

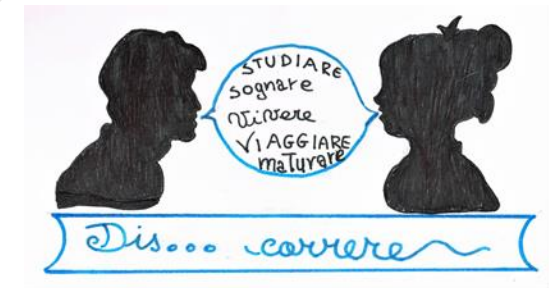
Students with Dyslexia: Listening to Learning Support Educators

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Aim of the Study

- The main aim of the study was to explore the perspectives and knowledge of Learning Support Educators (LSEs) on dyslexia.



Introduction

- This study explored Learning Support Educators' understanding on dyslexia in the Maltese context.

Research Questions

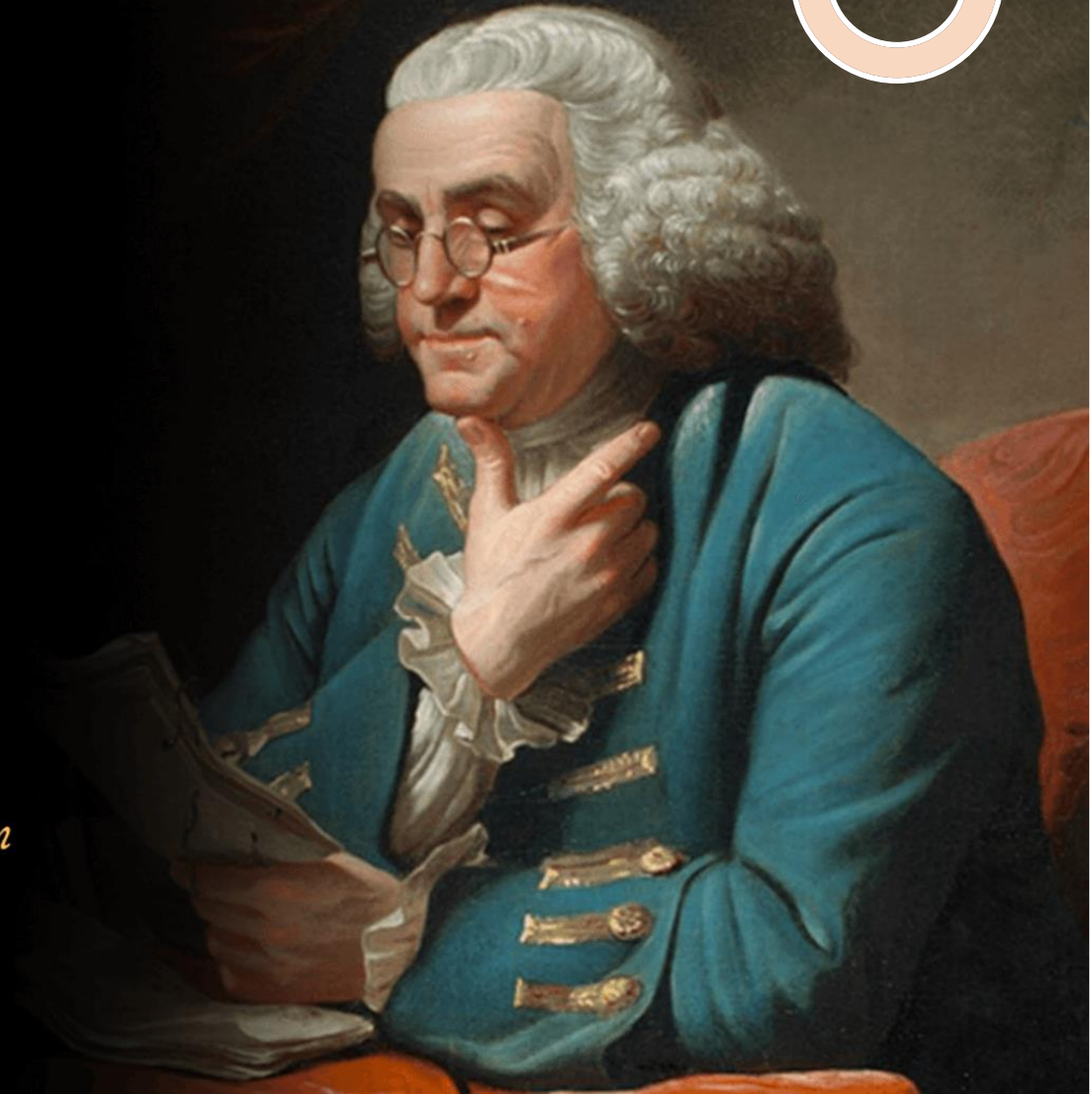
- Are LSEs' given the proper tools and training in their practice to support students with dyslexia?
- How can we further help these educators?

