

Dyslexia concealment in higher education: Exploring students' disclosure decisions in the face of UK universities' approach to dyslexia

Charlotte H. Hamilton Clark 

Institute of Education, UCL University of London, London, UK

Correspondence

Charlotte H. Hamilton Clark, Institute of Education, UCL University of London, London, UK.

Email: charlotte.clark.14@ucl.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper explores the lived experience of university students with dyslexia, focusing on identity and self-esteem. The qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with five students with dyslexia and discussions with learning support tutors at four UK universities. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed the impact of dyslexia's stigma on students' academic self-concept and self-efficacy in their studies, including how students manage stigma through decisions on when and with whom to declare dyslexia: some even rejected study support. Concealing dyslexia led to identity conflict and low self-esteem, compounding students' already low academic self-concept, particularly when dyslexia had been unrecognised through school. The study highlights significant academic, practical and identity consequences for students who hide dyslexia from their peers, subject lecturers or study support. The conclusions outline priorities to lessen dyslexia's stigma at university, increase student agency in their support and open dialogue on dyslexia, particularly important between students with dyslexia and subject lecturers. By exploring dyslexia's identity impacts and disclosure, this paper contributes to wider conversations on increasing the representation, achievement and retention of students with dyslexia.

KEYWORDS

disclosure, dyslexia, identity, self-esteem, stigma, student, university

Key points

- Study participants described the stigma of universities' approach to dyslexia, where policy and practices situated it as an individual defect and support is delivered through segregated disability support departments.
- Students made complex decisions on dyslexia disclosure to manage its stigma, fearing misconceptions from student peers and dyslexia scepticism or denial by subject lecturers, particularly devastating when voiced in front of their peers.
- Concealing dyslexia led to personal inconvenience, low self-esteem and identity conflict, as students balanced hiding their struggles from peers and lecturers, against asking for and accepting study support for dyslexia at university.
- To counter this, university support departments and policy makers should de-emphasise dyslexia portrayed as defect and disability; open dialogues on dyslexia between subject lecturers and students; and increase inclusivity in teaching to extend dyslexia support beyond segregated learning support spaces.

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

© 2024 The Authors. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of National Association for Special Educational Needs.

INTRODUCTION

While there are many gaps in our understanding of the experiences of those with dyslexia, the most fundamental relate to dyslexia at university: As Jacobs et al. (2022) noted recently, few researchers have addressed the lived experience of university students with dyslexia. Specific knowledge gaps have been highlighted over the past two decades, for example Burden (2008) called for research relating dyslexia to identity and probing the consequences for self-esteem. Extending this, Prevett et al. (2013) suggested it is important to investigate the relationships between individuals' experiences of dyslexia and societal attitudes to dyslexia. Peña et al. (2016) and Cameron (2016) then proposed studies on the lived experiences of UK students with dyslexia, to allow first-hand narratives to uncover the wider impacts of dyslexia (previous studies had focused on the specific difficulties of dyslexia and examining the benefits of existing support processes and structures). These researchers also highlighted the usefulness of relating lived experiences to a societal or institutional context, for example a university's approach to dyslexia.

More recent studies have started to explore these areas, for example Deacon et al. (2022) examined the biographical narratives of adults with dyslexia and Jacobs et al. (2022) probed the lived experiences of children with dyslexia through school. However, Jacobs et al. (2022) concluded that further work is needed to explore the intersection between the experience of dyslexia, stigma and students' academic confidence at university, which is explored in this paper.

Background on dyslexia among students

Dyslexia only emerged as a phenomenon in the past 100 years, alongside expectations of universal literacy (Kirby & Snowling, 2022). It is associated primarily with difficulty at the first stage of reading and comprehension: phonemic awareness, affecting how an individual learns to read and write (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2003, 2016). However, dyslexia is not limited to literacy in childhood; it persists throughout life as a heterogeneous phenomenon, affecting individuals differently (Snowling, 2012). In adulthood its effects widen beyond reading and spelling accuracy to affect language fluency, short-term memory, organisation and planning (Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 2003). Moreover, as Bates (2006) argues, while dyslexia has a genetic basis, its inheritance and expression is complex: Dyslexia variance between individuals is also accompanied by a high degree of overlap with other cognitive differences such as dyspraxia, ADD or autism. As Tamboer et al. (2016) assert, we struggle to define dyslexia succinctly so should instead 'accept dyslexia as

an alternative way of information processing that has evolved over thousands of years without being noticed' (Tamboer et al., 2016, p.482).

Kim and Lombardino (2013) note that dyslexia is independent of other higher-order cognitive functions, so is unrelated to intelligence, a common misconception being those with dyslexia are lazy or slow (Deacon et al., 2022). Van Viersen et al. (2015) further suggested that higher-ability students, such as those who progress to university, do not have consistent compensatory strengths associated with dyslexia but are generally those who efficiently mask the impact of dyslexia through a range of study methods or personal coping strategies. Indeed, these coping strategies may be the basis of some of the traits associated with dyslexia. For example, Deacon et al. (2008) argue that those with dyslexia use enhanced morphological processing to compensate for difficulties with decoding the smallest units of meaning in written words. This may explain one of the most common aspects of dyslexia, as it slows down the reading process.

At least 10% of the UK population are believed to identify with dyslexia (British Dyslexia Association, 2024). Yet only one in 20 undergraduate students declared a specific difficulty at UK universities, not all of which were dyslexia (Advance, 2018). One possibility that may explain this discrepancy is that students with dyslexia are under-represented (i.e., do not win the places they should, given dyslexia is orthogonal to intelligence), which, if true, is a failure of fair access in higher education. This is little understood due to difficulties assessing the extent of this in UK university applications but has implications for the teaching and support of those with dyslexia in their progression to university. A parallel explanation is that students with dyslexia are under-identified; either they are not aware of it as it is often missed at school (Gilroy, 2002) or students hesitate to declare dyslexia at university, perhaps rejecting previous associations with difficulty at school (Pollak, 2005). The under-identified hypothesis relates more directly to the themes of this article, relating to either low dyslexia disclosure rates by students (raising the question why) or highlighting unidentified dyslexia through school. The extent to which UK students with dyslexia are under-represented or under-identified is still poorly understood.

Supporting the under-identified theory, the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Difficulties (2019), claim more than 80% of children with dyslexia are not identified or assessed at school, so many students with dyslexia may only learn of it when they reach university (if at all). This has potential implications for academic performance, given that researchers have shown that later dyslexia identification impacts students' grades (Shaywitz et al., 2008).

As a result of dyslexia's persistence and heterogeneity, students with dyslexia who win a place at university continue to experience a wide range of difficulties, particularly as demands increase on their capabilities to

read, listen, think about and write volumes of text for their studies (Mortimore & Crozier, 2006). Students with dyslexia at university develop personal coping strategies to work-around their difficulties reading and writing and often hide their struggles in the classroom (O'Byrne et al., 2019). However, in the UK they achieve, on average, lower grades than their peers and are more likely to drop out from courses (Richardson & Wydell, 2003). Students' struggles with their studies have the potential to undermine self-esteem, in a university setting where the student is striving hard to prove their academic worth.

