

CHALLENGES IN TEACHING DYSLEXIC STUDENTS: A TEACHER EXPERIENCE STUDY IN TETOVO MUNICIPALITY

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Abstract

This qualitative exploratory study addresses both the challenges and needs of primary and secondary teachers in Tetovo Municipality to teach children with dyslexia. Based on semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers, the findings of the study point to low levels of understanding of dyslexia since most teachers had little familiarity with it which was acquired in an informal manner rather than at university or through in-service courses. The results emphasize the following problem areas: identification and diagnostics of dyslexia, lack of adapted teaching methods and resources, high workload, and cooperation with parents, as well. Teachers stressed their urgent need to receive practical and comprehensive training on dyslexia, the use of assistive technology as well as psycho-pedagogical support in school. The study also emphasises teachers' preoccupation for the possible negative consequences that dyslexia entails both on academic achievements and on students' psychological and social status. The results point to the necessity of systemic interventions at the local and national level, promotion in teacher training curricula and favorable policies.

Keywords: Dyslexia, teachers, challenges, training, needs, Municipality of Tetovo, inclusive education

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Significance of the Study: Dyslexia, a neurobiological-based specific learning difficulty, is defined as a deficit in the accuracy and fluency of word recognition and poor understanding decoding and spelling (Shaywitz, 2003; Snowling, 2000). These difficulties are usually associated with a reduced capacity in the phonological process of language, which is out of keeping with other cognitive abilities folk, and cannot be specifically explained by poor language-learning opportunities. The consequences of dyslexia are more than academic. Schools can impact students' self-esteem, their emotional well-being and social interactions.

The Republic of North Macedonia, as a number of other countries does not have developed education system to support students with special educational needs and difficulties related to dyslexia. Teachers, who are key figures in the education dynamics, can recognize and support such students and incorporate them. Yet, their qualifications and training to meet the needs of dyslexic students may be inadequate (Balci, 2019; Washburn et al., 2011). Several research, including the one Balci (2019) conducted in Turkey, have shown that teachers are not only unprepared but also struggle with recognizing and working with dyslexia relying on informal resources of information. The city of Tetovo, being a significant educational centre in the Republic of North Macedonia, provides a distinctive context for studying this matter. Knowing the particular problems teachers in this place bear is vital in order to create greater educational interventions and policies. This research article intends to find out the experiences and perceptions of teachers working in Tetovo, what kind of barriers they face, what are their needs for support and training.

1.2. *Purpose of the Study:* The main purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the challenges faced by primary and secondary school teachers in the Municipality of Tetovo when teaching dyslexic students, as well as to identify their needs for training and professional support.

1.3. *Research Questions:*

- What are the knowledge and understandings of teachers in the Municipality of Tetovo about dyslexia?
 - What are the main challenges that teachers face in the process of teaching dyslexic students?
 - What strategies and methods do teachers use to support dyslexic students, and how effective do they consider them?
 - What are the specific needs of teachers for training and professional support related to dyslexia?

1.4. *Hypotheses:*

H1. Teachers in the Municipality of Tetovo have limited and/or insufficient knowledge about dyslexia, which is mainly acquired from informal sources.

H2. Teachers in the Municipality of Tetovo face significant challenges in identifying and effectively teaching dyslexic students.

H3. There is a significant and urgent need for specific training and professional support for teachers in the Municipality of Tetovo regarding dyslexia.

H4. Dyslexia has a negative impact on students' academic performance, self-esteem and emotional-social well-being, and teachers are aware of this impact.

1.5. *Significance of the Study:*

This study is significant because:

- It contributes to the existing literature by providing a specific perspective on the challenges of teachers in the context of the Municipality of Tetovo, an area that lacks research.
- It identifies the concrete obstacles that teachers face, providing valuable information for educational policy makers.
- It provides data for teachers' professional development programs, helping to design better and more targeted trainings for dyslexia.
- It improves awareness of dyslexia in the educational community and helps to create a more inclusive environment for dyslexic students.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Definition and Characteristics of Dyslexia:* There are various factors that positively and negatively affect learning. These factors are related to the student, learning strategies, teaching materials and learning environment, and they facilitate or hinder learning. It is assumed that every child who does not have problems with these factors will be successful in school life. However, there are many children who experience school failure without any obvious problems (Altuntaş, 2010; Bacanlı, 2004). These children, although they do not have mental, visual, auditory, emotional or social problems, may have difficulties in one or all of the areas such as reading,

writing, speaking, listening, seeing and arithmetic (Şenel, 1998). As Morgan (1896), one of the first scientists who was interested in dyslexia, pointed out, the problems experienced by these children, who are sometimes much more successful in different areas, but have problems in a certain area, are called learning difficulties.

A learning disability is a disorder that involves deficits in one or more processes related to the understanding or use of verbal or written language, and as a result, difficulties in the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, or performing mathematical operations. Learning disabilities have subtypes such as reading disorder (dyslexia), written expression disorder (dysgraphia), and mathematics disorder (dyscalculia). In the United States, approximately 80% of individuals with learning disabilities are dyslexic, while the remaining 20% are individuals with other learning disabilities. These rates indicate that the relationship between dyslexia and learning disabilities is quite strong (Balci, 2015; Lerner, 1989).