The questions aimed to increase awareness and hopefully advocate for change.



**Tell me and I forget.
Teach me and
remember. Involve me
and I learn.”**

– Benjamin Franklin



Research Participants

- 6 in total.
- Participants who were currently working as LSEs, with at least four years' experience within this field, and worked/are working with pupils with dyslexia.
- They were required to have at least completed the 20-week course qualification available locally (National Comm for Further & Higher Education, n.d.).
- Three participants were also completing an undergraduate degree qualification in facilitating inclusion.



Participants' Profile

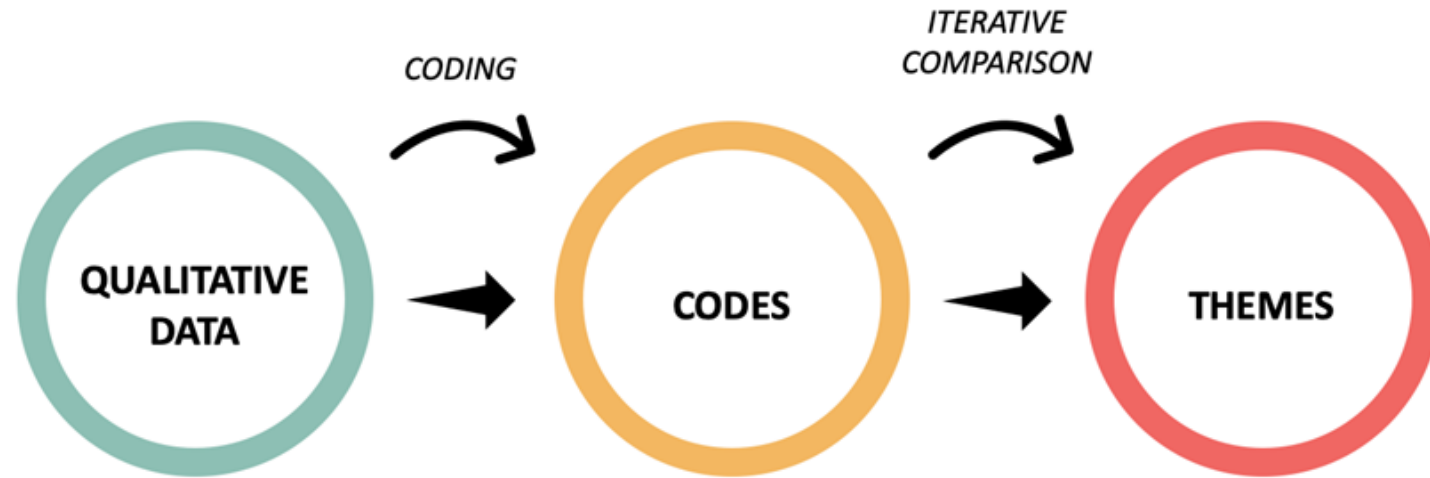
- 4 participants worked in church schools.
- 2 participants worked in state schools.
- 1 completed the 20-week course.
- 2 completed the 30-week course.
- 4 participants were also completing an undergraduate top-up degree qualification in facilitating inclusion.





Data Collection

- The research questions begged a qualitative approach using a one-time, individual, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews.
- Given the above, purpose sampling was used as it was believed to be the best approach (Palinkas et al., 2015).



Approach

- Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data collected.
- Interviews were processed to elicit emerging themes.

Defining Dyslexia

In the United Kingdom (UK) dyslexia is referred to as a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) (Burden, 2008).

In America Learning Disabilities (LD) is preferred (Porter, 2013).

The 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM5) explains that dyslexia is an LD that presents challenges such as inaccurate or slow and effortful word reading, difficulty understanding what is being read, trouble spelling and word expression and difficulty with mathematical reasoning (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013).

