

**THE CASE STUDY ON LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESSFUL
DYSLEXICS**

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ABSTRACT

THE CASE STUDY ON LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESSFUL DYSLEXIC SUFFERER

By Stephannie bt Maicheal

This study was conducted to explore the learning experiences of successful dyslexics from childhood till adult. It is based on the experiences and feeling for being dyslexic, parental support, and peers support in their learning. Various coping mechanism were used when they faced problems in their learning process from childhood till adult. A total of four people with dyslexia are selected as the respondents for this study. The respondents experienced many things in their life and faced many problems to cope with their dyslexia. They are not ashamed of themselves but they are so proud to be dyslexics and become successful. They get support from their family and peers. But some parents do not know that their children are dyslexic and some of their friends are underestimating them. The findings also uncover skills and knowledge that dyslexic learned through their life to be successful.

ABSTRACT

THE CASE STUDY ON LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESSFUL DYSLEXIC SUFFERER

By Stephannie bt Maicheal

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji pengalaman pembelajaran yang dilalui oleh disleksia yang berjaya dari masa kanak-kanak sehingga dewasa. Ini berdasarkan apa yang mereka alami dan perasan sebagai seorang disleksia, sokongan ibu bapa dan sokongan rakan sebaya dalam pembelajaran. Pelbagai cara mengatasi yang digunakan dalam pembelajaran oleh disleksia dari masa kanak-kanak sehingga mereka dewasa. Sebanyak empat orang yang menghadapi disleksia sebagai responden digunakan dalam kajian ini. Responden-responden mengalami pelbagai pengalaman dalam hidup mereka dan menempuh pelbagai rintangan dan masalah dalam kehidupan sebagai seorang disleksia. Mereka tidak berasa malu dengan diri mereka tetapi mereka sangat berbangga menjadi seorang disleksia dan berjaya. Mereka mendapat sokongan dari keluarga dan rakan-rakan. Namun begitu, terdapat juga keluarga yang tidak menyedari bahawa anak mereka merupakan disleksia dan terdapat juga rakan-rakan yang merendah-rendahkan diri mereka. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pelbagai cara mengatasi dan ilmu pengetahuan yang digunakan dalam pengalaman pembelajaran sedikit sebanyak telah mempengaruhi kejayaan mereka dalam kehidupan mereka sebagai seorang disleksia.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Chapter one consists of six sections. The first section for this chapter is the background of the study. The second section discusses the problem statement. A third section is the statement of the research objectives. The research objectives were divided into two parties which is general objective and specific objective. The fourth sections of this chapter discuss the definitions of terms used in this research. The fifth sections of the chapter are the significant of this study. The sixth section of the chapter is limitation of the study.

1.1 Background of Study

There are many successful and famous people who are dyslexics. Actress Whoopi Goldberg, business leader Charles Schwab, and Olympic diver Greg Louganis, to name a few, are all inspirations. There are many dyslexics that have made tremendous contributions to humanity. They include famous entertainers, designers, architects, writers, athletes, jurists, physicians, scientists, and political and business leaders. The main purpose this study is to investigate how people with dyslexia cope their disabilities and be successful in their life.

Accordingly to previous studies, some difficulties are often experienced by dyslexics. These difficulties occur in their reading accuracy, speed of reading, persistent spelling errors, difficulties with grammatical structure, sequencing difficulties in words and ideas, need to re-read text, difficulties in planning and organizing written work, difficulty in memorizing facts and formulas, following several instructions that are given at the same time, taking notes, planning study and general study skills, transferring learning from situation to another, noting inferences in text and written examination (Reid & Kirk, 2001). However, dyslexics have their own strength which can compensate with their weaknesses. They can be good in comprehension skills, good problem-solving skills, good visual skills, able to process information holistically, good verbal skills and accurate with their weakness and utilize with compensatory strategies (Reid & Kirk, 2001).

People with dyslexia shows several characteristic symptoms which believe by the researcher that it is a result from the neurological impairments (Clark (Eds), 2005). Although the symptoms are differed from the dyslexic child from younger until older, the dyslexia cannot be outgrown. The situation is when the dyslexic is from the birth and it remains with them throughout their life. On the other hand, dyslexia can be overcome if they diagnosed in their early time and get a special help to overcome it. Differ to dyslexics that do not get diagnosed or received help, they are likely to grow up and continue to have difficulty in reading and learning (Clark (Eds), 2005).

Even though dyslexia is a neurological disorder, the primary treatment for it is educational but not medical. Since the major problem of dyslexics is reading, the most common treatment is to give the dyslexics special help in learning to read (Clark (Eds), 2005). Most of the students with dyslexic receive help from the public school that they attend. Nevertheless some parents send their children to residential or boarding schools. In particular schools that provide education for dyslexia, the dyslexic students will receive special education from teacher who has received training in teaching students with learning disabilities (Clark (Eds), 2005).