Dyslexia's legal and societal framing in the UK

In the UK, the Equality Act, (2010) requires universities to offer reasonable adjustments or accommodations for dyslexia. The Act positions dyslexia as a disability deserving protection. Universities let this dictate how they classify and treat those students with dyslexia who declare it: Students must be formally tested for dyslexia by an Educational Psychologist and have their needs assessed by support tutors, to qualify for government funding of disability support through the disabled student allowance (DSA).

The UK government aims to push institutions towards inclusive teaching and Universal Design for Learning while reducing funding for student-specific support (Kelly & Erwin, 2022). Yet studies have found little evidence of inclusive pedagogy at universities (Hector, 2020) such that students claim they are not sufficiently supported due to a lack of dyslexia awareness or good practices in teaching (Jacobs et al., 2022; Osborne, 2019). Therefore, dyslexia support at UK universities remains external to subject-teaching and is focused on the student applying for additional exam time, money for tools such as laptops or printers, and one-to-one study skills development with a support tutor. As Jacobs et al. (2022) point out, technology-based assistive tools such as screen-readers were often not appropriate to the individual and students found them hard to learn to use or to incorporate into studies.

While disability as a label confers legal protection, it comes with negative associations of bodily difference and social marginalisation (Grue, 2016). Dyslexia is an invisible and heterogeneous phenomenon that many do not associate with persistent negative social constructions of disability (Cameron, 2016). Universities should be aware of the impacts associated with such loaded terms; for example, researchers such as Goode (2007) highlighted that disabled students who are required to declare a disability to gain accommodations find it stressful and time-consuming, it makes them 'extra-visible' and takes time away from studies. As a result, studies such as Brewer et al. (2023) reported impacts on disabled students' study time, finances, isolation and self-esteem.

Situating dyslexia as a defect located in the body can also impact how university staff and students view dyslexia, for example Griffin and Pollak (2009) found that students who embraced a narrative of dyslexia as weakness adopted a medical language of suffering and symptoms. Fawcett (2018) found that university personnel believe those with dyslexia are limited in their studies and Cameron and Nunkoosing's (2012) study among university lecturers highlighted that there are those who are resistant to dyslexia, do not see the need to support it and were little informed about it. Moreover, there was a connection between poor awareness and negative attitudes towards dyslexia and its support.

Therefore, the challenge of dyslexia in adulthood is not just limited to impacts on reading, writing or with short-term memory. Students with dyslexia must also deal with societal and institutional judgements of dyslexia's impact on their academic abilities (highlighted in Cameron & Nunkoosing's, 2012 study), as well as their own confidence in their competence and intelligence. The literature outlined above points to a potential conflict between the opportunity for students to disclose dyslexia to access support, set against a desire to distance themselves from a stigmatised aspect of their identity (Cameron, 2016). It is this conflict that the current study explores.

The relationship between dyslexia and identity

Identity theorists such as Giddens (1991) related social interactions to identity in terms of our values and ideals, as well as our behaviour. In a review of identity theory, Burke and Stryker (2016) elaborated on self-esteem as our response to how we perceive ourselves, which is impacted by self-concept, or our self-categorisation in different settings (e.g., academic self-concept). The authors distinguished this from self-efficacy, which relates to our feelings of control over our environment and is linked to feelings of power over outcomes or overcoming difficulty. Such effects are referred to here as 'identity impacts'.

Dyslexia affects self-esteem from an early age, impacting an individual's academic self-concept as an evaluation of the self's academic potential (Burden, 2008). Most dyslexia studies probing self-esteem focus on children: for example, in a review Zeleke (2004) noted that most studies found lower self-concept in children with dyslexia through a complex relationship between dyslexia, self-esteem and self-efficacy. The few studies with university students suggest a link between dyslexia, low academic self-concept and low self-esteem, which is still poorly understood and needs further work (e.g., Brunswick & Bargary, 2022; Jacobs et al., 2022).

While some identity impacts arise from social interactions, others result from interactions with material cultures. For example, Armstrong (2003) and Collinson

and Penketh (2010) explored the impact of children with dyslexia being removed to separate learning spaces for remedial help or relegated to a 'slow' group. The fear of physical removal from peers relates to ideas of spatial markers and Foucault's (1991) 'bench of ignorance' in school, affecting how individuals feel about their academic potential and limiting their ambition.

Identity research explores these impacts in terms of stigma in specific settings, which can lead to misunderstanding and discrimination. Goffman (2009) proposed three categories of stigma: mental illness; physical impairment; and group identity. This paper suggests dyslexia fits closest with mental disorder stigma, as it is innate, situational and non-visible. It is therefore an anticipated stigma, where individuals expect to be stigmatised if others find out about the difference, so they fear uncovering prejudice or discrimination. Further, dyslexia's stigma is an identity threat in academic settings, associated with loss of status and assumptions of dependency on help.

To avoid prejudice or discrimination, individuals with a stigmatised attribute can manage the stigma by deciding when, where and with whom they reveal the attribute (Goffman, 2009). Goffman's work highlighted normification, where the individual downplays the stigmatised identity aspect or conceals it. For students with dyslexia, non-disclosure of dyslexia at university avoids any possible associated stigma but means no access to support. For example, Henderson (2017) found that students with dyslexia at one UK university preferred not to disclose dyslexia due to fears about stigma. This finding is important to explore further, as students' decisions not to declare dyslexia and therefore not access support could impact grades and student retention as well as self-esteem.

Conversely, disclosing dyslexia to the university but hiding it selectively (e.g., from peers or lecturers) could result in conflict between identities managed in different settings. Researchers (e.g., Jacklin et al., 2007) have found that students prefer to be seen to fit in with a social group rather than seek help with their studies. Even university lecturers can be intimidating in this respect: students in Madriaga's (2007) study feared that revealing dyslexia would diminish them intellectually in a lecturer's eyes. Further, actively hiding an identity aspect can increase an individual's consciousness of the difference (Goffman, 2009), inducing a fear of discovery and resulting in conflict between different identities (outwardly acknowledged and hidden), which also impacts mental well-being (Orth et al., 2009).

Theoretical framework for the study

The study described in this paper examines the identity impacts of dyslexia at university, reflecting institutional constructions of dyslexia and the disclosure decisions

students made to manage dyslexia's stigma. The analysis explores how societal and institutional prejudice limits freedoms and confers stigma (Rexhepi & Torres, 2011), following ideas from critical disability research, which views disability as a social phenomenon rather than an issue located in individual impairment (Liasidou, 2014). The project recognised that it is important to highlight and explore individual experience, but those experiences arise from action within a sociotechnical system (the university) so, in line with the social model of disability, the study advocates for systemic changes, rather than individual development based on ideas of deficit (discussed in Rocco & Delgado, 2011). The analysis highlights the potential for societal or institutional change by critiquing social structures that disable and listens to those affected, to help in decisions concerning their support (as advocated by Peña et al., 2016). The non-normative approach to difference taken in the study (discussed in Bolt, 2016) aims to build insight by appreciating the positive aspects of difference and developing policy and practices for the benefit of all students (rather than remediating a few for a deficit located in the individual).

