

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA IN A GREEK HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Dyslexia is the most common declared disability at universities which primarily affects reading, writing, speed of processing and organization. Many students with dyslexia have 'invisible' difficulties that require different types of accommodations. The aim of this study is to give voice to the learning experiences of ten students with dyslexia in a Greek university. In depth interviews were conducted to record students' views and perceptions about teaching, learning and assessment in higher education. Five areas were identified as being the source of most concern for participants: disclosure of dyslexia, access to information, implementation of the law, awareness of staff, lack of inclusive instructional practices. The present research lends insight into how individuals with dyslexia will be able to fulfill their intellectual potential and participate in higher education as any other able and motivated adult with the adoption of a 'social model' of dyslexia.

Introduction

Participation of students with 'learning difficulties' in higher education is an issue of equal opportunities for the students concerned. Many countries (i.e UK, Australia, United States of America, Canada, Israel) have officially recognized the rights and needs of these students as learners in higher education. Legislative changes force universities to develop written policy and practice. Despite the definite signs of progress in provision for the students with 'learning difficulties', there are still social and organizational barriers which prevent their full participation and inclusion in higher education (Fuller, Bradley & Healey 2004; Denhart, 2008).

Dyslexia is the most common declared disability at university (Thomas 2000; Richardson & Wydell, 2003). Comparisons between the UK and other countries are hard to be made because the latter typically subsume dyslexia under the broader category of 'learning disabilities'. However, dyslexia is a 'hidden disability' because it interferes with academic and day-to-day functioning but does not have a physical manifestation (Matthews, 2009). According to Mullins and Preyde (2013, p. 147), "having a disability that is invisible can make it easier for these students to be treated as normally; it also means, however, that the validity of the disability can be disputed and that others may not understand the full extent of their limitations".

There is an ongoing debate in the literature regarding the nature and definition of dyslexia. Even if it is easier to give a definition of dyslexia for children of school age, lack of available screening and assessment tests for the adult population makes more difficult to define the condition in students and adults. Michail (2011) adopts a definition of dyslexia relevant to students in higher education. She suggests that dyslexia manifests itself as an imbalance of skills whereby the dyslexic is unable to commit to paper ideas and information which are commensurate with their intellectual ability as evidenced by spoken understanding. Dyslexia is a human variation with many different aspects and degrees of severity. Apart from the weaknesses, students with dyslexia have strengths and talents in many areas (arts, sports, business, engineering etc).

According to Richardson and Wydell (2003), students with dyslexia have been admitted to higher education on the basis of lower qualifications than those with no reported disability. Students with dyslexia are also disproportionately represented within particular academic subjects (such as languages, law, education, medicine and subjects allied to medicine), they are more likely to withdraw during their first year of study and less likely to complete their programs of study. What is sure is that people with dyslexia are under-represented in higher education internationally (MacCullagh, 2004). Although dyslexia may have adverse effects for progression and achievement in higher education, it is 'by no means incompatible with a high level of success, given appropriate commitment on the part of the students and appropriate resources on the part of institutions' (Richardson & Wydell 2003, p. 475; Stampoltzis & Polychronopoulou, 2008).

Several researchers outlined the key areas where dyslexic students face great difficulties. Cameron and Nunkoosing (2011), Holloway (2001) and Mortimore and Crozier (2006) underline that students with dyslexia had communication problems with academic staff who were at times indifferent or dismissive to students with regard to their dyslexia. Academic staff seemed to have a lack of knowledge, understanding and training about dyslexia (Riddell & Weedon 2006). Assessment methods or accommodations for dyslexic students were sometimes unsatisfactory or late applied during their studies (Hanafin, Shevlin, Kenny & McNeela, 2007). Keeping notes in lectures, writing assignments, spelling, organizing time and work, using the library and giving written exams are some of the weaknesses of dyslexic students (Fuller et al. 2004; Mortimore & Crozier 2006).

Madriaga (2007) explored the experiences of sixteen students with dyslexia from one area in UK. She found that students got insufficient available information to make their transition from secondary to tertiary education, they have high stress and anxiety to be prepared for higher education and poor confidence in staff and other students to understand their needs. It may be that low participation rates of students with dyslexia in higher education may be at least attributable to these factors (MacGullagh, 2014).

