

BEHIND THE CLASSROOM DOORS: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF UNTRAINED TEACHERS HANDLING STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

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Abstract

Inclusive education for dyslexic learners relied on teachers' ability to implement adaptive teaching strategies, foster supportive learning environments, and advocate for individualized instruction. However, challenges such as a lack of specialized training, difficulty in recognizing dyslexic students' specific needs, and limited institutional support hindered effective intervention. This study examined the experiences of educators teaching dyslexic students in Tamisan Elementary School, Mati City, Davao Oriental, Philippines. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study explored themes related to teacher attitudes, instructional challenges, emotional and psychological impact, effective teaching strategies, advocacy for school support, and continuous policy development. The findings revealed that while educators adopted multi-sensory techniques, personalized instruction, and reinforcement strategies to improve student engagement, challenges such as initial frustration, self-doubt in teaching effectiveness, and difficulty balancing curriculum demands remained significant. Addressing these concerns required enhanced dyslexia-specific training, mentorship-driven support programs, and institutional policies promoting structured intervention strategies. Strengthening teacher education programs and refining inclusive education policies will fostered a more effective learning experience for dyslexic students, ensuring equitable access to quality education.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Dyslexia, Teacher Training, Adaptive Teaching Strategies, Individualized Instruction, Institutional Support, Special Education (SPED), Policy Development

1. Introduction

The rising number of students with dyslexia presented considerable difficulties for educators, especially those without specialized training in addressing learning disabilities, as discussed by Thwala et al. (2020). Dyslexia, a neurodevelopmental condition that affects reading and writing abilities, impacted a substantial portion of the global population, as noted by Thwala et al. (2020). Despite increasing efforts toward inclusive education, Tuvida (2023) pointed out that many teachers still lacked the necessary skills and resources to provide adequate support for students with dyslexia.

Tuvida (2023) confirmed that many teachers across international settings struggled to meet the unique needs of students with learning disabilities, contributing to disparities in learning outcomes. Balgos and Albores (2024) highlighted that inadequate teacher development programs further worsened these issues

worldwide. In the United States, this problem was particularly evident, where inclusive education policies revealed substantial gaps in teacher preparedness, as noted by Tuvida (2023) and Balgos and Albores (2024).

In the Philippines, the challenge of untrained teachers working with students with dyslexia persisted as a significant issue in the educational system. According to Tuvida (2023), many educators lacked the specialized training and resources required to cater to the unique needs of students with learning disabilities, which led to gaps in both academic performance and emotional well-being..

This study aimed to explore the challenges and experiences of untrained teachers managing students with dyslexia in classroom settings, addressing a critical research gap in the Philippines. Unaddressed, this issue risked creating disparities in educational outcomes for dyslexic learners, as highlighted by Tuvida (2023) and Balgos and Albores (2024). The study's findings could have guided policy reforms and teacher training programs to promote inclusive education.

This study may benefited various stakeholders in the field of education. Students with dyslexia can gained improved learning experiences as the study identified strategies that untrained teachers might have adopted to meet their needs. Teachers were guided by insights from the research, enabling them to better understand the challenges and enhanced their skills in managing diverse classrooms. School leaders used the findings to develop policies that promotes teacher training programs focused on inclusive education practices. Researchers may built upon this study to investigate more innovative and sustainable solutions for supporting students with learning disabilities.

This study emphasized the lived experiences of untrained teachers managing students with dyslexia, a neurodevelopmental disorder that presented significant challenges in mainstream educational settings. Students with dyslexia often encountered obstacles in academic achievement and emotional well-being due to the lack of specialized training among educators.

This study applied Lev Vygotsky's Constructivist Learning Theory (1978) to examined how untrained teachers developed strategies for supporting students with dyslexia through social interactions and experiential learning. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) underscored the importance of mentorship and peer collaboration in refining teaching methods. Teachers constructed knowledge through classroom experiences, informal support systems, and guided interactions, allowing them to adapt despite lacking formal training. The study highlighted how structured environments and accessible resources served as scaffolds that enhanced educators' ability to navigate challenges. By leveraging social learning principles, teachers progressively improved their strategies, fostering inclusive education for dyslexic learners.