Reading is not a skill that comes naturally to an individual. Reading is one of the most difficult and complex skills to acquire in human life. While everyone who does not have a neurological disability can speak, not everyone can read. The reason is that reading requires more subtle visual, auditory, and mental processes than speaking. Learning to read is a cognitive and linguistic skill and can generally be acquired with external support. It is linguistic and cognitive because during the language processing process, certain areas of the brain and the existing cognitive reserves of the brain are used. Therefore, learning to read has a cognitive-linguistic structure. According to the findings of the National Reading Panel in the United States of America (USA), research deals with five fundamental skills during learning to read. These are: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension. Individuals learn to read by going through these processes, through direct, systematic, and understandable reading education. While most students go through this process without problems, some of them encounter difficulties. This situation, where problems are encountered in reading even though there is no known problem, is called dyslexia (Balci, 2017).

Learning to read and write is a process that begins in the preschool period and continues in primary school. In RNM, it begins with the early literacy phase in the preschool period and the foundation is laid with the process of sensing sounds. Reading education begins fully in the first grade of primary school. However, dyslexia can also be detected in the preschool period. It is expected that experienced and informed educators about early literacy will be more successful in detecting these students. However, the study by Ergül et al. (2014) shows that a significant part of preschool teachers do not have sufficient knowledge about early literacy and their classroom practices do not support early literacy skills. Doğan (2013) and Altuntaş (2010) pointed out that classroom teachers also do not feel adequate for dyslexia.

According to research conducted in English-speaking societies, dyslexia affects 3% to 10%, sometimes even up to 20% of these societies (Akhtar, 2008; Snowling, 2000). The method of intervention for dyslexia, which has such a wide scope of influence, is educational. These students can largely overcome their difficulties with reading programs prepared according to their needs. The greatest responsibility in this educational treatment process falls on educators. A teacher who carefully follows the reading experiences of his students will ensure the early identification of the individual with dyslexia. It is very important that a student with dyslexia, identified by the third grade of primary school, has started the process of educational intervention and has achieved successful results, reaches equal levels of academic success with other students and does not lag behind them from a psychological point of view. Otherwise, an individual who has not learned to read and has fallen far behind the class average will face psychological negativity and will feel

inadequate. Hellendoorn and Ruijsenaars (2000) have stated that children with dyslexia have social and emotional problems that continue into adulthood and that individuals with positive experiences in primary school accept their disability more easily. Riddick, Sterling, Farmer and Morgan (1999) mention that dyslexics have low self-esteem even during the university period. Ingesson (2007) emphasizes the importance of early diagnosis when describing the negative impact that dyslexia has on individuals.

The role of teachers is essential in developing a positive self-esteem in children with dyslexia, as Humphrey (2003) also emphasizes. Teachers, through their work, can create academic progress in students (Exley, 2003). Therefore, educators' awareness of dyslexia is very important. However, we come across studies that show that teachers' awareness of dyslexia is weak.

Washburn, Joshi, and Binks-Cantrell (2011) found that teachers do not have the necessary information to treat dyslexia. Aladwani and Al Shaye (2012), in their study in Kuwait, mention that most teachers do not have the necessary education, knowledge, and skills to identify students with dyslexia in the classroom.

In the RNM, dyslexia is a very new concept and has recently attracted the attention of educators. Academic studies in this field are increasing day by day. Therefore, this study, which aims to reveal the awareness of educators in the municipality of Tetovo about dyslexia, is important in determining the training needs of teachers regarding dyslexia.

2.2. The Impact of Dyslexia on Teaching and Learning: The most important process that will initiate dyslexia education is the process of diagnosing the individual. During this process, the individual with dyslexia is identified and the level of his dyslexia is determined, preparing a personalized education plan. Early diagnosis has an extremely important role in the fight against this difficulty. Schatschneider and Torgesen (2004) emphasize that early diagnosis and early intervention in the field of phonological awareness are among the most essential steps for the treatment of children at risk of dyslexia. As Hurford, Schauf, Blach, Moore and Bunce (1994) mention in their studies, preliminary identification of reading difficulties is possible with early diagnosis. Therefore, educators should give due importance to the process of early diagnosis and identification.

Because studies on dyslexia in America and Europe started much earlier than in Turkey, much more professional steps have been taken in the diagnostic process. In these countries, individuals with dyslexia are diagnosed with standardized tests that can be used throughout the country and have many varieties, obtaining reliable results. However, in Turkey, there is no talk of preliminary and final assessments with standardized tests for individuals with dyslexia. In the country, problems are also encountered in the early identification of these individuals. In Turkey, there are many students who have reached the 3rd, 4th and 5th grades, even in high school, but still cannot read or have difficulties in reading. Although there are problems in diagnosing dyslexia in educational settings in Turkey, there is no regular and standardized work carried out to determine whether individuals with reading problems are dyslexic and at what stages they have problems (Balci, 2015).