Literature Review Conclusion

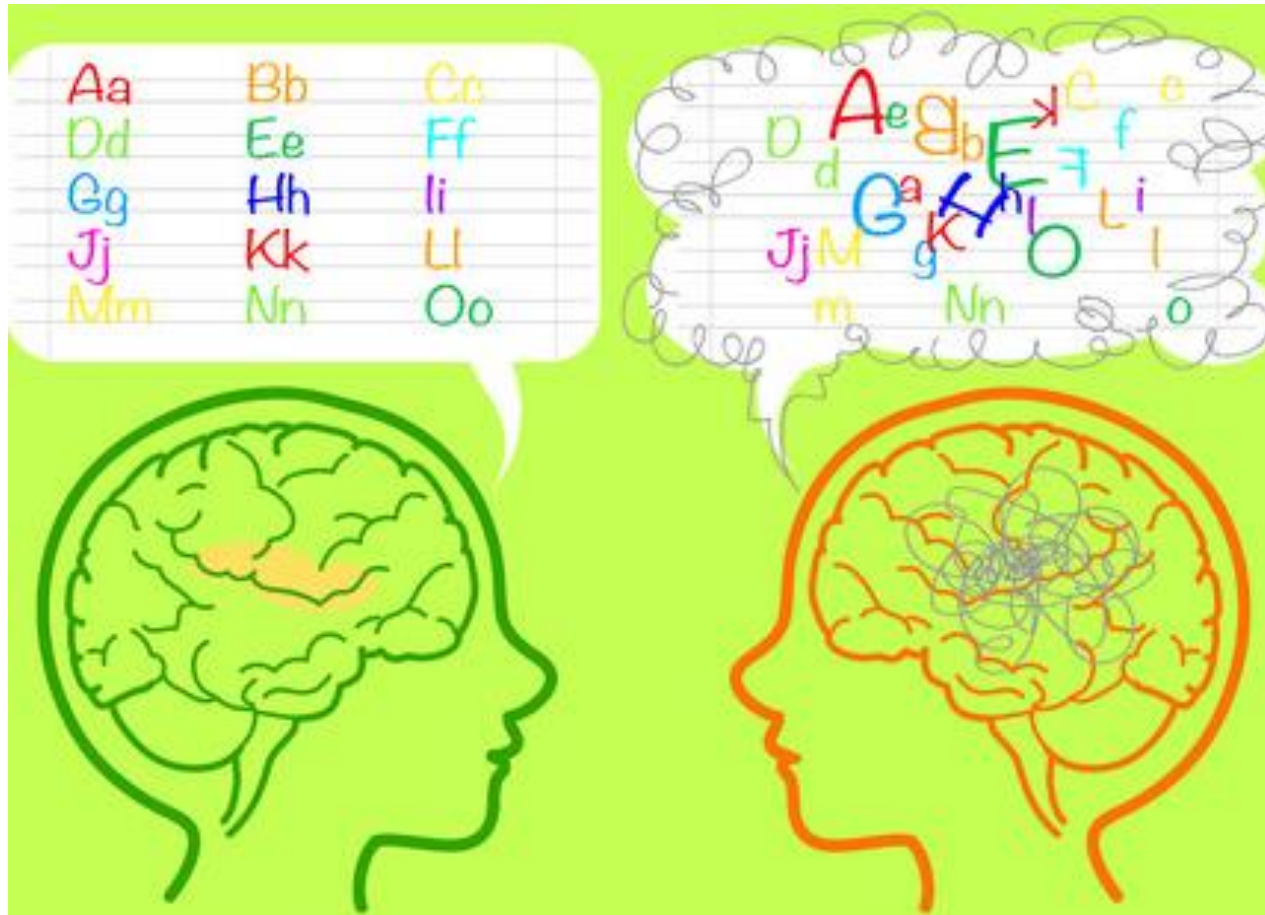
- Research shows that there is limited literature specifically on LSEs and dyslexia in the educational sector and how much knowledge is given to these educators to aid students.



Emergent Themes

The Study identified the following six emergent themes:

- Understanding Dyslexia;
- Theoretical Knowledge;
- Strategies Used;
- Challenges;
- Training;
- Personal Initiatives.



- LSEs acquired knowledge after dealing with students and became aware of lacked knowledge on dyslexia;
- This contributed towards feelings of helplessness;
- One participant felt “ashamed” of poor insight on dyslexia;
- Participants’ voices reveal a need for further training (e.g., The SpLD Services, 2020; Falzon, 2012; Azzopardi, 2014).