A dominant theme appearing in the literature is the issue of disclosure. Jones and Hopkins (2003, p.102-103) emphasize that people surviving in a disabling society make decisions about disclosure based on their previous experiences. Students with mild dyslexia do not consider that they need extra support in their studies and so do not declare their dyslexia. Another possibility, however, is the fear of being stigmatized or being denied the admission to certain courses because of the dyslexia. Harrison (1998, p.3) suggested that there was a dilemma for some students in deciding that the advantages of 'coming out' in terms of access to services and support outweighed the possible disadvantages of labeling or social discrimination. It has been found that students with disabilities often want to be treated as normal students, and they will often not disclose their dyslexia in order to appear normal.

According to Denhart (2008) three issues appear in the autobiographical literature concerning the students with 'dyslexia type' difficulties: a) being misunderstood, b) needing to work harder than their peers and c) seeking out their own strategies for success in higher education. Students with dyslexia are misunderstood both intrapersonally as well as interpersonally (Rodis, Garrod & Boscarding 2001). Intrapersonally (self) misunderstanding appears commonly in the use of the term 'stupid' by themselves. The different way of thinking in dyslexia is transforming in disability. In addition, some students with dyslexia believe that they 'cheat' the system when they ask for accommodations in higher education (McNulty, 2003; Riddell & Widdon, 2006). Interpersonal misunderstanding includes classmates and staff who are unaware or dismissive of dyslexia and judge students with dyslexia as intellectually 'inferior' or 'lazy'. Several students recall that some professors have a really negative attitude towards them, even though they don't know them (Rodis, Garrod & Boscarding, 2001).

Another important theme in higher education comes from the heavy workload students with dyslexia experience well beyond the scope of their non-labeled peers. Because of the nature of their difficulties, they need much more time for reading papers and textbooks, writing assignments, studying for the exams, searching books in the library, preparing a presentation etc. Richards et al. (2000) underlines that "dyslexics not only require more brain lactate for the same reading task but they do so for longer period of time" (p.4).

Fuller et al. (2004) exploring the learning and assessment experiences of sixty students with dyslexia found that more than a quarter of them reported choosing courses according to features such as little written work, more practical elements and few or no exams. Two thirds reported difficulties learning in

lectures, including lecturers talking too quickly, visual material being removed too quickly, unwillingness of staff to allow them to tape-record the lectures or make for them 'reasonable adjustments'.

Few authors have reported the strengths that people with dyslexia bring with them in higher education. These include creativity, high-level reasoning skills, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, lateral thinking, patience, volition and determination (Lock & Layton, 2001; Madriaga, 2007; MacCullag, 2014). There are also autobiographical accounts about people with dyslexia who succeed in their chosen field despite the difficulties they have faced along the way (Collinson & Penketh, 2010).

Several authors summarize the practices which created a positive experience for students with learning disabilities in higher education and those which resulted in a negative experience (Holloway, 2001; Mullins & Preyde, 2013; MacCullagh, 2014). Positive experiences occurred when students have adequate funding for learning support needs, receive information at their entrance at university, have special advice and access to dyslexia tutor, receive assistance with getting exam arrangements in place, learn how to use the library systems. Academic staff must be aware of dyslexia and prepared to adapt the learning material to the learning needs arising from a student's disability. In addition, staff should be highly motivated to teach their subject.

Positive experiences for students with dyslexia in higher education are connected with the abandonment of the medical/deficit model of dyslexia to the adoption of an alternative 'social model' where dyslexia is increasingly recognized as a difference in cognition and learning (Michail, 2011). According to the social model of disability (Riddick 2001; Terzi, 2004), individuals may have impairments, but these are transformed into disabilities by the negative attitudes of the society they live in. Disability cannot be understood outside of the context where it arises because it is the result of social interaction. From this perspective, dyslexia has become a major difficulty only because of the move towards mass literacy and the consequent negative connotations attached to being 'illiterate'.

According to Holloway (2001), dyslexia in higher education can also be seen as the result from the limitations of the systems available for accessing course information. Thus, the learning needs of students with dyslexia are different and they should be viewed as part of a range of learning needs of all students. This perspective would be in contrast to the present *ad hoc* type of individual response, which resulted in students' feelings of frustration, exclusion and stress. Educational environments must be restructured so that all kinds of students can flourish within them, rather than being disabled by them (Matthews, 2009).