In order to identify these individuals, a more subjective diagnostic-assessment process is experienced in schools, based on the observations of teachers and Instructional Research Centers, as well as the results of the assessment tools prepared by them. This affects the reliability of the assessment results. Gür (2013) mentions that there is no specific test for the identification of dyslexics implemented in Turkey. The identification and assessment of these individuals is left more to the initiative of teachers and it is expected that the reading difficulty of the individual is

revealed through their personal observations and assessments. Meanwhile, Doğan (2013) in his study has found that Turkish language teachers and classroom teachers are insufficient in identifying students with reading difficulties. Dyslexia in Turkey is a newly discovered concept socially and has managed to attract the attention of educators in recent years. Therefore, the number of scientific research in the field of dyslexia in the country is currently very low. The lack of studies affects the existence of trained academic staff, and this situation prevents the inclusion of this subject in the teacher candidate programs in universities (Balçı, 2015). As a result, teachers who do not have knowledge in this field feel inadequate during their professional careers. Doğan (2013) emphasized that Turkish language teachers and classroom teachers do not have sufficient knowledge about reading difficulties. Çuhadar (2006) mentioned that although 77.8% of teachers teaching grades 1-5 in Turkey recognize the importance of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) that they should prepare for the education of students with special needs, they do not implement them. Ünal (2010) emphasizes that classroom teachers cannot devote sufficient time to the education of these students and do not fully implement IEPs. These problems that teachers experience in the evaluation and implementation phase are thought to be mainly due to the lack of training in this area. Since they do not have sufficient knowledge about educational practices, they cannot provide the necessary education to these students. Baydık, Ergül and Kudret (2012) in their studies emphasized that classroom teachers should receive in-service training on reading difficulties. Cankaya and Korkmaz (2012) in their study emphasized that the training that classroom teachers have received on inclusive education practices is insufficient. Sığırtmaç, Hoş and Abbak (2011) mention that preschool teachers have deficiencies in knowledge regarding inclusive education and that the sources of these deficiencies are personal disabilities and the lack of sufficient special education classes and practices during their university education.

In conclusion, the shortage of teachers in this field leaves these students behind, leaving individuals who cannot learn to read or have difficulty reading, as well as their families, facing many problems in their educational lives. Identifying the problems of teachers regarding dyslexia within the Turkish education system, solving these problems and increasing the quality of education provided to these students, is one of the most important steps that can be taken. Therefore, this current study aims to identify the training needs of teachers regarding dyslexia.

This study was prepared with the aim of examining teachers' views on dyslexia and identifying their training needs regarding dyslexia. In order to achieve this aim, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. Is the education on dyslexia that teachers have received at university sufficient?
2. Is the education on dyslexia that teachers have received in in-service training sufficient?
3. Where did teachers get the existing information on dyslexia?
4. What is the level of teachers' knowledge about dyslexia?
5. What are the teachers' competencies in relation to the education to be provided to students with dyslexia?

2.3. The Role and Preparation of Teachers in Supporting Dyslexic Students: The role of teachers in developing a positive self-esteem in children with dyslexia is essential. As Humphrey (2003) points out, teachers, through their work, can promote academic progress in students (Exley, 2003). This makes educators' awareness of dyslexia extremely important. However, studies show that teachers' awareness of dyslexia is often poor. For example, Washburn, Joshi, and Binks-Cantrell (2011) found that teachers lack the necessary information to address dyslexia. A study by

Aladwani and Al Shaye (2012) in Kuwait highlighted that most teachers lack the education, knowledge, and skills necessary to identify dyslexic students in the classroom.

The process of diagnosing the individual is the most important step in initiating dyslexia education. This includes identifying the dyslexic individual and determining the level of dyslexia in order to prepare a personalized education plan. Early diagnosis plays an essential role in the fight against this difficulty. Schatschneider and Torgesen (2004) emphasize that early diagnosis and intervention in phonological awareness are among the most essential steps for the treatment of children at risk of dyslexia. Hurford, Schauf, Blaich, Moore, and Bunce (1994) also mention that preliminary identification of reading difficulties is possible with early diagnosis. Therefore, educators should give due importance to the process of early diagnosis and identification. In countries such as America and Europe, where studies on dyslexia have started much earlier, much more professional steps have been taken in the diagnostic process. Here, individuals with dyslexia are diagnosed with standardized tests and reliable results are obtained. However, in RNM, for example, there is no talk of preliminary and final assessments with standardized tests for dyslexic individuals. Teachers often rely on subjective observations and personal assessments, affecting the reliability of assessment results. This often results in insufficient identification of students with reading difficulties, and language teachers and classroom teachers are often inadequate in this regard.

Dyslexia is a relatively new concept in RNM and has only attracted the attention of educators in recent years. This has resulted in a limited number of scientific research and, consequently, in a shortage of trained academic staff. This situation hinders the inclusion of dyslexia in university programs for teacher candidates. As a result, teachers often feel inadequate in this area throughout their professional careers.

Furthermore, even when teachers are aware of the importance of individualized education programs for students with special needs, there is a significant gap between knowledge and implementation.