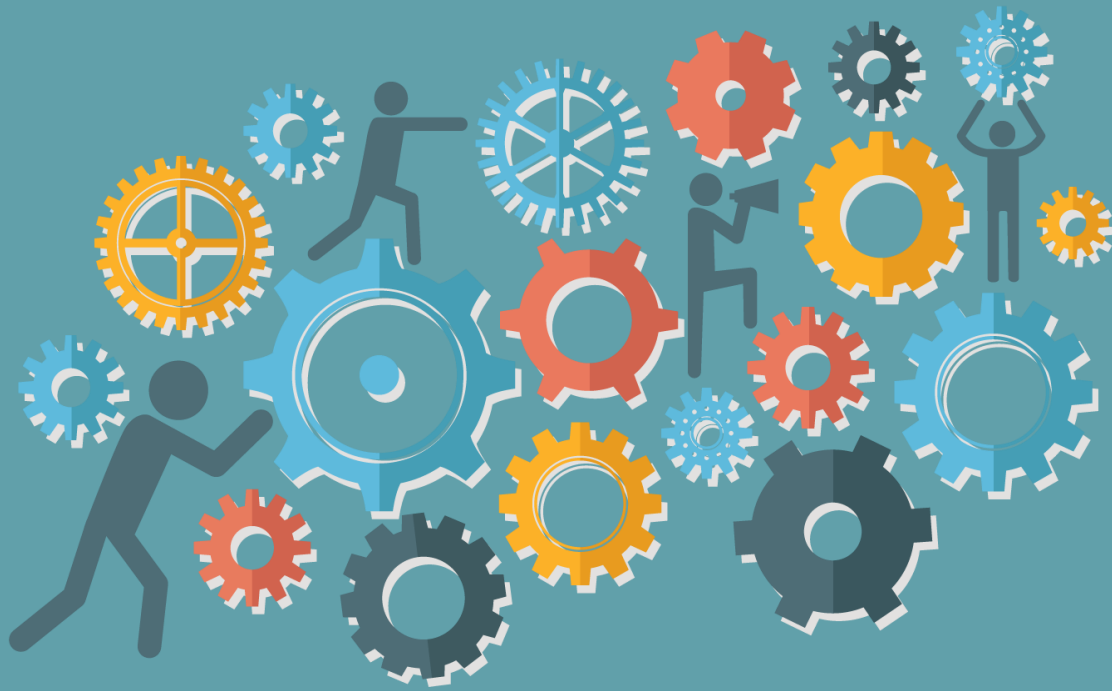
Theme 1: Understanding Dyslexia



Theme 2: Theoretical Knowledge

- 4 sub-themes emerged as follows:
- Causes and Prevalence
- Co—occurrence
- Diagnosing Dyslexia
- Application of Knowledge

Theme 3: Strategies Used



- In Maltese schools adapting the appropriate tools to support individuals with dyslexia can produce great benefits for the student (Camilleri, 2017).
- One participant mentioned that some resources such as magnetic letters or sand boxes were not available because she worked in a secondary school.
- One participant had resources available as she worked in a dyslexia-friendly school.

Theme 4: Challenges

- Mentalities within the classroom mainly negative attitudes from educators who associate dyslexia with being lazy.
- Helping the class as there are more students with learning difficulties without an official statement.
- In school extra help is needed from education authorities.
- Other professionals' advice is needed to support students with learning difficulties holistically.
- The education system.



Theme 5: Training

Focus on theory – participants did not have enough knowledge, courses did not supply enough hands on training on practical strategies which could be applied in the classroom.

Continued professional development considered as essential throughout the working life. Of an LSE.

“I didn’t get the proper training, I believe! That has been my fight since I started this course” (Sephora).





Theme 6: Personal Initiatives

The way forward

- The need for more in-depth CPD training on dyslexia.
- The need for specialisation rather than on overview on all profiles and being expected to have the ability to work with any profile (Falzon, 2012; Briffa, 2015).



The Findings

- The findings reveal strong conviction regarding the need for more **in-depth initial training**;
- Training was regarded as **essential**, together with having lack of support from professional within the school system;
- The overall understanding on students with dyslexia was **positive** and these pupils were considered as **stimulated and striving for achievement** in the educational domain;
- Participants' **commitment** to their students was shown throughout the work.



Recommendations for Future Studies

- Recommendations for practice, policy, training and research emerged in this research as follows:
- Continued Professional Development (CPD);
- Continuous school support;
- Further research with LSEs;
- Changes in initial training programmes.



Conclusion

- The participants suggested that initial training would include in depth focus on difficulties Rather than o=an overviews of all profiles with challenges.
- A poignant quote from one participant concludes this study:

“I've done an assignment in autism, as part of my course. Does it prepare me for the different kinds of autism? As if. I am placed with the student on a one-to-one basis, at any level to support them in all subjects. I mean it is crazy... irresponsible actually.”