Dyslexia in Greek higher education

Dyslexia is a recognised disability in Greece from the 1990's. A recent law (3699/2008) legally recognizes students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) as a distinct category of students who need special educational support and teaching. Students with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia can enter higher education after special examination arrangements. An estimation of the prevalence of dyslexia in the Greek public universities was below 0.5% which means that students with dyslexia are vastly under-represented in higher education (Stampoltzis & Polychronopoulou, 2008).

In almost all Greek universities, provision takes place in the form of oral examinations. The needs of students with dyslexia are addressed on an individual basis, making provision reactive rather than proactive. Disparities exist between universities in relation to awareness of dyslexia. As a result, Greek institutions are in the very beginning of recognising the existence of dyslexic students in their population and they have not developed institutional policy to address the needs of these students (Stampoltzis & Polychronopoulou 2008).

An interview study by Stampoltzis and Polychronopouloy (2009) exploring the personal and educational experiences of sixteen students with dyslexia in Greek universities revealed that family support (especially their mother's help throughout the school years), peer relationships, extra private tuition and hard work were the factors that lead them to 'success'. Negative school experiences at the first years lowered their self-esteem but 'after school activities' (such as sports, arts etc.) and parental support help them to improve their self-image. The majority of the sixteen students had a difficult

academic time at university which means that Greek universities are not yet 'dyslexia friendly' presenting 'social and learning' barriers for students with different learning needs such as dyslexia.

Rationale of the study

Oliver (1996) suggests that research about people with learning disabilities (including dyslexia) has failed to involve them or reflect their perspectives seriously. Oliver and Barnes (1998) pointed out that the lived experience of dyslexic students has been missing from the literature. To date there has been limited research on dyslexic students' views and perceptions about teaching, learning and assessment in higher education. In order to support them, their voices need to be heard. This research aims to give voice to the learning experiences of students with dyslexia in a Greek university. It seeks their perceptions as to obstacles they face and how to overcome them in order to move effectively through higher education.

Method

The research was a small-scale study conducted within a university located in Athens, Greece. The university consists of four faculties including engineering courses and education. The chosen method was in-depth semi-structured interviews (Daly, Willis, Small, Green, Welch, Kealy & Hughes, 2007). The development of the interview was based on the review of the literature regarding students' experiences of dyslexia (Holloway 2001; Mullins & Preyde 2013). Each interview lasted 40-50 minutes and was audio-taped.

Participants

A convenience sample of students with dyslexia (seven males and three females) was recruited through posters distributed across the university in areas often used by students. Interested students contacted the researchers and an interview was arranged. The participants included were undergraduate students ($n=8$) and graduate students ($n=2$). Two students ($n=2$) was freshman, four students ($n=4$) were at the second year of study, two students ($n=2$) was in the third year and two students ($n=2$) were at the last year of their studies. At the time of the study 37 students have been formally declared their dyslexia within the university. The total student population in the specific academic year was 2,787 students, so the estimated prevalence of dyslexia was 1.33%.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through individual interviews. A qualitative data analysis was carried out. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis and constructivist grounded theory (Smith, 2004; Charmaz 2006; Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). The researcher identified the issues that needed to be discussed in the interview to encourage the participants to talk about their experiences of teaching, learning and assessment at university. The headings used for the findings are derived from data and are therefore student-led. Subsequent discussion with a second researcher resulted in modification of the categories, and also provided a means for increasing validity and inter-researcher reliability (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel 2003).

Results

Difficulties at university

The main difficulties that students mention pertain to note taking, spelling, structuring and writing assignments, work overload and passing the exams. Another obstacle mentioned by one student was the great audience (number of students) during the lecture.

Things happen very fast. I need time... What's more, listening to everyone and at the same time taking notes gives me a very hard time. I can't do two things at the same time. (15)

I will catch at once whatever the professor says if I am there and listening. But I have never written correctly whatever he/she is saying (14)

I have to write many assignments etc. and they are unstructured, although they are very good in terms of my specialty. I need my own time to write. Essentially, I need deep education to learn to write. Sometimes I write the one third of an essay during one day, and it is totally without grammar syntax. The greatest difficulty is that I am too tired. At that point, in fact, a terrible dyslexia gets into me...A terrible problem and I can't read my assignments very well. I will neither remember them nor understand them. I need many many hours to work. (13)

Because there are 100 people in each academic year, the professor can't distinguish students with dyslexia from the others and perhaps this is the biggest problem. The professor will do the lesson to satisfy the needs of the average students, so we (the dyslexic ones) will find it difficult. (16)

The difficulties are: constant attention deficit difficulties, 'chaotic' thoughts which make you end up having a lot of questions from the professor who sometimes may not have enough time to answer them, and of course the written exams. What I have as a problem is that I get lost, I think about too many things and I can't reach my final goal on my own. (12)

Staff's awareness of dyslexia

According to students, staff are not well informed about dyslexia, although staff from education faculty seem to be more aware.