METHODS

This paper derives from a qualitative interview-based study (Hamilton Clark, 2022), gathering data from information-rich semi-structured interviews with five students (who self-identified with dyslexia) and four learning support tutors at different UK universities. The project was exploratory as it aimed to increase our understanding and advance theory, so focused on a deep exploration of the experiences of a few specific participants, rather than a broad assessment of many individuals' experiences to establish patterns of prevalence.

Participants

Students were recruited from flyers posted on learning support noticeboards and from information emailed to students by learning support departments at four universities located in the Midlands, south-central England, south-eastern England and London. The study sought to recruit from as wide a spectrum of students and universities as possible, without claims of this being a representative sample given the small number of participants. Including a range of different aged students at different stages of study at different universities suggests the data is not limited to one sub-set of students only. As Rocco and Delgado (2011) suggest, this diversity may be reflected in their experiences of the cultural response to dyslexia and the responses of the different institutions where they studied. The study included two undergraduates, a masters student, and two mature postgraduate students. Participation was self-selecting and voluntary,

no rewards were offered. Self-identification of dyslexia within the study allowed the students to define and recognise their cognitive differences, but recruitment through learning support departments meant students were likely to be actively engaged with support services. All student participants said they had been tested and identified with dyslexia, so were receiving or had received support.

Procedures

Students were offered a choice of interview mode and timing; either a phone interview or an email dialogue over a couple of weeks. One student preferred phone only, one email only and three chose to try both modes (consenting to a phone interview follow up from the email dialogue, which enabled the researcher to check responses across the two modes and ask for further detail). Email is a collaborative mode of discussion, with participant and researcher co-constructing knowledge (James & Busher, 2009) through dialogue conducted in short bursts. Each subsequent email question set was sent a day after the student responded each time, allowing the researcher time to clarify and probe the responses given and not to overwhelm the participant. The study acknowledged the potential for students with dyslexia to be biased against written over verbal communication, however all but one of the students who participated chose the email mode. The participants who used email for the dialogue cited its convenience and flexibility, suggesting email dialogue was not a deterrent to participating in research. Kitto and Barnett (2007) proposed that email interviews offer efficiency of time for both participants and researchers, ease of recording sequential responses, asynchronicity allowing flexible time-scheduling, and enables a more considered response than an immediate verbal exchange. The researcher's experience and participant feedback in the study mirrored these findings, with students noting they could choose when to respond (some very late at night) and reflect at leisure on what to say. For the researcher too, while responses were shorter than the verbal exchanges, email allowed a pause for reflection and to request clarification of what the students had said.

Data collection

Each interview explored broad areas with open-ended questions, which evolved through the project to focus on the topics that participants raised as most important. The student interviews opened by asking for information about experiences of dyslexia in school, when it was recognised, experiences of testing for dyslexia, difficulties and coping strategies, experiences of study support, how

others (peers, teachers and family) viewed dyslexia, who they were open about dyslexia with, and if the student felt that dyslexia had affected their sense of self as a student at university.

The student interviews took place first, then the researcher used the themes emerging from these student dialogues to triangulate with the perspectives of support tutors. The study recognised that the support tutors spoke as individuals with specific expertise working with many students with dyslexia but also as employees of the university, with insight into the policy and practices prescribed by the institution. The student and tutor perspectives were useful to note areas of commonality and difference, which were reflected on in the discussion. In this context, the study followed the ideas of Harding (1992) on standpoint epistemologies, who argues that a researcher acting as witness to lived experience research doesn't oblige us to accept one participant's testimony as unchallengeable fact, instead these experiences form part of a wider story and can involve other perspectives. One recent student who had trained and was working as a support tutor at a university, provided particularly interesting insights and highlighted conflict between the two roles. No individual student's case or comments were raised with a support tutor.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify themes in the discussions (as described by Braun & Clarke, 2006). The student and support tutor interviews were first recorded, transcribed and pseudonymised, then coded in NVivo. The pseudonyms chosen used the first letter 'S' for students and 'L' for learning support tutors. One student who had then trained as a support tutor was given the pseudonym 'Sarah-Louisa' to emphasise both perspectives.

The researcher used theoretical saturation and comparison with open, axial and selective coding to identify themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Data were sorted into individual topics, grouped into sub-categories, then constructed into over-arching themes, building a hierarchy of categorised data ranging from specific memories to thoughts on self-concept and societal attitudes. The researcher used these themes as the basis for inductive theory development: Figure 1 lists the themes arising from the student and support tutor interviews.

RESULTS

The over-arching themes that emerged from the discussions with students (see Figure 1) focused on (i) unidentified dyslexia's impact since school; (ii) universities' approach to dyslexia; (iii) lecturers' resistance to dyslexia and the impact on student self-concept; and (iv) how

Theme topics	Sub-categories	Over-arching themes
Experience of dyslexia before university	Dyslexia as difficulty in education	Unidentified dyslexia as a barrier in education
Dyslexia identification process	Late dyslexia identification (after school)	
University approach to dyslexia	Dyslexia as a disability	Institutions classified dyslexia as defect and disability
Dyslexia and support	Support segregated from subject-teaching	
Dyslexia and lecturers	Lecturer resistance to dyslexia	Lecturers' dyslexia resistance or denial compounds student low self-esteem
Student self-concept and coping with studies	Coping strategies vs institutional support	
Disclosing dyslexia to peers	Misconceptions and having to explain dyslexia	Students use selective disclosure to manage dyslexia's stigma
Disclosing dyslexia to lecturers	Being seen to ask for special treatment	
Disclosing dyslexia to student support	Rejecting support, to regain ownership of dyslexia	

FIGURE 1 Theme topics, sub-categories and over-arching themes developed in the project. [Developed from Hamilton Clark, 2022].

students managed dyslexia as an aspect of their identity at university. These themes are expanded on and related to existing research in the Discussion section.

Unidentified dyslexia as a barrier in education

When asked about their experiences of dyslexia before university, only two students were made aware of it at school. *'Throughout school I always fell through the system as I wasn't ddyslexi [sic] enough'* (Sophia, email). One student asked for testing after arriving as an undergraduate and, for the two mature students, dyslexia was only recognised during further graduate studies. *'I got tested and it came back ... 'Yeah you are dyslexic.' And I was, like, Oh! I probably should have done this a few years earlier'* (Selina, phone). The prevalence of unrecognised dyslexia was confirmed by a support tutor, Lilian, who said *'About 75%–80% of our students [with dyslexia] don't know and come through our screening process by self-referral. Inevitably they approach this process by saying "I always knew there was something wrong with me"'* (Lilian, phone).

While they recognised difficulties reading and writing from a young age, those students whose dyslexia was recognised later did not have an explanation for their

struggles at school. The lack of a reason for difficulties in education led some to develop avoidance or distraction tactics to evade difficult situations. Stewart said he *'could never concentrate, was very easily distracted, hated reading and writing and was generally quite disruptive'* (Stewart, email), he felt humiliation on being held back a year. Sylvia *'was in the top set, but I never produced any written work'* then started playing truant. *'No one ever asked me why. It was just 'she's a truant'... It was never considered that the reason I didn't go to school was to do with learning'* (Sylvia, phone). She dropped out from school aged 13, only returning to studies in her 30's to help her career.