1.2 Problem Statement

Dyslexia is a syndrome of many and varied symptoms affecting children and adults. Many with dyslexia and related learning and attention disorders realize early that they are not like their peers. Their learning and coordination or awkward difficulties often lead to ridicule and/or self-recrimination which lead them to feel dumb and depressed-isolated (n.d, 2008). As a result, one can only wonder just how many potential creative geniuses for example, how many Einstein's and Da Vinci's that stigmatized and pushed aside? All too often, learning-disabled children grow up to be unemployed adults, shunted into routine and dead-end occupations for life.

There is no cure for dyslexia, but dyslexic individuals can learn to read and write with appropriate education or treatment. Current researches avenues on developing techniques to diagnose and treat dyslexia and other learning disabilities, increasing the understanding of the biological basis of learning disabilities, and exploring the relationship between neurophysiological processes and cognitive functions on reading ability (n.a, 2007). The successful dyslexic learns to overcome or sidestep their barriers, permitting them to accomplish their dreams and desires (n.d, 2008).

Internationally there are many research work carried out on dyslexia. From genetics to teaching, from self esteem to auditory and visual processing, there is information for those who require it (Peer & Reid, 2001). However, there is no specific research has done qualitatively on the individual dyslexic from their childhood until adult. Most works focus on groups of dyslexic people rather than individuals. Therefore, there is a need to do an in depth study of people who were dyslexic and how they live their life from childhood till adult. From this research, we will know more information about their life and some findings with other dyslexic.

1.3 Research Objectives

There are two objectives in this study that are general objective and specific objectives. General objective is the main purpose that hopes to be reached through this study, whereas specific objectives are the objectives that need to be accomplished to achieve the general objective.

1.3.1 General Objective

The aim of this study is to study the learning experiences of people with dyslexia.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- 1) To explore the experiences of people with dyslexia from the childhood until adult with special focus on learning.
 - Suffering
 - Feeling for being dyslexic
 - Parental support in their life as dyslexic
 - Peers support in learning

- 2) To study the various coping skills that dyslexics used when they faced problems in their learning process from childhood till adult.

1.4 Definition of Terms

1.4.1 Dyslexia

Dyslexia is disabilities and difficulties which affect the learning process in reading, spelling, writing and sometimes in identifying numbers.

1.4.2 Learning

Learning for people with dyslexia is differing from normal people. People with dyslexia are slow to learn rather than people whom are not affected by dyslexia.

1.4.3 Learning disabilities

Dyslexia or a learning disability has difficulties in (Child Development Institute, 1998-2000):

- Letter or word reversals when reading. (Such as was/saw, b/d, p/q).
- Letter or word reversals when writing.
- Difficulty repeating what is said to them.
- Poor handwriting or printing ability.
- Poor in drawing ability.
- Reversing letters or words when spelling words that are presented orally.
- Difficulty comprehending written or spoken directions.
- Difficulty with right - left directionality.
- Difficulty understanding or remembering what is said to them.
- Difficulty understanding or remembering what they have just read.
- Difficulty putting their thoughts on paper.

1.4.4 Coping mechanism

People with dyslexia will face a lot of problems, and they might suffer and experience stress. Therefore, they need coping mechanisms to deal with their problems and (Tricia Ellis, 2003).

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributed to the understanding of the life experiences of dyslexic people from their childhood until adult. From their sharing, we know the kind of problems they had face in their life and especially related to learning. This study included some of the coping skills used in their lives and the findings gave that benefit to other dyslexics.

1.6 Limitation of Study

In this study, time was the main constraint. Besides, another difficulty was faced to find people with dyslexia that is successful in their life. So, only few dyslexic people were interviewed. Furthermore, much effort was needed to interview the dyslexics in depth. Even if there are only four informants, a series of interviews conducted depending on the need.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews seven sections. The first section is consisting of the history of the dyslexic people. Second section review what dyslexia is. Third section is about identifying the signs or symptoms of dyslexia in the area of learning. Fourth section is for learning theories. Fifth section reviews the development stage of dyslexia. Sixth section consist the mechanism that they use to recover their dyslexic problem and last section reviews the successful stories of dyslexic people.

2.1 History of Dyslexia

The word dyslexia comes from the Greek words “dys” means impaired and “lexis” means word (n.a, 2008). People with dyslexia are called dyslexic or dyslectic. It was first identified by Oswald Berkhan in 1881 when the terms “dyslexia” was invented by Rudolf Berlin in 1887 (n.a, 2008). This term used to refer to the case of a young boy who had a severe impairment in learning to read and write despite showing typical intellectual and physical abilities in all other aspect (n.a, 2008).