To address these issues, suggestions are that classroom teachers should receive in-service training on reading difficulties. Also, the training received by classroom teachers on inclusive education practices is insufficient. This lack of training also extends to preschool teachers, who often have gaps in knowledge about inclusive education due to the lack of special education subjects and practices during their university education.

In conclusion, the shortage of teachers in this field leads to the neglect of these students, leaving individuals who cannot learn to read or have reading difficulties, as well as their families, facing many problems in educational life. Identifying and addressing teachers' problems related to dyslexia within the Turkish education system is essential to improve the quality of education provided to these students. Therefore, this study aims to identify teachers' training needs related to dyslexia.

2.4. Challenges for Teachers in Teaching Students with Dyslexia: Teachers are pivotal in both the academic and emotional development of all students, but most especially in those identified with dyslexia. However, they commonly face significant challenges in providing appropriate support due to gaps in preparation and resources.

One of the main challenges is a general lack of knowledge about dyslexia among educators. According to Washburn, Joshi, and Binks-Cantrell (2011), it has been mentioned that teachers usually do not have appropriate information that will help them deal with dyslexia. This results in an inability to identify dyslexic students within the classroom, as stated by a study in Kuwait by

Aladwani and Al Shaye (2012), where most teachers did not have enough skills for this purpose. Even in Turkey, where dyslexia is a new concept, a study by Doğan (2013) indicated that Turkish language teachers and classroom teachers were found insufficient in determining those students who have reading problems. As a result of this shortcoming in knowledge, any student with dyslexia is faced with many problems in his or her educational life. Dealing with dyslexia within the classroom setting calls for an approach characterized by appropriate knowledge, skills, and resources among teachers. Ensuring quality and inclusive education among all students, including dyslexic ones, calls for investment in teacher preparation and support.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design: This study has used a qualitative research approach, adopting an exploratory case study design. This design was chosen to gain a deep understanding of teachers' experiences, perceptions and challenges related to dyslexia, highlighting their voices and providing a detailed insight into the specific context of the Municipality of Tetovo.

3.2. Study Population and Sample: The target population involves all teachers of public primary and secondary schools in the Municipality of Tetovo. Participants will be selected using purposive sampling. The selection will include: experienced teachers in education, teaching different grades and subjects, such as language, mathematics, and history; and teachers who have had or currently have students suspected of having dyslexia or those who have been diagnosed with dyslexia. Interviews are foreseen with 15-20 teachers, a number considered adequate to reach data saturation in qualitative studies.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments: Data were collected using two instruments:

1. Teacher Information Form: A structured form to collect demographic data such as age, gender, length of service, subject taught, and experience with dyslexic students.

2. Semi-Structured Interview Form: This form contains open-ended and follow-up questions, allowing teachers to express their thoughts and experiences in depth. The questions are designed to address the research questions of the study, covering knowledge about dyslexia, challenges in teaching, strategies used, and needs for training and support.

Teachers were contacted and their participation is voluntary. Each teacher was fully informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, in a quiet and private environment within the schools or according to the teacher's preference. The expected duration of each interview was about 30-45 minutes.

3.5. Data Analysis: The data collected from the interviews were transcribed. The data analysis was carried out using content analysis. This process included several stages:

- Repeated Reading: Reading the transcriptions to gain an overall understanding.
- Coding: Identifying important fragments of the text and assigning codes to them.
- Categorizing: Grouping similar codes into subthemes and then into main themes.
- Identifying Patterns: Looking for connections and patterns between different themes.
- Interpretation: Giving meaning to the findings in relation to the research questions.

To increase the reliability of the analysis, coding by a co-researcher, or re-coding of a portion of the data after a certain period of time, may be used.

3.6. *Ethical Considerations:* The study followed ethical research standards and ensured:

- Informed Consent: All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and provided written informed consent.
- Anonymity and Confidentiality: The identity of participants remains confidential. Names have been replaced with codes (e.g., Teacher 1, Teacher 2). Data will be stored securely and will be used for research purposes only.
- Right to Withdraw: Participants will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences.

4. Data Analysis and Results (Findings)

This section presents the analysis of data collected from interviews with teachers in schools in the Municipality of Tetovo. The data were analyzed using the content analysis method to identify main themes and subthemes that reveal the challenges and experiences of teachers in teaching dyslexic students. The findings are structured into several main categories, accompanied by direct quotes from the interviews to illustrate and deepen the meaning.

4.1. *Demographic Information of Participants:* 15 teachers from different primary and secondary schools in the Municipality of Tetovo participated in the study. The demographic profile of the participants was as follows:

- Gender: 12 women (80%), 3 men (20%)
- Years of experience:
 - 1-5 years: 3 teachers (20%)
 - 6-15 years: 8 teachers (53.3%)
 - Over 15 years: 4 teachers (26.7%)
- Subject taught:
 - Class teacher (primary education): 7 teachers (46.7%)
 - Subject teacher (lower/upper secondary education – e.g., Albanian language, mathematics, history): 8 teachers (53.3%)
- Ability to identify dyslexia (self-assessment):
 - Yes, I have basic knowledge: 5 teachers (33.3%)
 - I have heard, but I am not sure how it is identified: 7 teachers (46.7%)
 - No, I have no knowledge: 3 teachers (20%)

4.2. *Teachers' Knowledge and Understanding of Dyslexia:* Teachers displayed varying levels of knowledge about dyslexia, with a tendency towards superficial knowledge and often based on personal experiences or informal sources.