As a result of the difficulties in school, students' perceptions of their academic potential plunged. Selina said that *'at school and college I didn't know of my dyslexia, so I felt very down on my academic ability'* (Selina, email). As the tutor Lilian noted, *'They are pushed through lower and middle ability groups in their schooling and are not perceived as university material a lot of the time'* so when they arrive at university *'they have absorbed that questioning, self-doubt, that sense of 'Do I even really deserve to be here?''* (Lilian, phone). As Sarah-Louisa admitted: *'I am currently going to therapy to deal with my low self-value and the subsequent life choices I've made'* (Sarah-Louisa, email).

Institutions classified dyslexia as defect and disability

The study highlighted that universities' policy and practices for dyslexia support follow a medical approach that emphasised dyslexia as a defect of the student, with language focused on its diagnosis and remediation. Support tutors argued that universities' approach enabled arguments to fund support, as dyslexia was recognised as an impairment and therefore merited help through the DSA, administered through disability support departments. *'We are still in the medical model, so dyslexic students have entitlements based on their dyslexia, as with other disabled students'* (Laurence, phone).

The students in the study had internalised universities' narrative of dyslexia as a flaw in academic settings, as Sylvia said: *'It shows some dysfunction... that something doesn't add up. Maybe some intervention needs to happen'* (Sylvia, phone). But in contrast to the support tutors, student participants did not feel comfortable with the word disabled, for example Stewart said he saw himself *'as dyslexic not disabled. I think there is a big difference... I wouldn't say you are impaired'* (Stewart, email). The students recounted social prejudice towards disability, including from families and peers. They contrasted their ideas of disability with dyslexia's invisibility and situational nature. As a support tutor said of dyslexia: *'it affects very specific aspects of your life and in other aspects there may be areas where there's no impact at all'* (Lucy, phone). The conflict between students not considering dyslexia as a disability and tutors using the label to draw funding for support was highlighted by the recent student and support tutor Sarah-Louisa, who said it felt *'fraudulent'* (Sarah-Louisa, phone) to apply the term disabled to herself as someone with dyslexia, yet professionally she used it for her support students.

The students were also frustrated with how dyslexia is identified and supported at university, citing the standardisation of available support, which meant that it was not always relevant to the individual. *'They try to support you and treat everyone with dyslexia in the same way, but it doesn't work like that'* (Selina, phone). The support tutors agreed that there was a lack of inclusivity in subject teaching or access to general study skills help for all students, noting *'what I would like to see is a more inclusive approach to teaching those skills to all students'* (Lucy, phone).

Further, participants critiqued the centralisation of help in disability support services located in separated physical spaces *'even going to the space where you get extra support... It's like going to a sexual health clinic'* (Sylvia, phone). This led to a feeling of *'dependency'* (Sarah-Louisa, phone) on support and lowered student agency in their studies, with students *'not fully exploring how they live with their learning difference, and how they master it'* (Laurence, phone). In summary, the students

in the study felt dyslexia's stigma impacted self-concept and academic choices, as universities positioned dyslexia as a disability and defect of the individual, with students physically segregated from their peers when they accessed support external to subject teaching (see Figure 2).

Lecturers' dyslexia resistance or denial compounds student low self-esteem

The students in the study worried they would not meet lecturers' academic expectations, which was reinforced when marked work highlighted grammatical or spelling errors, rather than the ideas and structure. *'I can come away feeling really terrible and really judged and not... bright enough'* (Selina, phone). Support tutors agreed that *'there's still lots of misunderstanding [among lecturers] about the needs of dyslexic students and their entitlements'* (Laurence, phone). Resistant mindsets among lecturers towards dyslexia and a lack of time to spend in voluntary workshops run by the support team, did not help.

Two students noted specific instances when lecturers had been disparaging about student work and were resistant to dyslexia. *'I know some people do not think I am dyslexic. Some people think I'm making it up and trying to get extra time because I'm lazy. That does bother me'* (Sylvia, phone). They cited examples of lecturers who ignored notes to avoid focusing on spelling and grammatical errors, refused to record lectures, even denied dyslexia existed. The support tutors were also aware of resistance to dyslexia among lecturers: *'we have a couple of lecturers who are, what can I say, they are dyslexia deniers'* (Lilian, phone). In one instance, the support department was even used as an intermediary to apologise to a student who complained when a subject lecturer denied dyslexia existed. The support tutor passed on a brief written apology from the lecturer: the lack of direct redress frustrated the student, made her feel helpless and came across as disingenuous.

Dyslexia denial, whether stated or implied, was accompanied by derogatory comments to the student or class which increased the shame, for example one lecturer called it *'reading retardation'* (Selina, email). *'Lecturers have an element of power... people take what they say really seriously. So, if a really credited lecturer is standing there in front of a group of people, saying 'I don't think dyslexia's real'... That doesn't help the prejudice against it'* (Selina, phone).

Lecturers' dyslexia denial lowered students' academic self-confidence and increased their anxiety at university *'what that does is press all my insecurity buttons'* (Sylvia, phone). Support tutors agreed with student participants that the impact of dyslexia resistance or denial on students with dyslexia was catastrophic and long lasting: *'it only takes one negative thing to override all the positive*

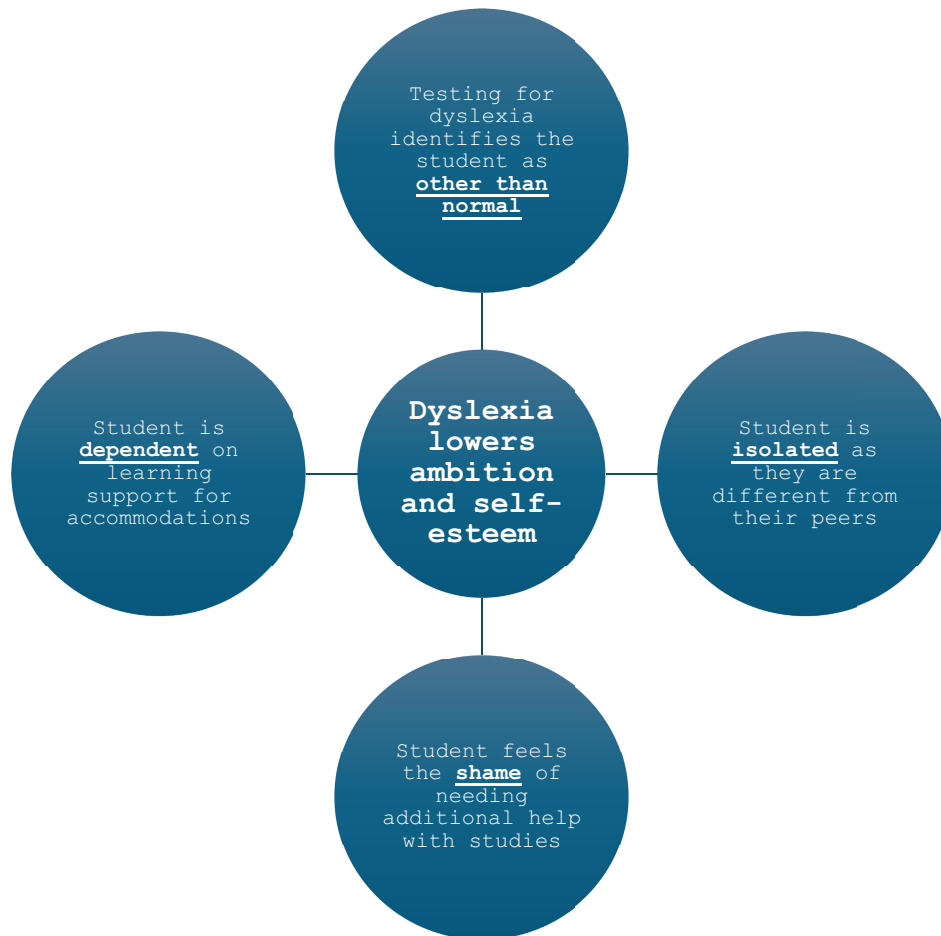


FIGURE 2 Universities' dyslexia approach impacts student self-esteem. [Developed from Hamilton Clark, 2022].

things we say to them, that's what unfortunately tends to stick in people's heads' (Lucy, phone).