The origins of dyslexia are the first findings of language problem which is due to aphasia (Guardiola, 2001). Aphasia is disorder that results from the damage of the portion of the brain which is responsible to language. This area of the brain is the left side of hemisphere. Aphasia normally occurs suddenly which is a result from stroke or head injury. It also develops slowly for cases like brain tumor, infection and dementia. Aphasia damaged the expression and understanding of language too reading and writing (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2008).

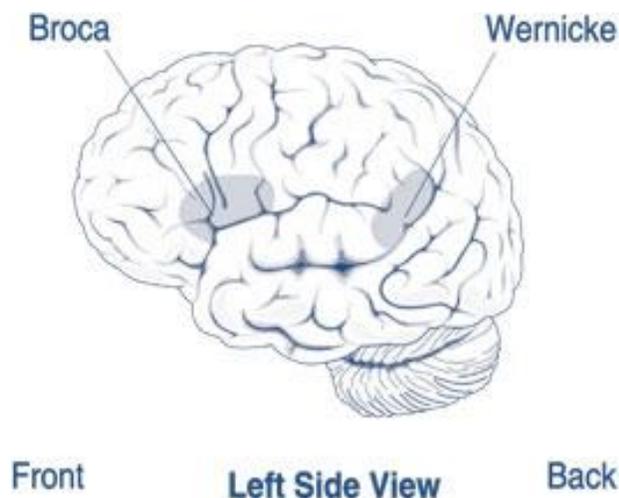


Figure 2.1: Areas of the brain affected by Broca’s and Wernicke’s aphasia
(National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2008)

The first case of loss of reading ability in 1676 was found by physician John Schmidt (Guardiola, 2001). The experience of Professor Lordat of Montpellier, France in 1825 which is suffered from temporal crisis has made him loss the ability to understand the written symbols (Guardiola, 2001). There are also many clinical cases of aphasia with reading problems have been considered as the founder in the history of dyslexia.

The beginning of dyslexia began more than hundred years ago and it was first happened in Great Britain (Guardiola, 2001). This is because of the great academic culture, intellectual curiosity and human and practical resources are many in Britain which contributes lots in research of developmental dyslexia. The first stages of the research of developmental dyslexia were defined that dyslexia is a disease of the visual system (Guardiola, 2001). A journal of “The Lancet” which is written by James Hinshelwood is about the issue of visual memory and word blindness was inspired W. Pringle Morgan to describe the case of intelligent fourteen years old boy that could not learn how to read (Guardiola, 2001). His article was the first reports about the word blindness, and he was recognized as the father of developmental dyslexia.

Although Morgan is considered as the father of developmental dyslexia, the real founder of dyslexia was Hinshelwood in 1896 until 1911 (Guardiola, 2001). He has contributed lots in creating clinical and social awareness of dyslexia. Hinshelwood was published a second treaty in 1917 on “Congenital Word Blindness” where he state that imperfection was involved the acquisition and storage in brain for the visual memories of letters and words (Guardiola, 2001). He classified dyslexics in three groups which are Alexia, Dyslexia and Word Blindness. Alexia is for the cases of mental retardation with reading disability, Dyslexia is for common cases of small delays in learning to read and word blindness is for severe cases of pure reading disability. His second’s monograph which publishes on 1917 state that the beginning of the history of developmental dyslexia is involving the identification and

description of clinical cases and the analysis and discussion of the symptoms and its components (Guardiola, 2001).

One important figure in the history of developmental dyslexia is the early research work in dyslexia conducted by Samuel T. Orton which is a neurologist who worked with stroke victims. His research started when he met a boy that could not read and exhibited symptoms similar to stroke victims. He called this condition as “condition strephosymbolia” which means twisted sign (n.a, 2008). He used this condition to describe a theory that individual with dyslexia had difficulty associating the visual forms of words with their spoken form. In 1970s, a new hypothesis which based on Orton’s theories emerged that dyslexia stem from a deficit in phonological processing or difficulty in recognizing the spoken words formed by discrete phonemes (n.a, 2008). As a result, affected individuals have difficulty associating these sounds with the visual letters that make up written words (n.a, 2008).