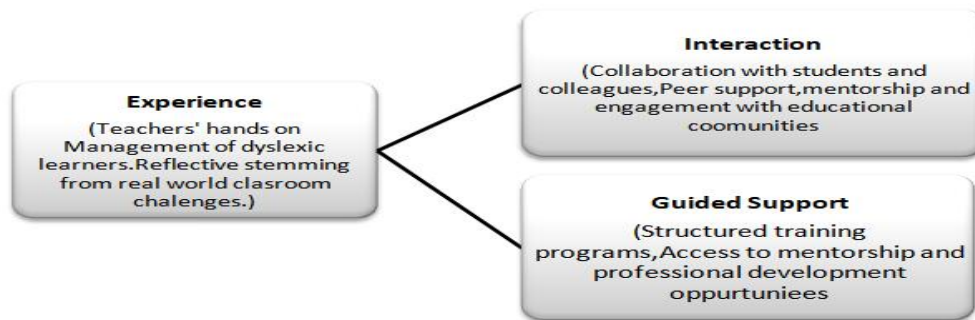


Figure 1. IPO Conceptual Framework of the Study

2. Method

This chapter outlined the steps taken to conduct the research study. It included the research design, research locale, research participants, ethical considerations, data collection, and data analysis.

This study utilized a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach, as guided by the principles of Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (2016). Qualitative research was particularly suited to understanding the complexities of human experiences, providing a rich and contextualized exploration of lived realities. Phenomenology, as a qualitative methodology, focused on uncovering the essence of participants' experiences, making it the ideal approach for examining the challenges faced by untrained teachers managing students with dyslexia. Van Manen (2016) further emphasized the interpretive nature of phenomenology, highlighting its capacity to connect individual experiences to broader contexts and meanings. Through in-depth interviews and narrative analysis, this study captured the subjective accounts of untrained teachers, reflecting the realities of their struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights. The qualitative phenomenological approach prioritized the voices of the participants, enabling the researcher to delve deeply into their unique educational and social contexts.

The research was conducted at Tamisan Elementary School, located in Mati City, Davao Oriental, Philippines. This school served as a representative institution for exploring the challenges faced by untrained teachers managing students with dyslexia, particularly in rural educational settings. The study involved six teachers from Tamisan Elementary School in Mati City, Davao Oriental. These participants were specifically selected based on their direct involvement in managing students with dyslexia within their classrooms, despite lacking specialized training in handling learning disabilities. This purposive sampling method ensured that the study captured firsthand insights and authentic experiences crucial to the research objectives. This study upheld strict adherence to ethical standards to ensure the safety, confidentiality, and well-being of its participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, clearly outlining the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any point without repercussions. Participants were assured that their identities and personal information would remain confidential, with codes or pseudonyms used instead of real names in reporting findings. Data was securely stored to prevent unauthorized access, in compliance with data protection policies.

The study employed a systematic approach to data collection, ensuring alignment with the research objectives and reliability of the findings. Guided by the qualitative research principles outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 teachers from Tamisan Elementary School in Mati, Davao Oriental. This method enabled an in-depth exploration of the participants' lived experiences, while maintaining the flexibility to uncover emergent themes and unexpected insights. The interview guide was meticulously developed, informed by the study's conceptual and theoretical framework as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Prior to the interviews, informed consent was obtained from each participant, and efforts were made to establish rapport to create a comfortable and open environment for sharing. All interviews were audio-recorded with the respondents' consent and supplemented with detailed field notes to enhance data accuracy. Follow-up questions were posed as needed to provide additional clarity and deepen the responses, enriching the overall quality of the findings.

This study was analyzed using thematic analysis, as detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006), to identify, organize, and interpret patterns or themes within the participants' narratives. This qualitative analysis method is particularly appropriate for phenomenological research, as it allows for a rich and nuanced understanding of lived experiences. The process began with data familiarization, during which interview transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure a thorough grasp of the content. Following this, related codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected recurring patterns across participants' accounts, such as "lack of resources,"

"coping mechanisms," and "emotional and professional challenges." These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the research questions and theoretical framework, particularly the Phonological Deficit Theory. The analysis process also involved constant comparison, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), to examine similarities and differences among participants' responses, enhancing the depth and reliability of the findings. Lastly, the themes were contextualized and interpreted to provide meaningful insights into the phenomenon, contributing to the study's goal of informing strategies for inclusive education.

3. Results and Discussion

This chapter elaborates the themes and subthemes of this study.



Figure 2. Modified Conceptual Framework of the Study

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Dyslexic Learners

Perception and Understanding of Dyslexia. Participants expressed that gaining a deeper understanding of dyslexia significantly altered their teaching perspectives. They realized the importance of focusing on the learners' strengths rather than their limitations. This shift in perception led them to design lessons more thoughtfully, with the goal of helping dyslexic students reach their full potential.

"Understanding dyslexia has changed how I teach. I now focus on their strengths rather than their struggles." – Participant 1

“My perception of dyslexic learners influences how I tailor lessons to help them unlock their potential.” – Participant 5

Empathy and Belief in Student Potential. Teachers highlighted the crucial role of empathy and belief in their students' abilities. They observed that showing care and recognizing the capabilities of dyslexic learners contributed positively to the students' self-confidence and motivation. This supportive attitude created a more empowering learning environment.