Students use selective disclosure to manage dyslexia's stigma

The study highlights that students are acutely sensitive to the potential for dyslexia misconceptions among their peers or denial by subject lecturers. As a result, students carefully managed when and with whom they disclosed dyslexia as an aspect of their identity. They also hid the fact they accessed support when they felt they would be judged harshly in terms of academic potential. The students said dyslexia was too complex to explain to peers: 'I don't want to disappoint them and I don't have time to explain... So I'd walk away from conversations, as I didn't want anyone to know' (Sylvia, phone). Stewart avoided classes when he had to read aloud 'I would say I'm not well, I'm not going' (Stewart, email). Selina chose to hide the fact she went to support from peers, missing her usual morning lift-share: 'I didn't say why so I just said I didn't need the lift' (Selina, email).

While students said they would like in-subject support, they were reticent about raising dyslexia with

subject lecturers, 'I don't think my teachers or lecturers are aware... I don't tell people to get special treatment' (Stewart, email). The support tutors agreed that students 'do not know how to break down the challenges with the lecturers... they would not initiate the conversations' (Lilian, phone). Yet universities leave it to students to start the dialogue on dyslexia with lecturers.

The students in the study even weighed up the benefits of continuing with support at university (often hard-won, due to the onerous process of diagnostic testing, needs assessment and application for government funding for support) against the stigma of declaring dyslexia and the low self-efficacy of having to accept additional help with studies. Sarah-Louisa noted a paradox between her view as a student and support tutor: She saw 'needing support as a weakness, which is ironic given my line of work' (Sarah-Louisa, phone).

One student had rejected support after a year, saying the decision had re-built her self-efficacy in her own work: 'When I stepped back from it, I almost felt relieved, because I didn't have to run my work by anyone... I felt this is good enough. So it's been "Yes I can do this, I'm just as capable as everybody else in this room"' (Selina, email). The support tutors noted that few students took 'ownership of dyslexia' (Laurence, phone) as they described

it, by internalising the locus of control over studies to increase self-efficacy and self-concept. Instead, the students in the study navigated complex decisions around disclosing or concealing dyslexia with peers, lecturers and support departments, to cope with the stigma associated with dyslexia and accessing segregated learning support (see [Figure 3](#)).

DISCUSSION

The results develop our understanding of students' lived experience of dyslexia before and at university; the relationship between universities' approach to dyslexia and student self-concept; and the impacts of students' attempts to manage dyslexia's stigma through disclosure decisions in different settings. In the discussion of these findings, this paper follows [Gibson \(2012\)](#) in applying critical perspectives to highlight disadvantage, argue for inclusion and amplify the voice of the disadvantaged.

Unrecognised dyslexia is associated with low academic self-concept

The study agrees with [Henderson \(2017\)](#) who found that dyslexia was often not identified before university study: three of the five student participants did not have dyslexia identified until after they had started their courses (either undergraduate or graduate studies). Late dyslexia identification among current university students may reflect societal misconceptions or poor guidance for teachers on dyslexia recognition. Study participants

saw unrecognised dyslexia as an absence of explanation for struggle or access to support, affecting students' academic self-concept, behaviour and persistence with studies. Therefore, unidentified dyslexia has the potential to impact academic performance, for example through lower grades, class disruption and truancy. This study extends the work of [Shaywitz et al. \(2008\)](#) on late dyslexia identification at school, who highlighted how hard it is to boost grades if dyslexia is recognised even in secondary rather than primary education. There is a clear opportunity for further work to explore the potential for early dyslexia identification and support to lessen dyslexia's impacts in higher education.

Universities' dyslexia approach impacts student self-concept and self-efficacy

Researchers (e.g., [Mellifont, 2023](#)) who probed the negative lived experiences, ableism and stigma derived from the medical model of disability have called for a better understanding of the impacts of different approaches to disability in universities. While [Deacon et al. \(2022\)](#) found situating dyslexia as a neurological defect had a negative impact on the self-esteem of adults with dyslexia, the current study adds insight from the perspectives of university students.

Situating dyslexia as a disability under the UK's Equality Act, 2010 affords a moral and legal argument for accommodations or support, however the disability label carries additional stigma. This study extends the findings of [Lister et al. \(2020\)](#), who showed that students with dyslexia were resistant to a disability label. The students and support tutors in the current study highlighted that universities' medical approach to difference through policy and practices stems from a positivist perspective, which describes impairment as a defect located in the individual. The participants argued that universities' approach impacted negatively on students' academic self-concept. In contrast to the university's approach, support tutors and students highlighted their individual view of dyslexia as nuanced, heterogeneous, invisible and situational, so they were uncomfortable with dyslexia characterised as defect and disability by university policy and practices.

Dyslexia situated as a condition needing intervention or remediation challenges the value of those with dyslexia in society, further highlighting deficit against normalcy. Universities' segregation of support from subject teaching further underlines this narrative. [Goffman \(2009\)](#) highlighted how those specialists, who identify and help the disabled, exert power due to their control of assistance. Researchers such as [Beauchamp-Pryor \(2012\)](#) similarly argued that disabled students are passive receivers of support, dictated by the university's disability support department as gatekeeper and deliverer, where student agency was not invited. The current

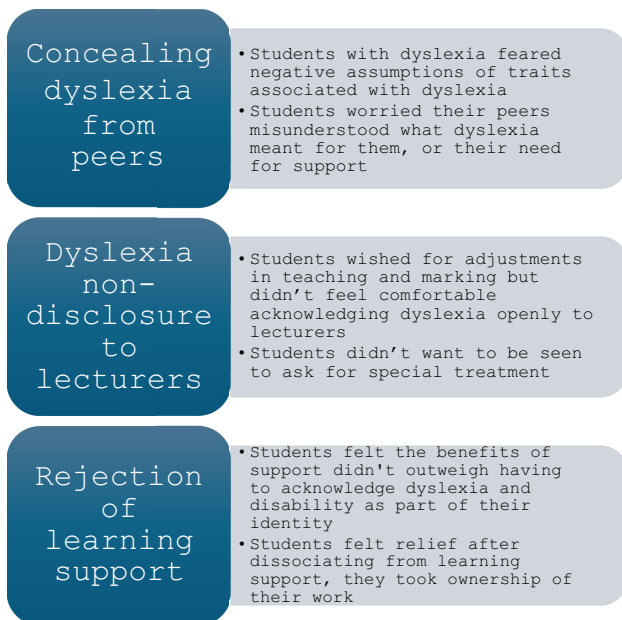


FIGURE 3 Students' decisions on dyslexia disclosure impacts access to peer support, lecturer help, and learning support. [Developed from [Hamilton Clark, 2022](#)].

study found that segregated learning support lowered students' self-efficacy in their studies, negatively impacting self-esteem. To counter this, disability research (e.g., Liasidou, 2014) argues that we should encourage individuals to be involved in decisions on what they want, boosting self-efficacy, rather than be assessed by others for their needs. This follows from the active stance of the individual enshrined in international agreements on disability rights (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN, 2006).