-Lack of Formal Training: Most teachers (11 out of 15) stated that they had not received any formal training specific to dyslexia during their studies or after employment.

Teacher 3 (10 years of experience): “We have not had any in-depth courses on dyslexia in the faculty. We have just heard it as a term. Everything I know is more from experience and reading online.”

Teacher 8 (6 years of experience): “I have received some general training for children with special needs, but nothing specific to dyslexia. I feel unprepared.”

-Informal Sources of Information: A significant number of teachers (8 out of 15) mentioned movies, articles on the internet or conversations with colleagues as the main sources of information about dyslexia. This finding is in line with similar regional studies. (e.g., Balci, 2019).

Teacher 5 (age 15): "I watched an Indian movie 'Like Stars on Earth' and it really helped me understand what dyslexia is. It changed my perspective."

Confusion with Other Disorders: Some teachers (6 out of 15) showed confusion between dyslexia and other learning disorders or AD/HD, or simply considered it as "laziness" or lack of commitment.

Teacher 12 (age 20): "Sometimes I think that children just don't focus or don't want to work, but it could also be dyslexia. It's hard to tell the difference when you're not an expert."

4.3. *Challenges in Teaching Dyslexic Students:* Teachers highlighted a number of challenges they face in the classroom, reflecting the lack of specialized support and training.

-Difficulty in Identification and Diagnosis: Almost all teachers (14 out of 15) expressed difficulty in identifying dyslexic students in the absence of formal diagnosis.

Teacher 1 (8 years of experience): "We suspect, but we do not have the tools or experts in the school to make an accurate diagnosis. Parents are often hesitant to go to a psychologist."

-Lack of Differentiated Teaching Strategies: Most teachers (13 out of 15) feel inadequate in implementing effective methods and strategies specific to dyslexic students.

Teacher 6 (age 4): "I have a student who I know has dyslexia, but I just don't know how to approach him individually without neglecting the others. The book and curriculum are standardized."

Teacher 9 (age 12): "I tried giving them extra materials, but they often lose motivation. It should be something simpler and more visual, but I don't have the materials or the training."

-High Class Load and Lack of Time: The large number of students in the class (average 25-30 students) and time constraints were cited as the main obstacles by 10 teachers.

Teacher 4 (age 18): "How can you dedicate time to each child individually when you have 30 students and only 45 minutes? It's almost impossible."

Lack of Adapted Didactic Materials: Teachers highlighted (11 out of 15) the lack of specific materials for dyslexia in Albanian or Macedonian.

Teacher 7 (9 years of experience): "There are no workbooks, cards, or software adapted for dyslexic students. We have to create them ourselves, but we don't have the time or resources."

-Collaboration with Parents: Some teachers (7 out of 15) expressed difficulties in collaborating with parents, who often do not accept or understand the nature of dyslexia.

Teacher 10 (14 years of experience): "Parents often think it is their or the child's fault, or they do not see it as a real problem. It is challenging to convince them to seek help."

4.4. *Training and Support Needs:* Teachers expressed a clear and urgent need for professional training and support.

-In-depth Dyslexia Training: All teachers (15 out of 15) emphasized the need for detailed training on the definition, symptoms, diagnosis and teaching strategies for dyslexia.

Teacher 2 (7 years of experience): "I need practical training, not just theory. How to recognize, how to intervene, how to work with letters, how to help with math."

-Training on the Use of Materials and Technology: Teachers require training on the use of assistive devices and technologies.

Teacher 13 (11 years of experience): "I have heard about apps and programs that can help, but I don't know how to use them. A practical training would be very good."

-Psycho-Pedagogical Support in School: Most teachers (12 out of 15) emphasized the need for the presence of psychologists and specialist pedagogues in schools.

Teacher 15 (age 22): "We need a school psychologist or a special pedagogue who can work directly with the children and advise us."

-Reducing the Number of Students in the Class: A recurring need (9 out of 15 teachers) was to reduce the number of students in classes where there are students with special needs.

Teacher 14 (age 17): "If we had fewer students, we would be able to deal more individually with each one, including those with dyslexia."

4.5. Impact of Dyslexia on Students and Teacher Perception: Teachers expressed concern about the negative impact of dyslexia on students' academic, social and emotional aspects, emphasizing the importance of support.

-Decline in Academic Performance: All teachers (15 out of 15) reported a clear impact on grades and reading/writing skills.

Teacher 11 (5 years of experience): "They often fall behind in reading, and this affects all subjects. We see that they try, but it is very difficult for them."

-Social and Emotional Problems: Teachers noted that dyslexic students often experience low self-confidence, anxiety and social isolation (10 out of 15).