2.2 What Dyslexia is

There are several definitions for dyslexia. Dyslexia is described as a combination of disabilities and difficulties which affect the learning process in one or more of reading, spelling, writing and sometimes identifying numbers. Nevertheless there is no specific answer for the question “What is dyslexia?” This is because some of the dyslexics will experiences some difficulties with reading, spelling, writing and possibly mathematics. Some may find more difficulties in spelling but greatest in fluent reading or getting the ideas on paper. This had shown that they faced different problems as dyslexics (Hannell, 2003). Research Committee of International Dyslexia Association in August, 2004 defines that dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. Difficulties characterized it with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties are resulted of deficit in phonological component in language that relate to

cognitive abilities. It is also included the problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can slows down the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge (Hannell, 2003).

Miles and Miles, 1999 (as cited in Riddick, Wolfe & Lumsdon, 2003, p.2) states the different definitions of dyslexia are constructed by varying social groups for different purposes and different historical circumstances. The oldest definition of the World Federation provided dyslexia of Neurology in 1968. They state that (as cited in Riddick, Wolfe & Lumsdon, 2003, p.3)

Dyslexia is disorder manifested in difficulty learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and socio-cultural opportunity. It is dependent on fundamental cognitive disabilities which are frequently constructional in origin.

This definition assumes that child who did not learn to read being either they are poorly educated or failed to learn read because they are not intelligent. Most of recent definitions highlight that dyslexia effect by many aspects such as spelling, writing and other skills in numeracy and motor coordination (Riddick, Wolfe & Lumsdon, 2003). Different definitions of dyslexia reflect a wide range of theories and perspectives. This was bringing forward to explain the literacy difficulties and to make publics understand what dyslexia is. This also affect that the educational policy, research and practice (Hartas, 2006).

The Orton Dyslexia Society defines that dyslexia is a specific learning difficulties that affects the phonological development, word decoding and word recognition such as spelling, reading and writing (Hartas, 2006). It means the children with the learning disabilities despite adequate educational expose and proper teaching. This was excluded the social-cultural factors which has been affecting in identifying and assessing dyslexia in young children from minority linguistics and socio-cultural background (Hartas, 2006). This definition has been influencing the

assessment and diagnosis by introducing the divergence criterion to guide diagnosis. This guide has been used mostly by the UK and the USA in diagnose people with dyslexia. It was that has been criticized on the validity of this criterion and the use of intelligence scores (IQ scores) by the theorists and practitioners (Hartas, 2006).

Report by DECP of the British Psychological Society (BPS) on Dyslexia, Literacy and Psychological Assessment has proposed a working definition of dyslexia.

Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the 'word level' and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities. It provides the basis for a staged approach to assessment through teaching.

(BPS, 1999:5 as cited in Hartas, 2006)

According BPS, dyslexia refers to difficulties in accuracy and fluency of reading and spelling at the word level. This means that criterion that are marked are difference in between aptitude and performance which mean it is not related to the intelligence scores (Hartas, 2006).

Different understanding of dyslexia is reflecting to the way of teaching and how to overcome it. An embedded understanding in all definitions is children with dyslexia do not learn at the same rate, style and manners as their peers (Hartas, 2006). This is because they may find difficulties in memorizing and retrieving information, understands the sound of language, link the sound to the letters and manipulate it accordingly, process the information at speed and develop reading and writings skills at the level of expected (Hartas, 2006).

2.3 Identifying the Signs or Symptoms of Dyslexia in the Area of Learning

These signs or weakness are identified in areas of speed of processing, short-term memory, sequencing, auditory and/or visual perception, spoken language and motor skills (Peer & Reid, 2001). Some children with dyslexia have creative skills, others have strong verbal skills and yet some have no outstanding talent. We know that some of dyslexic people have weaknesses in aspects of reading process, but all the problems arises in the writing process as well. General areas that are affected includes the speed of processing, misunderstanding the complicated questions although knowing the answer, finding list of instructions in memory difficulty to perform all tasks and name's finding (Peer & Reid, 2001).

Reading difficulties are the most obvious signs for dyslexics. Dyslexics will acquire basic reading skills process is much slower and needs more teachers or supports; differ from the normal people (Hannell, 2003). Difficulties in reading has does not affect the ability to read. Since the basic skills of learning of subjects are reading, dyslexics who have trouble in reading are more likely to have trouble in school learning. They find it is difficult to keep up in subjects such as social studies and sciences because of the limited readings skills. Dyslexics do not outgrow their reading problems by their own. They have to spend more time on reading and appropriate help in how to learn to read (Clark (Eds), 2005).

There are the past studies conducted by Professor Micheal Rutter and his colleagues on 9-10 years old children of Isle of Wight (Selikowitz, 1998). First, they have tested on determine their intelligence and reading ability. After that, they studied all the children whose reading was differing from their peers. They have found two groups of children which first group is those are delayed reading could be explained by low intelligence and the second group is the children with normal intelligence and reading difficulties that could not be explained. By contrast, the children in the group