I am not sure if lectures and professors are informed about dyslexia. Even if they are, some of them are not willing to deal with this issue. Especially today, because of the work they have, they don't want to spend time. (12)

Few of them are informed (mainly staff from the education faculty). These ask to be informed in advance if there are any students with dyslexia (13).

I believe that staff's training on dyslexia is not adequate. This has a negative result on me. I miss the opportunity to be treated equally with my colleagues. I think that staff should show their ability in practice. (15)

Staff attitudes towards dyslexia

According to students staff have neutral or negative attitude towards dyslexia. One student ($n=1$) claimed that professors treat students having in mind that dyslexia will not be a facilitating factor in the job market and as a result they will have to cope with the courses to the same extent as the other students.

...I don't care if you are dyslexic because it won't count out there (in the job market)', one professor said to me. (14)

We have a lot who don't care. They care about other things. They care about their career. So the only thing that can be done is the oral exam. Staff should know in advance who and how many are dyslexic. (13)

If you, as a professor, lower my level, I will never, as a student, increase it... You, as a professor, have to increase the level of knowledge. Professors of Technical Education Institutions and Higher Education Institutions could change schools and teach to another school each semester. What's more, divergent thought and imagination are missing. Professors need to use imagination too. And to think that what they do is worthwhile. (19)

Four of the participants ($n=4$) said that professors' attitude towards dyslexia depends on the professor's personality and experience, while two of the participants ($n=2$) claimed that professors' attitude is indifferent.

It depends on how professional is each person, how each one is going to take it, what it will happen etc.. Some treated me positively, some negatively, some didn't help me. To be honest, I no longer remember.. (110)

Now there are other people who don't care at all, they may even be ironic, it has clearly to do with the character. The thing is whether the person is narrow-minded and thinks that we are trying to 'cheat' the system to get a higher and easier grade. But this is not true. (18)

Comparing educators in different education level, six of the participants ($n=6$) claim that the professors' attitude at university is worse in comparison to high school.

Worse, in that it's not just that they discourage you, they don't leave you much room for negotiation. (14)

I would call it a little worse, because it is more impersonal at University. (11)

It is worse not only in the way of testing, but also in the way of teaching. In high school they adapt the content of the lesson to the total of students. They had our documents, so I didn't need to go and talk to them about dyslexia. They just saw who was dyslexic and adapted it not only to that student, but to the whole class to be comprehensible. And that was good. Here they don't adapt anything. (17)

One student ($n=1$) said that the professors' attitude at University is better and another one ($n=1$) that it depends on the person.

It's much better at university because there are many courses interesting and relevant for students with dyslexia, so professors also see the interest. In high school there were many subjects which were not interesting for those with dyslexia (19)

Disclosure of dyslexia at university

A female student claimed that she would not expose herself, because it would not have any facilitating result, whereas another one said that she has thought about it but she is ashamed. Three students ($n=3$) said that some professors, when they realized that the student is interested they help him/her.

Here at the department even if you wanted to talk, you will either not find the professor, or he/she will be busy and you can't catch up with him/her. There are two-three professors who know that I have dyslexia, although normally all the professors should be informed about which children are dyslexic, since you are obliged to bring the diagnosis. (16)

Some professors understood it and tried to help me, by explaining some exercises to me or by giving me notes sometimes. There are other professors who just made fun of me in many ways and in public. (11)

Most of the time you are afraid of speaking. They will think that you don't study, you don't care. So it's up to you to keep your fears or fight against them. Professors are busy here and they won't go into details. They also believe that Greek students want to pass exams without much effort. This is injustice for those who have dyslexia. As a result, professors believe that students with dyslexia should compete under the same circumstances with their classmates. (12)

Disclosure of dyslexia to students

All the participants said that they revealed their dyslexia to their fellow students.

