



Enhancing Digital Tools for an Inclusive Dyslexia Adult Education

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National report on current dyslexia-specific training programmes and existing gaps in the system.

Country: Poland

Activity coordinated by: Danmar Computers

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Introduction

Dyslexia is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties in reading, writing, and spelling. While there is relatively ample research on dyslexia in children, there is a significant knowledge gap concerning adult dyslexia in Poland.

The objective of this report is to evaluate the existing programs aimed at helping adult dyslexic learners in knowledge acquisition, analyse the results of the focus groups, present the used methodology and report any findings and observations as conclusions to what new solutions can be implemented to address any gaps in the system.

The report is formulated with the following elements:

Overview of the current situation in Poland provides an insight into the availability of specific dyslexia programs that are available for adults. It presents the status of the issue of dyslexia and how it is approached. It also concludes the current system of diagnosis of dyslexia for different age groups of students.

Focus group analysis that presents findings of the discussions that have been conducted with adult educators about the dyslexia-related problems that may occur in adult education and what improvements can be made to overcome these issues.

Methodology that has been introduced to conduct research during the discussions and techniques used to draw conclusions.

Conclusion of the findings of the report with clear guidance and recommendations for filling the existing gaps in the adult education system in Poland.

Overview of the situation of the dyslexia-oriented environment in Poland

Unfortunately, there is a lack of comprehensive data on the prevalence of adult dyslexia in Poland. Most studies have focused on children and educational settings. However, it is estimated that the prevalence of dyslexia in the adult population of Poland ranges from 4% to 10%, based on international statistics. These figures indicate a considerable number of adults affected by dyslexia, emphasizing the need for increased attention and support.

Efforts to enhance educational support for adults with dyslexia in Poland are still in the early stages. Compared to the focus on children, there are limited resources and specific interventions available for adults. However, there have been some positive developments. In recent years, universities and workplaces have started to recognize the challenges faced by dyslexic individuals, leading to the implementation of certain accommodations such as assistive technologies, extended time for exams, or adapted teaching materials. Nonetheless, these initiatives are not implemented systematically across educational institutions and workplaces throughout the country.

Polish law protects individuals with dyslexia from discrimination in the workplace under the Act for Persons with Disabilities. Employers are obliged to make reasonable accommodations for employees with dyslexia, ensuring equal access to professional development opportunities and guaranteeing a supportive working environment. However, despite legal protections, the awareness and

implementation of such accommodations can still be limited. There is a lack of clear criteria for the diagnosis of dyslexia so it can make it difficult to perceive dyslexia as a real and important disability. The most descriptions of disabilities in Poland concentrate on describing physical permanent impairments or dysfunctions so it refers only to an individual and the only way to achieve any improvements is to change the disabled person himself.

There has been a growing interest in researching adult dyslexia in Poland, but further efforts are needed to bridge the existing knowledge gap. Current research focuses mainly on dyslexia in children, with limited attention given to adults. Greater collaboration between researchers, psychologists, educators, and policymakers is necessary to advance understanding and improve support systems for adults with dyslexia.

Focus Group

Participants

The focus group was conducted with eight adult educators at the Rzeszow University of Technology.

The participants included:

1. *Dr Iwona Oleniuch*- Assistant Professor in the group of research and teaching staff of the Department of Enterprise Management at the Faculty of Management
2. *Dr Jolanta Stec-Rusiecka*- Assistant Professor in the group of research and teaching staff of the Department of Enterprise Management at the Faculty of Management
3. *Dr hab. Krystyna Kmiotek*- University Professor in the group of research and teaching staff, Head of the Department of Enterprise Management at the Faculty of Management

4. *Dr inż. Bożydar Ziółkowski*- Assistant Professor in the group of research and teaching staff of the Department of Enterprise Management at the Faculty of Management
5. *Dr hab. Teresa Piecuch*- University Professor in the research and teaching staff group at the Faculty of Management
6. *Natalia Prędko*- senior engineering and technical specialist at the Faculty of Management
7. *Dr inż. Marzena Jankowska-Miśkiewicz*- Assistant Professor in the group of research and teaching staff of the Department of Enterprise Management at the Faculty of Management
8. *Dr Aldona Migala-Warchoł*- Assistant Professor in the group of research and teaching staff of the Department of Enterprise Management at the Faculty of Management

Methodology

Prior to the focus group meeting the plan for the discussion was developed. It included all of the discussion points to be followed during the focus group discussions. Participants were also given consent forms to fill in.

