely-pom,
How cold my
TOES-tiddely-pom
How cold my
TOES-tiddely-pom
Are
Growing.

*Result*

It was observed that only 9 students have given the correct word corresponding to the given rhyme even though the word doesn't semantically correspond to the earlier word. For example: Students who saw the sentence, 'you could wear it to do the wash or when cooking stew or squash. Here the rhyming pair is Wash and Squash. But students would hesitate to use the appropriate rhyming for Wash. They would relate words like clothes, soup, blue and bus without any semantic and structural reasoning. Considering their low proficiency of English language, researcher has extracted the second passage published in English Made Easy Key Stage 1 for ages 5 to 6 by Dorling Kindersley Limited., a level lower for 12-15 year but those 12 students though find it semantically difficult but they could pronounce it. Due to its onomatopoeic sound it is difficult for the special language disability students to rhyme the word. The researcher's main aim is to observe their cognitive and mental imagery. On the other hand, Schwartz, Saffran, and Marin (1980) described this as a syndrome wherein dyslexic shows a remarkable dissociation between ability to read aloud both regularly and irregularly spelled words and the ability to comprehend those words. But researcher found that though words are irregularly spelled but they can pronounce after few drilling but dyslexics cannot repeat these words in other context. Regularity effects are observed in reading; words whose spellings do not convert transparently to pronunciation will be mispronounced in a manner that forces the direct orthographic-phonological conversion (Martin 1998).

*Exercise 4: Collage the Word*

This activity will help the child to explore letter sounds by making a collage. This is another technique teacher should teach dyslexics to drill words and make them 'Learn to Think'. This data is a structured source from Miriam Myers Activities through Great Schools Education portal. This is an activity which imparts fun and learning too. The materials which are needed are Magazines, Old greeting cards and newspapers (to be cut apart for the collage), Cardboard, Scissors, Glue, Pencil, Crayon or marker

Firstly, let the student choose a letter. The researcher has given the freedom to the student to choose the sound and later brainstormed words that start with the letter sound. The primary aim is to observe the students' behavioral aspect and mental ability to create a word. Does the student write the capital and lowercase letter in the middle of a piece of cardboard? Have the students find and cut out pictures that start with the letter sound.

*Result*

This activity shows that how students overcome the error pattern on inflectional and derivational affix. However, they were not able to understand the noun or verb form. For example, three students could manage to collage inflectional words such as *play > player*, *read > reader*, *spy > spys* (irrespective of their wrong spelling). Other students could not create more than single and disyllabic word, for e.g. *Cat*, *Water*, *Book*, *Wash*, *Stop*, *Kind* and *Tree*.

*Exercise 5: Simple swapping phonemes*

This activity is to swap the initial two and three phonemes. This exercise has been made to understand the ability of lexical retrieval. It has been designed into four different segments such as
i. Consonant + Vowel phoneme
ii. Vowel + Consonant phoneme
iii. Consonant + Consonant phoneme
iv. Vowel + Vowel phoneme
The following exercise were given as per.

| Consonant + Vowel | Vowel + Consonant | Consonant + Consonant | Vowel + Vowel |
|---|---|---|---|
| **po**ng | **un**iform | **cr**eam | **Ae**ro |
| **be**ar | **ar**ound | **st**and | **Ai**r |
| **be**en | **ar**row | **br**eak | **ou**r |
| **mu**ch | **ic**e | ha**pp**y | **ea**r |
| **ba**ck | **er**ror | **cl**ip | **oa**ts |
| **ri**ng | **or**ange | **br**eak | **ou**t |
| **pu**g | **oc**cur | **pl**ug | p**ea**r |
| **pi**ck | **on** | **sp**ark | r**ea**d |
| **ki**nd | **ar**e | **sp**oon | d**ee**p |
| **ju**ice | **ab**sent | **st**and | bl**oo**d |
| **pa**rty | **an**d | **br**ing | p**ai**r |
| **ha**ve | **is** | **ch**rist | n**oi**se |
| **ro**se | **in**fect | **fr**om | h**ea**p |
| **so**ng | **id**ea | **bl**ood | s**ee**k |

*Result*

Each students were given these words with blanks; for e.g.
1. __ng,
2. __ar,
3. __ark,
4. r__d,
5. __ood
6. __om
7. s__k

Students' feedback was unexpected. The amount of students varied from earlier exercise. Almost 50% students in the class filled appropriate blanks. However, they could not understand

the instructions such as filling two initial and medial blanks with suitable phonemes rather they filled the gap with their own understanding. Their responses were as follows: *bing*, *car*, *dark*, *red*, *food*, *somme*, *sak*. Even after giving repeated instruction and practice, dyslexics' ability to read non-words is severely impaired.

### *Exercise 7: Interviews and Phonetic Transcription*

After taking 25 sessions for almost three months, the researcher almost got to know each student. Informal conversation from the student was taken through unstructured interview which lasted for 10 minutes per student. The researcher kept the interview as a casual conversation as this helped the student to participate actively and created mutual understanding. Also, it helped the student to perform without being insecure. Researcher believed that creating a mutual understanding with dyslexic student would create a degree of openness and freedom to commit error. Interviews were not taken on one- to- one basis rather it was a natural observation to gain spontaneous speech. The data mainly recorded and transcribed. However, the data are conversations of researcher and students using drilling technique.

## 6. CONCLUSION

It is difficult to come to a conclusion as this research has opened many other possibilities of other research areas. The primary aim is to find out all possible causes and development of dyslexia through formal setup. Moreover, the key challenge is to reach the core teaching methods given to dyslexics. These exercises were partially developed and administered tasks by predecessors. These activities helped to understand students' problems with information processing. However, the origin and core reason and solution of dyslexia remains unknown from ages. Still, experts and scientists have been able to describe the difficulties of dyslexic people experienced in day- to- day life.

However, teachers are the only propagator who knows their students' level of reading and comprehension during the English language learning. This research helped the teachers of the school to teach methods and approaches which are recommended as suitable for dyslexic learners. This research has been carefully planned and designed for limited 20 dyslexic students to suit the individual needs of learners. This research has developed other ideas with wider perspective. The aim of the project was to develop strategies in a way to increase an awareness of dyslexia and utilize new parameters in assisting teachers in learning dyslexics got some results.

This paper overall benefited the teachers' attitude of teaching language to dyslexics by motivating them and making the lessons as enjoyable as possible.

Working on such a short span of time and reaching to conclusion that researcher has shown a perfect method for teaching English language to dyslexic learners does not exist. Each learner is an individual and is unique in his or her own way, and each learner processes the language differently (Chlupáčková 2012).

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## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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