I'm not hiding it. I have accepted it. We discuss and talk about our problems. (15)

To everyone. I'm not hiding anything and I'm not ashamed now. (13)

Yes, everybody knows it. I'm not ashamed of this. It's not a shame. (16)

Yes, I have observed that they are nicer to me. That is they help me a little with the notes or somewhere when I have difficulty. (17)

Supportive practices and types of accommodations

The only accommodation offered is 'one to one support' at the workshops, which ensures personal contact with the tutor. Three students ($n=3$) said that professors of pedagogical courses are more supportive and give more time.

I don't think there are accommodations. The only thing I have realized, the right to be examined orally. But not all the professors applied it. The Secretariat told me that I would be examined orally, but the professors told me if they want to. I haven't noticed any other facilitation. (17)

When I was in the fifth year they started to do supplementary courses (extra tuition). You have physics and a physics workshop. You have statistics and a statistics workshop. But this started from the first year so I didn't forestall as I was at the end of my studies. I had already passed these courses. (14)

X is a school with the best pedagogical department. Especially in the psycho-educational courses, professors are more willing to apply the oral exam accommodation and others which are related to dyslexia. As for the other courses, it depends on the person, the person's character. (18)

Exam arrangements

Another point made by all participants ($n=10$) is that not all members of the staff are willing to apply the oral exam accommodation. Students experienced arbitrarily different departmental practices in relation to exam accommodation.

The Secretariat doesn't help with such issues. They said we should bring the document so that it exists officially but the oral exam is the professor's decision. (13)

During exams many professors don't examine orally and it's a great difficulty. Some others criticize you if you ask for oral exam. They make negative comments. I feel embarrassed and ashamed, because it happens in front of the whole class. (11)

From my experience I have understood that I have the right by the law to be examined orally. The arrangement of oral exam is not applied uniformly at university. At the end staff gives or not the permission. I have not observed any other accommodation (17).

Proposed practices and accommodations for improvement

Students proposed dozens of practices to improve their educational experience. They suggested accommodations such as video recording of the lesson, having supplementary course material, good quality notes, using and updating e-class lessons, using a forum (where students can ask questions and lecturers should answer them), individualized tuition, oral examination, counseling services and raising staff awareness about dyslexia.

Videos would help. It is very important to see the lesson again in a little more analytical way. Or to see a lesson that you have missed, a difficult lesson to have time to see it again and again to understand. Dyslexic people need more time. It is important to cover the learning gaps and move on. (15)

The lecturers can 'videorecord' the lesson and he/she will upload it on the e-class platform so the students who missed it, they have the chance to attend it. I miss some parts for sure, or I don't have had enough time to take notes. Through the video I will run it up to there, I would see what I hadn't understood or even better something which I have noted down and I can't understand. None of the professors uploads videos except for one. (17)

In general, good and detailed notes by the professor are very helpful, it helps me to have a guide map, that is to have the steps, not the solution. (15)

E-class should be updated regularly, to have exercises, to have examples. Through the e-class the course can be explained a little more and can be as simple as possible even for a student with dyslexia to understand it. (16)

Use of technology. There are professors who are willing to help, who upload notes, explain more things, reply to their students. I would like a little more: To have something like a forum group where there could be discussion fields that each student who might have a question would upload it and everyone could see it. The professor would answer the question. (17)

I need the professor to take me step by step. In the workshops I learn better, there are three of us in every table and the professors have their assistants. In theory class (where there are about thirty people), I get a little lost. (11)

I would suggest professors find specific time in the week and we have a short lesson for students with dyslexia. So the professor will focus on you, you can ask him/her your questions. If you have questions during the lecture it is difficult for him/her to answer them because they are in a hurry to cover the material and they can't spend time on you. There should be small classes and the professors to have one and a half hour lessons with students with dyslexia to help them more. (16)

Some supplementary courses. A differentiated lesson where the professor knows or not that there is a dyslexic student in there. An adapted version of the lesson will benefit all my fellow students, not only me. (19)

More assistant staff in the workshops so that the professor could help because now there is only one lecturer per 10-12 students. He/she doesn't have enough time. I'm asking for too much, aren't I? If the professor has 2 assistants he/she could cope better, serve us with dyslexia better. (18)

I would take part in counseling sessions, to begin with at least because it is something I haven't come across all these years. So, yes, I would try it. (17)

Personal strategies to cope with dyslexia

All students have developed through years their own strategies to compensate for dyslexia. Five of the participants ($n=5$) mentioned that they work on the course material by making their own notes. Two participants ($n=2$) said that it is helpful when they make charts or diagrams from the notes. Two students ($n=2$) said that they memorize, understand, and learn better if they read the information many

times and then rewrite it. Another male student ($n=1$) mentioned that he has very good memory and it helps him when he notes down the most important. Two students ($n=2$) think that studying extracurricular books with topics on their specialty and literature is helpful.

