"It takes so long!": Dyslexic students' experiences of academic referencing.

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The issue

Accurate and consistent referencing is an expectation of all students throughout their academic journey,

however, …

dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities,

so, …

What is the experience of dyslexic students with respect to academic referencing?

How is this relevant?

• Library services provides teaching across the university to support students in learning how to reference accurately and consistently.

• Currently no targeted teaching methods or tools are used to specifically support dyslexic students during teaching sessions.

• Support is provided to dyslexic students through DDS but how this supports referencing is unclear.
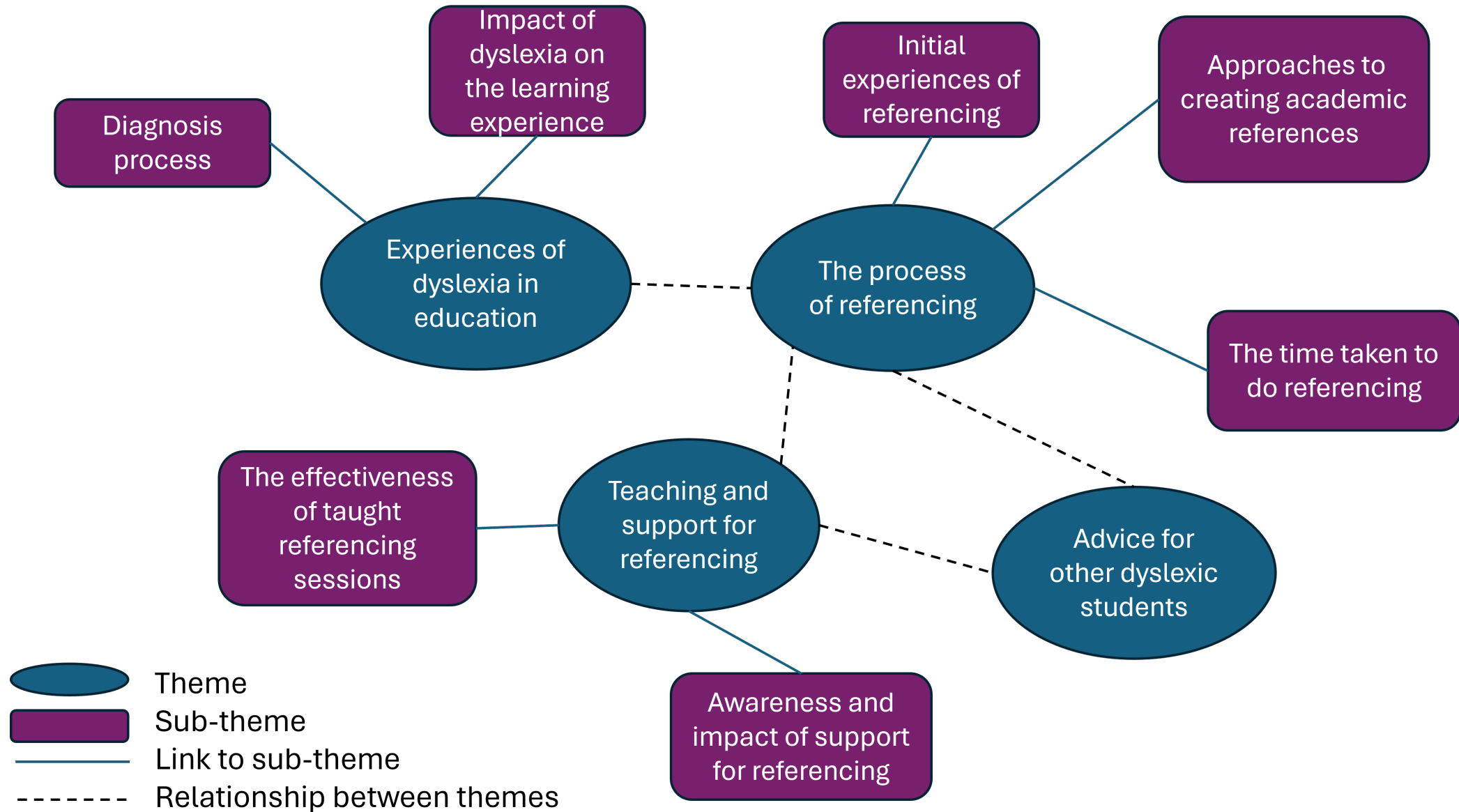
Why no specific referencing support for dyslexic students?

- There is only anecdotal evidence of what works for dyslexic students.

- Any tools/support/teaching should be evidence based, but <u>NO research could be identified</u> that directly addressed dyslexic students' experiences of referencing.

- A gap in the literature indicated a need for research to be conducted so that teaching ~~could be informed by student exper~~ience.

Research outline

- 9 semi-structured interviews were conducted with dyslexic students from across the school of Nursing and Midwifery and the School of Allied Health & Community.

- Topics discussed included pre-university experience, initial response to teaching of referencing, impact of referencing on their academic work, methods/tools used for referencing, experiences of getting help with referencing and their personal recommendations to improve the experience of referencing for dyslexic students.

- Thematic analysis was conducted of interview transcripts.

Mapping of Themes Identified

Diagnosis process

Impact of dyslexia on the learning experience

Initial experiences of referencing

Approaches to creating academic references

Experiences of dyslexia in education

The process of referencing

The time taken to do referencing

The effectiveness of taught referencing sessions

Teaching and support for referencing

Advice for other dyslexic students

Awareness and impact of support for referencing

Theme

Sub-theme

Link to sub-theme

------- Relationship between themes

Student responses: General Experiences of Dyslexia in Education

Responses talked about both the ==difficulties they experienced as a result of their dyslexia== and also ==difficulties related to the process of being formally diagnosed as dyslexic==. As would be expected, participants mentioned issues related to spelling and reading and how these impacted on writing, however one of the most notable features discussed by participants was related to ==negative feelings and negative feedback==.