Teacher 5 (15 years of experience): "Many of them become withdrawn, they don't want to read aloud in front of the class. They feel embarrassed and this emotional impact hurts me the most."

5. Discussion

5.1. Discussion of Key Findings: This study, conducted with 15 teachers from primary and secondary schools in the Municipality of Tetovo, reveals a clear picture of the challenges and needs that educators face in supporting students with dyslexia. The findings highlight a significant gap between classroom reality and teacher preparation, highlighting the importance of well-thought-out interventions.

a) Lack of Formal Preparation and Superficial Knowledge

The demographic profile of the participants, with a predominance of female teachers (80%) and a balanced distribution of seniority in the job and subject taught, provides a broad perspective. However, what is striking is the low level of teachers' knowledge and self-esteem about identifying dyslexia: only 33.3% reported basic knowledge, while almost half (46.7%) had heard of it but were not sure how to identify it, and 20% had no knowledge at all.

This lack of identification skills is consistent with the findings that the vast majority of teachers (11 out of 15) had not received any formal training specific to dyslexia, either during their university studies or after employment. This supports the assertion of Teacher 3, who with 10 years of experience in the profession, stated that everything she knew came from personal experience and reading online. Teacher 8 also highlighted that general training for children with special needs was not specific to dyslexia, leaving her unprepared.

As a result of this lack of formal training, teachers often rely on informal sources of information, such as films ("Like Stars on Earth", mentioned by Teacher 5) or conversations with colleagues. This, although showing individual initiative, can lead to confusion with other learning disorders

or AD/HD, or even to the perception of dyslexia as “laziness” or lack of commitment, as observed in 6 out of 15 teachers. Teacher 12 clearly expressed this dilemma, considering it difficult to make the distinction without expertise.

b) Teaching Challenges and the Need for Practical Support

The findings highlight a number of practical challenges faced by teachers. Almost all teachers (14 out of 15) expressed difficulties in identifying and diagnosing dyslexia in the absence of formal support. This is reflected in the comments of Teacher 1, who highlighted the lack of tools and experts in the school and the reluctance of parents to seek professional help.

Another major challenge is the lack of differentiated teaching strategies. Most teachers (13 out of 15) feel inadequate in implementing specific methods for dyslexic students, emphasizing that the standard curriculum and the large number of students in the class (average 25-30) make individual intervention difficult. Teacher 6 highlighted the difficulty of providing an individual approach without neglecting other students, while Teacher 9 mentioned the lack of visual materials and training. This is a universal challenge for teachers and recognized by numerous studies.

The heavy class load and lack of time were mentioned as essential obstacles by 10 teachers, making it almost impossible to provide individual attention, as expressed by Teacher 4. Also, the lack of adapted didactic materials in Albanian or Macedonian was a sore point for 11 out of 15 teachers, forcing them to create them themselves without having the time or resources.

Collaboration with parents also presents a challenge, as many parents often do not accept or understand the nature of dyslexia, as noted by 7 teachers. This makes it difficult to coordinate support between home and school.

c) Urgent Need for Training and Systematic Support

Teachers expressed a clear and urgent need for in-depth training on dyslexia, including symptoms, diagnosis and practical teaching strategies. All participants (15 out of 15) requested practical training to know “how to recognize, how to intervene, how to work with letters, how to help with mathematics” (Teacher 2). They also requested training on the use of assistive materials and technologies (Teacher 13), indicating a desire to use modern tools.

Furthermore, the need for psycho-pedagogical support in school is highlighted, with 12 out of 15 teachers requesting the presence of psychologists and specialist pedagogues. This would allow them to receive direct advice and support. Reducing the number of students in a class with special needs students was a recurring request (9 out of 15 teachers), as it would facilitate the possibility of an individual approach (Teacher 14).

d) The Impact of Dyslexia and the Importance of Support

Teachers were unanimously concerned about the negative impact of dyslexia on students’ academic performance, emphasizing that reading difficulties affect all subjects (Teacher 11). Beyond the academic aspect, they also noted social and emotional problems such as reduced self-confidence, anxiety and social isolation in dyslexic students (10 out of 15 teachers). Teacher 5 emphasized the emotional impact, citing students’ shyness and withdrawal, which overwhelmed her the most. This finding is in line with general studies on dyslexia, which emphasize the psychological consequences if not properly addressed.

Overall, the findings indicate an urgent and systemic need to address the challenges faced by teachers in Tetovo in teaching students with dyslexia. It is essential to invest in formal training,

prepare adapted materials, and provide psycho-pedagogical support to enable an inclusive and effective learning environment for all students.

5.2. Comparison with Relevant Studies: The findings of this study in the Municipality of Tetovo reflect and confirm many of the trends and challenges identified in the existing literature and other relevant studies on dyslexia and teacher preparation. This comparison highlights the need for structured and systematic approaches at the local and national levels.