I analyze everything. That's how my mind has learned to function in order to survive in the educational system. I analyze everything and then I synthesize it. I do this in every course and in my life generally. Charts, pros-cons, bullets etc. The computer helps me when I do assignments with spelling, it also helps with arithmetic a lot, especially the Excel you press two numbers, you show the relation to it and it makes it on its own. (14)

Techniques? What helps me is just write on paper what I have learnt many times. I study and then I write again what I remember. I write it in sentences. We also have assignments at school. I prefer individual than group assignments. (11)

In theoretical (courses) I try to write down 1 sentence out of the 10 that the professor says. I note down the important. I note it down with a highlighter, I underline if it is from the book etc. and then I write it using encoded words. I keep the most important ones, the gist. (13)

Until two years ago I used to read many books. Extracurricular ones. I have read books relevant to cars, planes, motorbikes, engineering topics. I have read books such as the Alchemist and literature..I understood most books after the second or third reading. I also like writing, designing and doing maths.

I read aloud and when I am tired I have someone else read it for me. If the topic has been made into a documentary...I may have watched it one, two, three time. I gain as much knowledge as possible in this way. I did some research and I looked for a program that could read for me everything on the computer. I bought the program, I put everything there and I listen to it. (18)

Study groups and peer tutoring

All the participants ($n=10$) think that study groups or peer tutoring are good ideas, but they find difficulties in practice. As a result, they have ended up preferring individual assignments and individual study.

I vote for collaboration because I think that two three 'minds' think better than one and they can be more productive and efficient. The problem is that this not happens in practice. It is our fault. Both professors and us. (13)

I prefer individual work because cooperation is difficult. It would be a group of five and only two do the work. So there is no reason for collaboration. Apart from this, I like group work because you take your thoughts further, one has an idea, the other another idea. The assignment is done very well in this way. (14)

I believe that group work needs mature persons who know to share with each other. If there are 'suitable' people, it would be very easy for all the students. I have tried it but it hasn't worked, because the company didn't feet well. (17)

Positive aspects of dyslexia

Finally, four participants ($n=4$) mention that dyslexia is not only a drawback but something different that they can take advantage of it:

It's a shame that some children can't understand that dyslexia is not something bad but a gift which, if you try to exploit properly, will give you a lot. (16)

I think that dyslexia is divergent thought, I think a little differently. I can get over things. It's a kind of gift. It is up to us to use something for our sake.. I try to use it for my sake. (14)

We shouldn't view dyslexia as a flaw. It is very important to try. For me getting my degree will make me twice as happy as another child. (15)

Discussion

The findings of the present study provide insight into the experience of students with dyslexia in a Greek university from the perspective of students. Students admit that they experience difficulties at university, showing that dyslexia is a life-long disability with many similar characteristics in specific age groups irrespective of the country or culture. It seems self-evident that students with dyslexia meet challenges relating mainly to learning and assessment in higher education (Holloway 2001; Mortimore & Crozier 2006).

The themes developed so far suggest that the university experience of individuals with dyslexia is dynamic and multifaceted. The participants reported that the university provided very few accommodations to meet their needs. At the same time, they reported the presence of barriers that made the university experience difficult and stressful. Students' negative experiences were the consequence of practice that sees dyslexia as the problem of the individual. Confirmation of the students' experiences is found in the existing international literature (Holloway 2001; Mullins & Preyde 2013; MacCullagh 2014).

While many of the experiences of students with dyslexia in this institution are unique and are influenced by the university's policy and ethos, there are a number of issues that relate to wider concerns of students with dyslexia within the higher educational system as a whole. Five areas were seen as being the source of most concern in the present study: disclosure, access to information, implementation of the law, awareness of staff, inclusive teaching accommodations. According to MacCullagh (2014, p. 8) three key themes emerge for students with dyslexia with regard to institutional challenges: attitudinal challenges, resource challenges and policy and administrative challenges.