“When teachers believe in their students' potential, it significantly boosts their confidence and willingness to learn.” – Participant 2

“Recognizing their abilities and showing care helps dyslexic learners develop self-esteem and motivation.” – Participant 4

Challenges in Teaching Dyslexic Students

Ineffectiveness of Traditional Methods. Participants shared their challenges in using conventional teaching strategies, which they found ineffective for dyslexic students. They experienced initial frustration but eventually realized the need to change their instructional approaches. This led them to explore alternative methods that were more suited to the learners' needs.

“At first, I felt frustrated because the usual teaching strategies didn't work. I had to completely change my approach.” – Participant 1

“Traditional methods don't fit dyslexic learners. I had to develop new ways to engage them.” Participant 5

Difficulty Engaging and Motivating Dyslexic Students. Teachers noted that engaging dyslexic students required creative and flexible teaching techniques. They shifted from traditional methods to more interactive and visual approaches to better capture students' interest and improve comprehension. Adapting to these needs became essential in maintaining student engagement.

“I had to shift from conventional teaching to a more interactive approach. Using visuals helped my students grasp concepts better.” – Participant 2

“Dyslexic students need a different approach. I had to be flexible and creative to make lessons engaging.” – Participant 4

Emotional and Psychological Impact

Initial Frustration and Uncertainty. Participants described feeling overwhelmed and uncertain during the early stages of teaching dyslexic learners. They questioned whether their efforts were sufficient. However, witnessing their students' progress over time helped ease these feelings, replacing frustration with a sense of fulfillment and patience.

“At first, I felt overwhelmed and unsure if I was doing enough. But when I saw my students gain confidence, I realized patience matters.” – Participant 1

*“It was frustrating at first, but seeing my students succeed made all the effort worthwhile.”
Participant 5*

Effective Strategies for Dyslexic Learners

Multi-Sensory Techniques. Teachers identified multi-sensory strategies as effective tools for supporting dyslexic learners. These included the use of visual aids, physical movement, and hands-on activities, which helped students process information through different sensory channels and enhanced their understanding.

Using visual aids, movement, and hands-on activities makes learning more effective for dyslexic students.” – Participant 1

“Multi-sensory approaches allow students to process information in different ways, improving understanding.” – Participant 3

Gamified and Creativity-Driven Learning. Participants found that incorporating games and creative tasks into lessons made learning more enjoyable and less intimidating for dyslexic students. These approaches allowed learners to focus on the content rather than their difficulties, creating a more engaging and supportive learning atmosphere.

“Games and creative activities make learning more enjoyable and engaging for students with dyslexia.” – Participant 5

“When students are having fun, they forget their learning difficulties and focus on understanding concepts.” – Participant 2

Advocacy for Teacher Training & School Support

Lack of Formal Dyslexia Training. Teachers pointed out the absence of formal training in dyslexia as a major barrier to effective instruction. They emphasized the need for schools to provide specialized education and professional development. With proper training, teachers believed they could offer more appropriate and impactful support to their dyslexic learners.

“Many teachers lack proper training in dyslexia education. Without specialized knowledge, it’s difficult to provide the right support.” – Participant 1

“Schools need to prioritize dyslexia training for educators. A well-informed teacher makes a huge difference.” – Participant 5

Teachers significantly influenced dyslexic students' learning experiences, as their perceptions and knowledge of dyslexia shaped classroom dynamics. Educators with a strong understanding of dyslexia fostered inclusive learning environments by adapting instructional methods to support individual needs (Florian & Hegarty, 2004). Positive teacher attitudes enhanced student engagement, self-confidence, and overall academic success, reinforcing the importance of empathy and targeted interventions (Reid, 2016). Conversely, misconceptions about dyslexia resulted in ineffective teaching strategies and hindered students' learning progress, highlighting the need for continuous teacher training and awareness initiatives.

Teaching dyslexic students presented unique challenges, particularly within standardized education systems that often prioritized uniform curricula over individualized instruction. Traditional teaching methods did not accommodate diverse learning styles, making it difficult for dyslexic students to keep pace with conventional instruction (Washburn et al., 2014). Many educators struggled with limited training and inadequate institutional support, leading to frustration and difficulties in implementing effective strategies. The absence of dyslexia-specific resources further exacerbated learning barriers, emphasizing the urgent need for curriculum reforms and professional development programs that equipped teachers with adaptable teaching techniques.