Dyslexia non-disclosure leads to further academic and identity impacts for students

The study findings add to our understanding of the connections between dyslexia disclosure, stigma, low academic self-concept and low self-esteem in students. The results support previous research which links dyslexia to low student self-esteem, anxiety and depression (Burden, 2008). Dyslexia's stigma is therefore rooted in societal expectations of academic performance at university, based on large amounts of reading, written work and exam assessment, which does not sit easily with dyslexia characterised as persistent difficulties reading and writing.

Existing research suggests that the primary factor why students don't disclose disability (Lindsay et al., 2018) or dyslexia (Henderson, 2017) at university is fear of stigma. The study's findings agree that students use dyslexia's renounceability to manage its stigma but also extends this to understand stigma management with specific audiences at university and in terms of impacts on academic self-concept and self-efficacy. The student participants had to choose between being perceived falsely, by hiding their dyslexia from peers and lecturers, or having to (i) publicly acknowledge dyslexia and its association with difficulty in academic study as part of their identity, (ii) confront and explain societal misconceptions about dyslexia among peers, (iii) face prejudice and derision from lecturers, and (iv) own an identity of needing support to achieve success.

Research is yet to explore in detail the consequences of dyslexia non-disclosure at university. The study's participants noted that hiding dyslexia led not only to personal inconvenience, for example avoiding lift-shares with peers, and academic impacts, such as missing classes or not accessing support. It also led to feelings of isolation, as the student was aware of an identity difference from their peers, adding to stress over dyslexia's discoverability as a hidden aspect and identity conflict in maintaining a false identity.

The study specifically advances our understanding of the impact of lecturers' dyslexia denial on students' preparedness to disclose dyslexia, extending research on lecturer attitudes to dyslexia by Cameron and

Nunkoosing (2012). Student participants in the current study highlighted lecturers' position of power in a classroom setting and the devastating impact if they met dyslexia resistance or denial. As a result, the students were keen not to raise dyslexia with lecturers, worrying about highlighting difficulty and inviting prejudice. They even went as far as avoiding classes, removing themselves from the setting where dyslexia might become obvious. This was despite acknowledging a potential advantage in lecturers understanding how the student worked best or avoiding exacerbating dyslexia's difficulties through their teaching. There was clear conflict between students' desire for dyslexia to be understood and accommodated by lecturers, set against students' reluctance to admit a stigmatised identity in an academic setting to someone in a position of power, who may not be sympathetic. The support tutors also noted that lecturers had little awareness or training on how to understand dyslexia or teach inclusively for neurodiversity.

There is scope for further work to develop our understanding of when and why students hide dyslexia; the inconveniences of this concealment; and the impacts of hiding a sensitive identity aspect in academic settings, particularly with subject lecturers who could be a source of support. Studies exploring identity in university settings have only touched briefly on our understanding of students' self-denial in identity concealment (Ragins, 2008) and the resulting stress and low feelings of belonging (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014).

IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSITIES

This study develops ideas suggested by researchers (e.g., Cameron & Billington, 2015), who argued it is important to clarify the constructions of phenomena such as dyslexia, to counter prejudice and stigma in education and to promote social justice and inclusion. The project therefore advances our understanding of the interactions between students' lived experience of dyslexia, universities' approach to dyslexia and student self-esteem. The findings emphasise an opportunity to adapt university policy and practices to reframe dyslexia, challenge misconceptions, highlight prejudice and improve the inclusion of university students with dyslexia, to impact positively not only on student self-esteem, but also on academic success and persistence in education.

Reframe dyslexia to remove the emphasis on defect and disability

The students and support tutors in the study rejected assumptions of dyslexia as low academic ability; criticised universities' unhelpful language around dyslexia as an individual defect needing remediation; and argued to

reduce the emphasis on qualifying as disabled to access support. The findings suggest university support departments could build a positive and student-led narrative around dyslexia as one of many examples of neurodiversity, to lessen dyslexia's stigma for students who may already be reticent of asking for help. Support departments could frame positive discussions on dyslexia as neurodiversity and how it is accommodated at university on their web pages; highlight the value of recognising dyslexia early to encourage students to come forward before they are in difficulty; and raise awareness of where students (and lecturers) could seek information and help, to counter misconceptions and reduce the stigma of accepting support.

The study furthers the arguments of other dyslexia researchers (e.g., Blessinger et al., 2019; Cameron & Nunkoosing, 2012; Henderson, 2017) who call for universities to foster dialogue on dyslexia among student peer-groups, tackling misconceptions and increasing opportunities for peer support at university. This study adds that it is important to encourage dyslexia awareness particularly in the first year at university so students don't delay seeking support. Student mentoring is another way that universities have started to pair students either with older years or alumni for support and career advancement. Early studies on disabled student mentoring have shown positive results (Burgstahler & Crawford, 2007) but further work is needed. In the current study, one support tutor reported they had tried mentoring between students and alumni with dyslexia, with positive feedback from a careers as well as mental health perspective.

Reduce dyslexia misconceptions among lecturers and increase inclusivity in teaching

Universities have an obligation to reduce prejudice among their staff. Previous studies (e.g., Mortimore, 2013; Ryder & Norwich, 2019) showed that despite a willingness to be inclusive, lecturers had low confidence in their dyslexia inclusivity skills, made assumptions that disempowered students with dyslexia and relied on generic accommodations from support departments. The current study extends our understanding from the students' perspective: participants said that lecturers' dyslexia denial or resistance had a marked effect on student academic self-concept, given lecturers' power and status in academic settings.

To counter lecturer dyslexia resistance and denial, universities should enhance dyslexia awareness and understanding as part of accommodating neurodiversity and incentivise lecturers to find opportunities for dialogue around student learning preferences and in-subject support. By encouraging teaching staff to open discussions with students on ways to support neurodiversity,

institutions will reduce the obstacles to students making lecturers' aware of their difficulties studying. Discussing dyslexia with students could build choice in where students can turn for help and reduce the study barriers in subject teaching. Lecturers will understand the importance of widening sources of student help when framed in terms of highlighting issues early, raising grades and reducing course drop-out.

In a study among academic staff, Kendall (2017) found that most lecturers recognise a need for ongoing training to update on policy issues as well as best practice in inclusive teaching at university. The study's support tutor participants noted that voluntary workshops for lecturer training were poorly attended, so universities need to consider compulsory online training to challenge attitudes as well as refresh pedagogy. It is important to recognise that inclusive pedagogy needn't be at the expense of other students' quality of learning: For example, simple steps such as lecture recording and making slides available in advance could benefit all students not just those with dyslexia (Pino & Mortari, 2014).