Some students mention that the implementation of certain accommodations (such as oral exams) was contingent on the subjective preferences of their professors or other accommodations may need to be negotiated with them (Mullins & Preyde, 2013). A recommendation implied from the above finding is the adoption of the Universal Instruction Design (UID) (McGuire, Scott & Shaw 2006), an approach to teaching which is designed to be inclusive to all students and all kind of learners. Taking actions to provide various methods of presenting and assessing information when planning courses has been found to minimize the need for many accommodations (Scott, McGuire & Shaw 2001).

Raising awareness of staff emerges as a priority from the students' accounts because their success is determined by the type and quality of interactions they have with their instructors. Some of the students felt reluctant to ask for help because they felt that they were being a nuisance and staff would not have time to spend with them. The validity of dyslexia sometimes can be disputed by staff with little understanding and knowledge about dyslexia. In addition, professors may not be able to understand the full extent of students' limitations because of the dyslexia. Academic staff need to be familiar with the various models of dyslexia as well as the rationale behind these models. They need clear, accessible and comprehensive information about dyslexia (Shevlin, Kenny & McNeela 2004; Wadlington & Wadlington 2005; Cameron and Nunkoosing 2012).

Another theme appearing in the students' interviews is the issue of disclosure. Students in the present study have a dilemma whether to declare dyslexia or not and at which point in their student career.

According to Riddick (2001) disclosure could be made at different points for example on the application form, at interview, in the first meeting with the tutor or at the point of their first (or subsequent) failure. Disclosure is a difficult process because there seems to be a 'contention' between confidentiality and effective sharing of information about 'special needs'. Students are not willing to disclose dyslexia because of the lack of understanding or negative perceptions of the staff members. Passing as normal does not eliminate the disability. On the other hand, students with 'invisible difficulties' must disclose their disability in order to receive accommodations (Matthews, 2009). Students in the present study feel free to disclose dyslexia only to their fellow students.

The social environment of the university and peer support is crucial in making educational establishments 'enabling' (Onley & Brockelman 2003). Academic staff's skills in managing all kind of learners and learning environments are critical in promoting inclusion at university (Matthews, 2009). While there is a pressure for the university to respond to the principle of equal opportunities, how and to what extent they are implemented in practice remains unclear, and up to the discretion of the institution. It is therefore appropriate that a Greek law of inclusive education should be voted and implemented to include institutes of higher education. In addition, it seems that an individually focused model of dyslexia is adopted so far within the Greek educational system reflecting a medical/ deficit model of dyslexia. It is time for the university to shift from the deficit model to the social model of disability by adjusting the context rather than the learner, producing consequent positive impact for all learners. Changes should be made to eliminate the social and organizational barriers in students' transition to higher education and during the years of their studies (Riddick 2001; Mortimore 2012).

An optimistic finding of the present research is that some students with dyslexia report on their own the 'positive aspects' of dyslexia. They see dyslexia as a different way of thinking which endows the person with several career advantages, such as creativity, visual thinking, practical and problem-solving skills. These skills are difficult to evaluate using conventional examination or assessment procedures. Professors should adapt teaching and point to solutions that take the student's learning style into account (McGuire, Scott & Shaw 2006). In addition, students in the present study make dozens of practical recommendations on how to improve their learning experience. This means that students realize that their difficulties in a certain degree are the results of the limitations of the system. An accessible learning environment would benefit all kind of students. According to Holloway (2001), there is a need to enable students to advocate for themselves where they experience discriminatory practices, as well as a need for someone to advocate on their behalf at departmental level.

Conclusion

This study makes a small contribution to the literature about the university experiences of students with dyslexia in Greece. There seems to be much room for improvement in key areas so that students with dyslexia will be able to fulfill their intellectual potential and participate in higher education as any other able and motivated adult. Because of the small number of the sample, students' experience may not be reflective of a universal experience. Data were also obtained solely from interviews. In future studies, quantitative data (such as students' subjects, grades and completion rates) should be combined with qualitative data. Larger studies including students from different universities and departments will give a clearer picture of the situation in Greece. Although this was a small-scale study, it is hoped to be useful to staff in Greek universities to make them aware of the potential adjustments that may be required for students with dyslexia as well as the important role they play in presenting new routes towards more inclusive education.

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