"I am anticipating that I've got it wrong." (Participant A)

"I was told at the very start in year seven that I wouldn't get my English GCSE." (Participant J)

"It was really hard. It was really difficult. I didn't get any support." (Participant H)

"I got a bunch of GCSEs which I was told I was never going to get when I was in primary school." (Participant G)

Diagnosis of dyslexia: Some participants reported having obtained diagnosis prior to starting university, but five of the nine participants reported ==only receiving diagnosis and associated support in their second or third year.==

Student responses: first experiences of referencing.

"I didn't cope very well. It was completely overwhelming - where do you put the full stops? Where do you use italics? When do you not use italics? It is those kinds of things that I particularly struggle with." (Participant C)

"I'm never going to be able to get this right, because there's so many dots and commas and things." (Participant D)

"That added pressure of dyslexia, it makes it 10 times more complicated." (Participant B)

Student responses: initial experiences of submitting assessed work with academic references.

My referencing was all incorrect. I was definitely graded down for it." (Participant F)

" Every assignment I'd have a comment saying your referencing is wrong." (Participant J)

"I did get marked down for references and it's something that I was pulled up on in my first year, saying things like this isn't right but there's no direct feedback. Well, how do I make it right?" (Participant C)

"I always got comments about my referencing basically saying it's not very good." (Participant B)

Student responses: Impact of initial teaching sessions

Most students talked about teaching sessions being very content heavy and not focussed on practical examples. Issues with the timing of the taught content were also raised by several students.

"You talk about it in theory, and you don't actually have the opportunity to apply it and give examples: this is what the paper is, how would you reference it?" (Participant C)

"I like to see things and have it in front of me rather than people just say stuff, so it doesn't hit the target, it doesn't hit dyslexic people." (Participant B)

"We didn't have anything on referencing until I think it was December and we had assignments due middle of December. The referencing sessions need to be much sooner." (Participant E)

"It's all in one go, buried beneath everything else you do in the day." (Participant H)

Student responses: approach to referencing.

Students reported using referencing tools, including the online sites ZoteroBib, Cite-this-for-me and MyBib and the software tools Zotero and Grammarly. Two participants also reported doing references manually without reference generator software. Responses indicated a positive benefit of the software but also an awareness of issues related to using reference generators. Students were universally positive about the printed referencing guide.

"There are different websites you can use but it doesn't always give me the correct layout." (Participant F)

"I used Zotero for my second year. It was so useful. Without that, I would be spending hours writing references." (Participant D)

"I have found I'm using the library recommended referencing guide and I go through it absolutely full stop by full stop." (Participant A)

"I do have to go through it and double check that everything's right. And there's been a few issues a couple of times." (Participant H)

Student responses: workload and stress.

Workload: All the participants made comments relating to the time taken to create references and the additional workload. Several participants also commented on the resultant stress that this creates.

"What might take someone else 5 minutes to do, you will probably have to spend 15 doing it." (Participant A)

"It was taking a lot more time to do things and it was a lot harder work than when I spoke to some of my colleagues that were doing it." (Participant C)

"I find it all time consuming, a lot of stress. I'm not on top of my essays as much as I should be." (Participant F)

Additional time: Participants also commented on the need for extra time in written assignments to reflect dyslexia.

"I'll get extra time for in-person exams, but not extra time for deadlines." (Participant C)

"What I really want is extra time. I'll probably say at least a week compared to others" (Participant H)

Student responses: support for dyslexic students.

DDS Support: Six of the nine participants mentioned help received from tutors that they accessed through the dyslexia and disability support system in the university. The comments related to these tutors were very positive.

"The main person that I go to is my tutor. Going to the tutor has significantly helped me." (Participant F)

"I contacted DDS [Dyslexia and Disability Service] and have a study skills tutor. I meet pretty much every week if we can. I don't know what I'd do without her." (Participant H)

Library services: Almost all participants were aware of services available from the library. Opinions expressed were positive about the value of these services.

"If I've got something in particular that I'm like struggling with, I have gone to the librarian one-to-one on teams." (Participant C)

"I took advantage of the library's Zotero training and I did use live chat to get some clarification on how to reference and that was really useful." (Participant D)

Student responses: advice for other dyslexic students.

Seek help early-on:

> "Go into the university services in the first instance and make it known that that's something that you struggle with. Seek out help straight away."
> (Participant C)

> "Go to the disability services sooner rather than later." (Participant E)

Engage with referencing right from the start.

> "Pay attention during that first session. Don't just sit in that lecture and go 'I'll figure it out'." (Participant B)

> "You are never going to be able to make this referencing easy. This is going to be tough, but if you want to get this degree, you have to do this referencing." (Participant A)

Summary of Key Findings

- Significant time and stress impact in written assignments.

- The limited effectiveness of initial taught sessions.

- The importance of the referencing guide.

- The range of tools employed by dyslexic students to help in referencing.

- The positive impact of support services.

Implications of this study

Recognition of the time/stress impact of referencing on dyslexic students written assignments (Additional time for written work?)

Moving away from a 'One-shot' model of teaching referencing skills

A consistent approach to teaching the use of reference generating and reference managing software

Continue to provide and develop support services, including additional library video guides and potentially training for DDS tutors in referencing software.

Limitations of this study

- Participants drawn only from health-related subject areas
- All participants were female
- All participants used the Harvard referencing style

Questions?