Extend support beyond standardised help in segregated support spaces

As Kelly and Erwin (2022) point out, student support should be a balance between inclusive in-subject teaching and additional learning support, which can still play an important role. Student learning support is still an area where universities can differentiate their offering from other universities in a competitive market. Study support departments are a place where some students may still prefer to seek specialist help, in addition to within-subject teaching. Further, support tutors can be advocates for students with dyslexia as they manage the process for identifying dyslexia and they are also fantastic repositories of specialist experience in helping students with a wide range of cognitive and developmental differences.

The study found students' only source of support was from segregated departments, which students felt marked them out as it was 'like going to a sexual health clinic'. Students also felt that support tutor sessions could better suit individual profiles and include student agency in decisions about support. Given the impacts on self-esteem discussed in the study, support departments should also proactively signpost emotional and mental health support as well as study skills, as few students saw dyslexia in a positive light.

Universities could also offer access to general study skills training to all students, to de-stigmatise seeking help, widen awareness of dyslexia and reach students who might not access formal support. Examples of this training could include self-paced video tutorials on study

methods, bridging the gap to university, promoting appreciation of neurodiversity and where to find help. This will enable a keener focus on personal study strategies for those students who then pursue one-to-one learning support.

CONCLUSIONS

As an exploratory research contribution in an emerging field, this project applied critical perspectives to develop our understanding of the intersection between education studies, identity work and dyslexia research. It does relational work between individual, societal and institutional constructions of dyslexia at university to expose the impact of students' lived experience of dyslexia. The most startling outcomes from the study examine how students managed dyslexia's stigma through decisions on when and with whom to declare dyslexia at university. Dyslexia non-disclosure impacted student self-esteem through the conflicts arising from managing a hidden identity with student peers and lecturers. This was compounded by students' low academic self-concept associated with dyslexia, particularly when unrecognised through school, and low self-efficacy from accessing learning support at university outside of subject teaching. Future studies among students with dyslexia should prioritise the identity impacts of late dyslexia identification and explore further students' dyslexia disclosure choices with lecturers, peers and support departments at university.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The project was subject to UCL's Institute of Education ethical guidelines and was reviewed by the UCL Research Ethics Committee. The research was designed to comply with British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011), specifically regarding informed consent, the right to withdraw, non-use of incentives, privacy and data storage.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT STATEMENT

All participants gave informed consent and were able to withdraw at any point. Permission to reproduce material from other sources (not applicable).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Charlotte acknowledges the research guidance and editing suggestions from Professor Martin Oliver, also for the additional expertise during the project of Professor Mina Vasalou, both at UCL's Institute of Education.

FUNDING INFORMATION

No specific funding was involved.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflicts of interest (financial or other benefits) which may result from the applications of this research.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ORCID

Charlotte H. Hamilton Clark  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6058-4405>

REFERENCES

- Advance, H.E. (2018) Higher Education Statistics for the UK. Available at: https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-05/2018-06-ECU_HE-stats-report_students_v5-compressed.pdf [Accessed 3rd January 2024].
- Armstrong, F. (2003) *Spaced out: policy, difference and the challenge of inclusive education*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Bates, T.C. (2006) Genes for reading and spelling. *London Review of Education*, 4(1), 31–47.
- Beauchamp-Pryor, K. (2012) From absent to active voices: securing disability equality within higher education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(3), 283–295.
- Blessinger, P., Jaimie, H. & Makhanya, M. (2019) Introduction to perspectives on diverse student identities in higher education: international perspectives on equity and inclusion innovations. *Higher Education: Teaching and Learning*, 14, 1–11.
- Bolt, D. (2016) Enabling the classroom and the curriculum: higher education, literary studies and disability. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 41(4), 556–565.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Brewer, G., Urwin, E. & Witham, B. (2023) Disabled student experiences of higher education. *Disability & Society*, 1–20. Available from: <https://doi-org.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/10.1080/09687599.2023.2263633>
- British Dyslexia Association. (2024) Available from: <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexia> [Accessed 10th May 2024].
- Brunswick, N. & Bargary, S. (2022) Self-concept, creativity and developmental dyslexia in university students: effects of age of assessment. *Dyslexia*, 28(3), 293–308.
- Burden, R. (2008) Is dyslexia necessarily associated with negative feelings of self-worth? A review and implications for future research. *Dyslexia*, 14(3), 188–196.
- Burgstahler, S. & Crawford, L. (2007) Managing an e-mentoring community to support students with disabilities: a case study. *ACE Review (Formerly ACE Journal)*, 15(2), 97–114 Available at: <https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/19814/> [Accessed 3rd January 2024]
- Burke, P.J. & Stryker, S. (2016) Identity theory: Progress in relating the two strands. *New Directions in Identity Theory and Research*, 2016, 657–682.
- Cameron, H.E. (2016) Beyond cognitive deficit: the everyday lived experience of dyslexic students at university. *Disability & Society*, 31(2), 223–239.
- Cameron, H.E. & Billington, T. (2015) The discursive construction of dyslexia by students in higher education as a moral and intellectual good. *Disability & Society*, 30(8), 1225–1240.
- Cameron, H.E. & Nunkoosing, K. (2012) Lecturer perspectives on dyslexia and dyslexic students within one Faculty at one University in England. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(3), 341–352.