Dyslexia profoundly affected students' emotional and psychological well-being, often leading to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem. Struggling with reading, writing, and comprehension tasks created a negative academic experience, making students hesitant to participate in classroom activities (Shaywitz, 2003). Teachers played a crucial role in fostering a supportive and encouraging environment that empowered dyslexic learners. When educators provided reassurance and targeted guidance, students developed resilience and confidence in their abilities. Moreover, a positive classroom culture reduced stigma and helped dyslexic students feel valued, strengthening their motivation to overcome learning challenges.

Implementing effective strategies tailored to dyslexic learners enhanced comprehension, engagement, and academic success. Multi-sensory teaching methods, gamified learning experiences, and confidence-building activities helped students retain information and develop literacy skills (Shaywitz, 2003). Personalized instruction based on individual strengths promoted deeper understanding and ensured students received the necessary support to thrive in an inclusive classroom setting (Reid, 2016). Assistive technologies, such as AI-driven reading tools and speech-to-text applications, bridged literacy gaps and created accessible learning opportunities. Encouraging creativity, project-based learning, and alternative assessments also fostered a more accommodating educational environment.

A lack of formal dyslexia training presented a major obstacle for educators seeking to support dyslexic learners effectively. Schools needed to prioritize professional development programs that provided evidence-based strategies for differentiated instruction (Washburn et al., 2014). Advocacy for institutional support ensured teachers had access to essential resources, fostering a more inclusive and accommodating learning environment (Hornby, 2011). Strengthening collaboration between educators, parents, and policymakers enhanced intervention programs and community awareness initiatives. By advocating for teacher training and school-wide dyslexia accommodations, educational institutions created a structured and supportive framework for dyslexic students.

Institutional commitment to dyslexia education required ongoing policy development and the integration of research-backed teaching strategies. Future studies focused on improving dyslexia-specific teacher training and refining evidence-based instructional techniques to support students' literacy development (Snowling, 2020). Policymakers needed to prioritize curriculum reforms that incorporated multi-sensory learning approaches and alternative assessment methods, ensuring academic success beyond conventional literacy benchmarks (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2019). Advancing dyslexia education through AI-driven learning

tools, structured mentorship programs, and continuous professional development ensured long-term support for dyslexic learners and equipped educators with effective teaching methodologies.

This study highlighted the urgent need for adaptive teaching strategies in dyslexia education, emphasizing the importance of individualized instruction over traditional methods. Research confirmed that multi-sensory approaches, structured mentorship, and continuous support significantly enhanced literacy outcomes and student confidence (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2019; Snowling, 2020). Educators refined their strategies through experience and collaboration, aligning with Vygotsky's Constructivist Learning Theory (1978) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasized the role of guided learning in student development. Effective intervention required immediate action in teacher training, curriculum reform, and technology integration, including AI-driven tools and assistive technologies that improved accessibility for dyslexic learners (Eden & Moats, 2021).

Institutional support and policy development played a crucial role in fostering an inclusive learning environment. Schools needed to prioritize professional development programs, ensuring teachers received training in evidence-based dyslexia-friendly instructional strategies (Washburn et al., 2014). Collaborative efforts between educators, parents, and policymakers enhanced intervention programs and reduced stigma through awareness initiatives. Moving forward, research needed to focus on strengthening dyslexia-specific teacher training, advocating for alternative assessment methods, and implementing policies that supported flexible learning frameworks. By investing in continuous improvement, educational systems equipped teachers with the tools necessary to help dyslexic students thrive academically and emotionally.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role teachers play in shaping the learning experiences of dyslexic students, with their attitudes, understanding, and instructional approaches significantly influencing student outcomes. Teachers who demonstrated empathy, held informed perceptions of dyslexia, and employed adaptive strategies such as multi-sensory and gamified learning fostered greater student engagement, confidence, and academic progress. However, the study also revealed persistent challenges, including reliance on traditional methods, emotional strain among educators, and a lack of formal dyslexia training and institutional support. These insights highlight the urgent need for targeted professional development, inclusive policy reforms, and the integration of evidence-based and technology-enhanced instructional practices. Ultimately, fostering a supportive and flexible educational environment is essential to empowering dyslexic learners and enabling their success within mainstream classrooms.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, it is recommended that schools and educational institutions implement comprehensive professional development programs focused on dyslexia awareness and evidence-based instructional strategies. These programs should equip teachers with the skills to recognize, understand, and effectively support dyslexic learners through individualized, multi-sensory, and creative approaches. Additionally, curriculum reforms should prioritize flexible teaching methods and alternative assessments that accommodate diverse learning needs. Institutional support, including access to specialized resources, collaboration with parents, and the integration of assistive technologies, should be strengthened to ensure an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Lastly, policymakers must advocate for the inclusion of dyslexia-specific training in teacher education programs to build long-term capacity for inclusive education.

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