Firstly, participants were introduced to the presentation about the Dygi4ADU project and its main aims and objectives. The discussion was led by Elżbieta Stefańska, Dygi4ADU project manager at Danmar Computers. The participants expressed great interest and enthusiasm about the project's topic. The newsletter of the project was also distributed to the audience to learn more about the results and partnership.

Next, the translated version of the vignette with the short story about dyslexia was distributed.

The vignette was emailed to all participants prior to the meeting via email.

The following vignette was used:

“This nightmare might sound familiar to you:

You walk into an exam. You sit down. You stare at the sheets of paper in front of you as you listen to people scribble answers to questions that you yourself have no idea how to answer. You can hear the clock ticking away. When it seems like an eternity has passed, the teacher calls time. You hand in a piece of paper that may not be completely blank, but might as well be. The panic sets in. You can awake from this nightmare knowing that next time you will be prepared and you will be able to answer the questions. We'll call this Nightmare Scenario Number 1.

Now imagine walking into an exam, knowing all the answers, but cognizant that you'll never complete it in time. Rather than spend time answering the questions, you try to strategize about which questions you can answer the fastest, rereading each question a few times. In this scenario, which we'll call "Nightmare Scenario Number 2," you're also dyslexic. So, not only do you have to decode the symbols on the page, you also have to work through the nerves you have from knowing that you have all this extra work to do while taking the test, but not the extra time. Since you're not a professional spy, who is trained to decode under pressure, you take a little longer than usual to translate the words on the page. By the time you have figured out the questions you can answer the fastest, you have about half the time left. Even though you know the answers to more than half the questions on the test, you only have time to answer some of the questions. You leave feeling frustrated. You studied as hard as anyone else—probably harder—and you start to realize that no amount of studying can prepare you. You could have memorized the entire textbook. But you will never have enough time to translate your knowledge into coherent answers. Now imagine Nightmare Scenario Number 2 repeating, again and again.”¹

¹ (n.d.). *Stories from Dyslexics. How Extended Time Improved More than Just Test Scores.* <https://Dyslexia.Yale.edu>. <https://dyslexia.yale.edu/resources/dyslexic-kids-adults/stories-from-dyslexics/how-extended-time-improved-more-than-just-test-scores/>

The group facilitator presented the story and prompted the discussion. Then the questions related to the story were presented.

Findings

Participants were asked a set of questions relating to the vignette presented as well as a few additional ones relating to the topic of dyslexia.

How does each story compare to the types of cases you experience in your professional role?

Teachers do not encounter students with dyslexia as they are not aware of the problem. As there is no formal acknowledgement of the existence of dyslexia in adult students, they may be hiding this or thinking that it does not impact their life as much. This might be due to the lack of awareness and knowledge on the topic of adult dyslexia. One of the participants pointed out that according to the research they have read, it takes on average 2.5 hours more to read a book of 300 pages for a dyslectic person than their peers without this diagnosis. Adults diagnosed with dyslexia in childhood still have a problem with silent reading speed. They take several hours longer to read one book than their classmates. It can also take a dyslexic student considerably longer to read a short text on a computer screen.

How well is dyslexia covered in the teacher training programmes? Have you received any additional training?

Most focus group participants agreed that there is a need to introduce methods of support and educational adjustments for students with specific learning difficulties, while according to them

educational adjustments should only be made for those with documented learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia). The mere statement of a student, that he or she has dyslexia is insufficient.