- Collinson, C. & Penketh, C. (2010) Sit in the corner and Don't eat the Crayons': postgraduates with dyslexia and the dominant 'Lexic' discourse. *Disability & Society*, 25(1), 7–19.
- Corbin, J.M. & Strauss, A. (1990) Grounded theory research: procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3–21.
- Deacon, L., Macdonald, S.J. & Donaghue, J. (2022) "What's wrong with you, are you stupid?" Listening to the biographical narratives of adults with dyslexia in an age of 'inclusive' and 'anti-discriminatory' practice. *Disability & Society*, 37(3), 406–426.
- Deacon, S.H., Parrila, R. & Kirby, J.R. (2008) A review of the evidence on morphological processing in dyslexics and poor readers: a strength or weakness. In: Reid, G., Fawcett, A.J., Manis, F. & Siegel, L.S. (Eds.) *The sage handbook of dyslexia*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 212–237.
- Equality Act. (2010) The UK Government. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/6> [Accessed 3 January 2024]
- Fawcett, A.J. (2018) The challenge of transitions for dyslexic students in higher education. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, 44(1), 15–19. Available at: <https://dyslexialibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/file-manager/public/1/Winter%202018%20Final%20Fawcett%20p15-19.pdf> [Accessed 3rd January 2024]
- Foucault, M. (1991) *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin Books.
- Gibson, S. (2012) Narrative accounts of university education: socio-cultural perspectives of students with disabilities. *Disability & Society*, 27(3), 353–369.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and self-identity: self and Society in the Late Modern age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gilroy, D. (2002) *Dyslexia and higher education*. Bangor, ME: University of Wales.
- Goffman, E. (2009) *Stigma: notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. London: Penguin Books.
- Goode, J. (2007) Managing disability: early experiences of university students with disabilities. *Disability & Society*, 22(1), 35–48.
- Griffin, E. & Pollak, D. (2009) student experiences of neurodiversity in higher education: insights from the BRAINHE project. *Dyslexia*, 15, 23–41.
- Grue, J. (2016) The social meaning of disability: a reflection on categorisation, stigma and identity. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 38(6), 957–964.
- Hamilton Clark, C.H. (2022) *Classification and stigma: Theorising the identity impact of dyslexia for students in UK higher education*. PhD diss. London: UCL (University College London). Available at: <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10156218/> [Accessed 3rd January 2024]
- Harding, S. (1992) Rethinking standpoint epistemology: what is 'strong objectivity'? *The Centennial Review*, 36(3), 437–470.
- Hector, M. (2020) *Arriving at thriving: Learning from disabled students to ensure access for all*. Policy Connect. Available at: <https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/research/arriving-thriving-learning-disabled-students-ensure-access-all> [Accessed 3rd January 2024].
- Henderson, P. (2017) Are there delays in reporting dyslexia in university learners? Experiences of university learning support staff. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 41(1), 30–43.
- Jacklin, A., Robinson, C., O'Meara, L. & Harris, A. (2007) *Improving the experiences of disabled students in higher education*. Sussex: University of Sussex.
- Jacobs, L., Parke, A., Ziegler, F., Headleand, C. & De Angeli, A. (2022) Learning at school through to university: the educational experiences of students with dyslexia at one UK higher education institution. *Disability & Society*, 37(4), 662–683.
- James, N. & Busher, H. (2009) Engaging with research participants online. In: *Online Interviewing*. London: Sage.
- Kelly, D.R. & Erwin, V.M. (2022) Specific learning difficulty tutors: direct supports for Navigating disabilities and the university environment. *Disability & Society*, 2022, 1–24.
- Kendall, L. (2017) Supporting students with disabilities within a UK University: lecturer perspectives. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 55(6), 1–10.
- Kim, S. & Lombardino, L.J. (2013) What do diagnostic test data tell us about differences in the profiles of children diagnosed with Reading disability or language impairments? *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 46, 465–474.
- Kirby, P. & Snowling, M.J. (2022) Dyslexia discovered: word blindness, Victorian medicine, and education (1877-1917). In: *Ch.I in dyslexia a history*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Kitto, R.J. & Barnett, J. (2007) Analysis of thin online interview data: toward a sequential hierarchical language-based approach. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 28(3), 356–368.
- Liasidou, A. (2014) Critical disability studies and socially just change in higher education. *British Journal of Special Education*, 41(2), 120–135.
- Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E. & Carafa, G. (2018) A systematic review of barriers and facilitators of disability disclosure and accommodations for youth in post-secondary education. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 65(5), 526–556.
- Lister, K., Coughlan, T. & Owen, N. (2020) Disability or 'additional study Needs'? Identifying Students' language preferences in disability-related communications. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 35(5), 620–635.
- Lyon, G.R., Shaywitz, S.E. & Shaywitz, B.A. (2003) A definition of dyslexia. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 53, 1–14.
- Madriaga, M. (2007) Enduring Disablism: students with dyslexia and their pathways into UK higher education and beyond. *Disability & Society*, 22(4), 399–412.
- Mellifont, D. (2023) Ableist ivory towers: a narrative review informing about the lived experiences of Neurodivergent Saff in contemporary higher education. *Disability & Society*, 38(5), 865–886.
- Mortimore, T. (2013) dyslexia in higher education: creating a fully inclusive institution. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 13(1), 38–47.
- Mortimore, T. & Crozier, W.R. (2006) Dyslexia and difficulties with study skills in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), 235–251.
- Newheiser, A.-K. & Barreto, M. (2014) Hidden costs of hiding stigma: ironic interpersonal consequences of concealing a stigmatized identity in social interactions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 52, 58–70.
- O'Byrne, C., Jagoe, C. & Lawler, M. (2019) Experiences of dyslexia and the transition to university: a case study of five students at different stages of study. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 38(5), 1031–1045.
- Orth, U., Robins, R.W., Trzesniewski, K.H., Maes, J. & Schmitt, M. (2009) Low self-esteem is a risk factor for depressive symptoms from young adulthood to old age. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 118(3), 472–478.
- Osborne, T. (2019) Not lazy, not faking: teaching and learning experiences of university students with disabilities. *Disability & Society*, 34(2), 228–252.
- Peña, E.V., Stapleton, L.D. & Schaffer, L.M. (2016) Critical perspectives on disability identity. *New Directions for Student Services*, 154, 85–96.
- Pino, M. & Mortari, L. (2014) The inclusion of students with dyslexia in higher education: a systematic review using narrative synthesis. *Dyslexia*, 20(4), 346–369.
- Pollak, D.E. (2005) Dyslexia, the self and higher education: learning life histories of students identified as dyslexic.
- Prevett, P., Bell, S. & Ralph, S. (2013) Dyslexia and education in the 21st century. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 13(1), 1–6.
- Ragins, B.R. (2008) Disclosure disconnects: antecedents and consequences of disclosing invisible stigmas across life domains. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(1), 194–215.

- Rexhepi, J. & Torres, C.A. (2011) Reimagining critical theory. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 32(5), 679–698.
- Richardson, J.T.E. & Wydell, T.N. (2003) The representation and attainment of students with dyslexia in UK higher education. *Reading and Writing*, 16, 475–503.
- Rocco, T.S. & Delgado, A. (2011) Shifting lenses: a critical examination of disability in adult education. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 132, 3–12.
- Ryder, D. & Norwich, B. (2019) "UK higher education lecturers' perspectives of dyslexia, dyslexic students and related disability provision." *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 19(3), 161–712.
- Shaywitz, S.E., Morris, R. & Shaywitz, B.A. (2008) The education of dyslexic children from childhood to young adulthood. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 59, 451–475.
- Shaywitz, S.E. & Shaywitz, B.A. (2003) Dyslexia (specific Reading disability). *Pediatrics in Review*, 24(5), 147–153.
- Shaywitz, S.E. & Shaywitz, B.A. (2016) *Dyslexia: profiles of success*. Yale: The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity.
- Snowling, M. (2012) Changing concepts of dyslexia: nature, treatment and comorbidity. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 53(9), 1–3.
- Tamboer, P., Vorst, H.C.M. & Oort, J.O. (2016) Five describing factors of dyslexia. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 49(5), 466–483.
- UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Difficulties. (2019) *Current understanding, support systems, and technology-led interventions for specific learning difficulties*. The UK Government. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/926052/specific-learning-difficulties-spld-cst-report.pdf [Accessed 3rd January 2024].
- UN. (2006) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html> [Accessed 3 January 2024]
- van Viersen, S., de Bree, E.H., Kroesbergen, E.H., Slot, E.M. & Jong, P.F. (2015) Risk and protective factors in gifted children with dyslexia. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 65, 178–198.
- Zelege, S. (2004) Self-concepts of students with learning disabilities and their normally achieving peers: a review. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 19, 145–170.

How to cite this article: Hamilton Clark, C.H. (2024) Dyslexia concealment in higher education: Exploring students' disclosure decisions in the face of UK universities' approach to dyslexia. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 00, 1–14. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12683>