

## Teachers' role in helping learners with dyslexia in the language classroom

### What this research was about and why it is important

It is estimated that 10% of the world's population has dyslexia or related learning difficulties. Dyslexia affects language learning, particularly when learning a second/additional language. Therefore, it is important for language teachers to have a thorough understanding of what dyslexia (and related learning difficulties) is and how to accommodate learners with such learning difficulties in the language classroom. However, in many educational contexts, teachers do not seem to have sufficient knowledge on learning difficulties and their influence on language learning. In this study, the researcher analysed the knowledge and attitudes of English language teachers about dyslexia and inclusive practices in the Sri Lankan context, where English is taught as a compulsory second language in the mainstream education system. In addition to this, the challenges language teachers face in implementing inclusive practices at classroom level were also investigated.

### What the researcher did

- The researcher conducted teacher-training workshops for English language teachers, teacher trainers and policy planners in the mainstream education system in Sri Lanka on dyslexia and inclusive practices.
- Immediately after the workshops, feedback was collected from participants using a questionnaire. A few months after the workshops, some participants were interviewed.

### What the researcher found

- **Teacher knowledge:** Before the workshop, the participants had minimal understanding of what dyslexia was or its influence on language learning. After the workshop, the participants demonstrated basic understanding of learning difficulties and inclusive practices.
- **Teacher attitudes:** Before the workshop, the participants had negative attitudes towards learners who showed signs of learning difficulties. After the workshop, the participants seemed to have developed more positive attitudes towards learners with learning difficulties.
- **Institutional barriers:** Institutional barriers are the main challenge the participants face in implementing inclusive practices. For example, a non-flexible full syllabus, non-learner-friendly textbooks and rigid examination systems hinder teachers' ability to cater to the individual needs of the learners.
- **Other challenges:** Negative socio-cultural ideology among parents and wider society on learning difficulties, as well as practical problems such as large classrooms and lack of resources also influence the implementation of inclusive practices.

### Things to consider

- All language teachers should be provided with teacher training on learning difficulties and inclusive classroom practices.
- It is necessary to raise awareness of educational policy planners, parents, school communities and the general public about learning difficulties.
- Some kind of legal requirement to accommodate learners with learning difficulties is necessary to make inclusive practices more sustainable in an education system.

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