Teachers also felt that:

- Some flexibility should be included in the methods of testing the knowledge and skills of dyslexic students, e.g., providing the possibility to adapt the format of the examination
- Dysgraphic students should be allowed to write notes and credit papers on laptops (without internet access), even if such adaptations are not allowed for other students
- Spelling mistakes should not lower the mark for credit, as long as the test is not specifically about linguistic correctness
- People with dyslexia should be allowed to use adaptations in class, even if such adaptations are not allowed for students without dyslexia
- Educational adjustments for dyslexics should only concern the form of the teaching and not the scope of the material taught and tested
- A person with dyslexia deserves all possible forms of support from the university and lecturers

If you could imagine your ideal intervention/innovative techniques in the classroom context, what would it include?

Participants mentioned the Good Write which is a smart text corrector available for students. There are two paid options, one available for advanced users like marketers, PR professionals, journalists and businesses and a free plan option available for Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox browsers offering:

- advanced language proofreading (for spelling and grammar),
- recognition of errors resulting from fast typing.

In your opinion, are there gaps in the current provision of dyslexia-specific training programmes or the existing interventions for dyslexic students within adult educational programmes? If yes, what are they?

Educators have pointed out that there is not enough research and available knowledge about adult dyslexia at the University. Students can present an applicable certificate at the stage of the university admission process. This allows them to extend the writing time by 20% at the exam. That, however, is not further applicable during their course of study. They are not aware of the signs and characteristics of adult dyslexia that can impact their students' performance. The students are also not reporting any issues as they may feel that they are somehow dealing with the problem and also, they do not know if they can receive any help from the school authorities. Educators expressed the willingness to take on supporting training in this area if there will be any available as there are no scenarios or protocols for dealing with students with dyslexia or other disabilities in general.

In your opinion, are there barriers faced by adult dyslexic students accessing timely and effective support? If yes, what are they?

University has an Office for Persons and Disabilities located on campus but it is mostly devoted to the:

- elimination of architectural and transport barriers,
- organization of sign language interpreters,
- assisting the blind and visually impaired, persons with reduced mobility and persons with special needs,
- organization of appropriate technical and digital solutions for students, post-graduate students and staff with disabilities carrying out scientific activities,
- the coordination of transport for persons with reduced mobility.

Dyslexia is a type of disability with a neurological basis. In Poland, however, it does not have the formal status of disability. Although high school students can apply for support for “special educational needs” which is based on the opinion issued by psychological-educational counselling centres, higher education students cannot count on further legally mandated support in the form a free diagnosis or counselling. Yet, dyslexia is a lifelong problem that may have an impact on a person’s ability to read and write in adult life as well, affecting their learning process and future career.

If you could change one thing about the situation for adult dyslexics in your community, what would it be?

Educators will like to have access to training on how to help adult learners with dyslexia. Dyslectic people are very often judged by the stereotypes that they might be lazy, unintelligent or simply stupid. It is untrue that through more work they can eliminate deficits. There should be more awareness on the topic and extensive training introduced as dyslexia is a vast subject and the phenomenon is very complex. Also, dyslexia should be formally added as a form of disability and certain legislation regulating its status added. In this way, Office for Persons and Disabilities located at the University could also serve people that are affected by dyslexia.

Conclusions

The findings from the literature review show that according to the statistics available, there is a number of adults in Poland that are dyslectic. Thus, the need for increased attention and support for the individuals affected arises. There is a formal way of dyslexia recognition processes but they are only designed for children. When entering university or starting a job there is no formal certification that could prove an individual is dyslectic. Universities and workplaces have started to recognize some assistive technologies or extended time for exams in recent years yet advanced research is needed to improve support systems for dyslectic adults.

The focus group discussions highlighted the need for a change of legislation that will recognize dyslexia as a type of disability and will prompt the development of a framework and guidelines for the teachers on how to approach students with dyslexia. Teachers pointed out that there is no official recognition of the problem and students might hide the fact that they are dyslectic. Yet there are research findings available that prove that dyslectic adults take longer to read and write than adults not affected by it. This has a profound effect on their lives and future career. Teachers underlined a few specific rules that could be introduced at school helping with students' assessment and supporting them in knowledge acquisition.

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