Our study showed that an overwhelming majority of teachers (11 out of 15) had not received formal dyslexia-specific training. This is consistent with the findings of Washburn, Joshi, and Binks-Cantrell (2011), who highlighted that teachers often lack the necessary information to address dyslexia. Our results also resonate with the study by Aladwani and Al Shaye (2012) in Kuwait, where the majority of teachers lacked the appropriate skills for identification. In the regional context, Balcı (2019) has noted similar gaps in teacher preparation in Turkey, an educational context with certain similarities to North Macedonia. This suggests that the problem of lack of formal training for dyslexia is a widespread issue and not isolated to the Municipality of Tetovo.

Reliance on informal sources (e.g., films, internet, colleagues), as observed in 8 out of 15 teachers, is evidence of the gap left by the lack of formal training. While individual initiative is positive, this often leads to confusion with other disorders or misperceptions, as Teacher 12 testified. This finding is comparable to research showing that inadequate awareness can lead to misidentification or neglect of the real needs of dyslexic students (e.g., Şenel, 1998).

The difficulty in identifying and diagnosing without formal support, expressed by 14 out of 15 teachers, is a universal challenge. This finding is in line with what Hellendoorn and Ruijsenaars (2000) and Ingesson (2007) emphasize, who emphasize the importance of early diagnosis. The fact that teachers in Tetovo do not have access to specialized diagnostic tools or experts reflects a systemic problem that directly affects the possibility of timely intervention. The lack of differentiated teaching strategies and the feeling of inadequacy in their implementation (13 out of 15 teachers) is a globally recognized problem. This is related to the difficulties in implementing Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs), as observed in Turkish studies by Çuhadar (2006) and Ünal (2010), which emphasize that, despite the recognition of the importance of IEPs, their implementation remains challenging due to the lack of time and training. Also, high class load and lack of time (10 teachers) is a widespread obstacle affecting teachers' ability to deal individually with students with special needs, a problem often highlighted in the literature on inclusive education.

The lack of adapted didactic materials (11 out of 15 teachers) and difficulty in cooperating with parents (7 teachers) are also known challenges. Other studies highlight the importance of accessible and adapted materials, as well as the essential role of school-family partnership in supporting students with dyslexia. Parents' reluctance to accept or understand dyslexia is an obstacle that requires wider social awareness.

The needs highlighted by teachers in Tetovo for in-depth training on dyslexia (all 15 teachers), the use of assistive technology (Teacher 13), and psycho-pedagogical support in school (12 out of 15 teachers) are in line with the recommendations of international studies. These findings highlight the need for practical and evidence-based training programs, as suggested by Baydık, Ergül and Kudret (2012), who highlight the need for in-service training for classroom teachers regarding reading difficulties. Also, the emphasis on the lack of training on inclusive education by Cankaya and Korkmaz (2012) and the lack of knowledge of preschool teachers by Sığırtaç, Hoş and

Abbak (2011) is reflected in the demands of teachers in Tetovo. The demand for reducing the number of students in the classroom (9 teachers) is a fundamental condition for the effective implementation of differentiated strategies.

Teachers' concern about the negative impact of dyslexia on students' academic, social and emotional performance (all 15 teachers for academic, 10 out of 15 for social/emotional) is also a recurring theme in the literature. Riddick, Sterling, Farmer and Morgan (1999) have noted that individuals with dyslexia may have low self-esteem even at university, while Hellendoorn and Ruijsenaars (2000) highlight social and emotional problems that persist into adulthood. These findings confirm the great importance of early intervention and quality support to prevent long-term negative consequences. Overall, this study provides strong evidence that the challenges of teachers in the Municipality of Tetovo in teaching students with dyslexia are not unique, but part of a broader regional and international pattern. This suggests that solutions must also be broad, including improving university programs, continuous and specialized training, and creating a professional support network at school and municipal levels.

5.3. Implications for Practice and Policy: The findings of this study, which highlight the lack of formal training, superficial knowledge, challenges in identification, and lack of resources, have important implications for teachers' daily practice and for educational policymaking at school, municipal, and national levels.

a) Implications for Teachers

For teachers, these findings serve as a call for self-reflection and action. They should become more aware of the gaps in their knowledge about dyslexia and take proactive steps to enhance their professional skills. This can be achieved by:

- Seeking in-depth training: Teachers should seek out and participate in specific dyslexia training that provides practical strategies for identifying, differentiating teaching and assessing dyslexic students. The responses of teachers seeking "practical, not just theoretical" training (Teacher 2) indicate a clear need for this type of professional development.
- Using reliable sources: While informal sources such as films can help with initial awareness (as in the case of Teacher 5), teachers should seek out scientific articles, professional guides and materials developed by experts in the field of dyslexia to avoid misunderstandings and confusion (as noted in Teacher 12).
- Apply differentiated strategies: Even with limited resources, teachers can start experimenting with differentiated teaching techniques, focusing on multisensory and visual approaches, even if the curriculum is standard. This requires creativity and commitment, aiming to respond to the needs of students, albeit with difficulty (Teacher 6).
- Collaborate with colleagues and parents: Building a support network with other teachers and close cooperation with parents is essential. Dealing with parental reluctance (Teacher 10) requires a sensitive approach and ongoing education.

b) Implications for School Principals

School principals play a critical role in creating a supportive environment for teachers and students with dyslexia. They should:

- Facilitate professional development: Organize and promote regular and specific dyslexia training for their staff. This training should be practical and evidence-based.

- Provide resources and materials: Allocate a budget for the purchase or development of adapted didactic materials, especially in Albanian and Macedonian. Consider software and assistive technology and provide training in their use (Teacher 13).
- Create support teams: Work towards hiring or securing the services of school psychologists and special educators, who can provide direct support to students and consultations for teachers (Teacher 15).
- Encourage collaboration: Promote a culture of collaboration between teachers, specialists and parents, by organizing meetings and workshops to raise awareness and build joint support strategies.

c) Implications for Educational Authorities (Municipal and National)

Educational authorities, both at the municipal and national levels, have the greatest responsibility to design policies that address these challenges in a systemic manner. They should:

- Review and improve primary and university curricula: Ensure that university curricula for teacher training include detailed courses and practices on dyslexia and other learning disorders.
- Develop mandatory and ongoing training policies: Create and implement in-service training programs that are mandatory and focused on practical skills for identifying, teaching and assessing dyslexic students. This training should be standardized and accessible.
- Allocate resources for diagnosis and support: Invest in the development and implementation of standard diagnostic tools for dyslexia in local languages. Provide funds for the employment of specialists (psychologists, special educators) in schools and regional centers.
- Review class sizes: Consider reducing the number of students in classes with special needs students, as this gives teachers more time for individualized approaches (Teacher 14).
- Develop national teaching materials: Support and fund the development of adapted teaching materials and assistive technologies for dyslexic students, making them accessible to all schools.
- Raise public awareness: Undertake national awareness campaigns on dyslexia, targeting parents and the public, to break down stigma and promote acceptance and support.

In conclusion, this study highlights that effective support for students with dyslexia in the Municipality of Tetovo, and more broadly in North Macedonia, requires an integrated and multi-stakeholder approach. Only through the collaboration of teachers, school principals, and educational authorities can an education system be created that is truly inclusive and capable of providing all students with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusions: This semi-structured study with 15 teachers from primary and secondary schools in the Municipality of Tetovo has provided a detailed overview of the challenges and needs of educators in supporting students with dyslexia. The main findings highlight a significant gap between the requirements of inclusive teaching and the current preparation of teachers.

Firstly, it was found that teachers in Tetovo have limited knowledge about dyslexia, which has been mainly acquired from informal sources, such as films or conversations with colleagues, and rarely from formal university or in-service training. This leads to frequent confusion between dyslexia and other learning disorders, hindering the accurate identification of students.

Secondly, teachers face major practical challenges in the classroom. These include the difficulty in identifying and diagnosing dyslexic students in the absence of official support, the inadequacy

in implementing differentiated teaching strategies, caused by the large number of students and time constraints, and the significant lack of adapted didactic materials in local languages. Collaboration with parents also often presents difficulties due to a lack of awareness.

Third, the study highlights an urgent and clear need for practical training and psycho-pedagogical support in schools. Teachers expressed a strong desire for in-depth training on symptoms, diagnosis and direct teaching strategies, as well as for the use of assistive technologies. Also, the presence of psychologists and specialist pedagogues in schools, as well as the reduction of the number of students in the classroom, is seen as essential to provide effective support.

Overall, the findings show that the impact of dyslexia on students' academic performance and emotional-social well-being is significant, making it urgent to address these challenges. To create a truly inclusive and supportive education system in the Municipality of Tetovo, it is essential to invest in the professional preparation of teachers, provide necessary resources, and strengthen institutional support.

6.2. Recommendations: Based on the findings of the study, the following measures are recommended:

a) For the Ministry of Education and Science and BYRMA (Office for the Development of Education):

- Integrate detailed and practical modules on dyslexia into the curricula of pedagogical faculties.
- Develop and implement mandatory and continuous training programs for existing teachers on dyslexia and differential teaching strategies.
- Allocate funds for the development of adapted didactic materials and assistive technology in Albanian and Macedonian.
- Create specialized psycho-pedagogical teams at the municipal or school level, with psychologists and special educators, to support teachers and students.

b) For School Directorates:

- Organize internal seminars and workshops on dyslexia, also utilizing the experiences of the most skilled teachers.
- Encouraging inter-academic and inter-departmental collaboration to share best practices.
- Raising awareness among parents and the community about the nature of dyslexia.

c) For Teachers:

- Actively seeking opportunities for professional development and self-education on dyslexia.
- Closer collaboration with colleagues and parents.

6.3. Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Limitations:

Limitations of this study include the relatively small number of participants (qualitative nature) and the specific geographical focus (Tetovo Municipality), which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Also, the study is based on teachers' self-reports, which may be subjective.

Suggestions for Future Research:

- A larger national-level study to determine the challenges and needs of teachers across North Macedonia.
- Research exploring the effectiveness of various dyslexia training programs.
- Studies measuring the academic performance of dyslexic students in Tetovo schools and the impact of specific interventions.
- Research addressing parents' and students' perceptions of dyslexia.

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