Complications with dyslexia when learning English

Common strategies for accommodating the needs of dyslexic pupils in the English language classroom

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate how schools work with dyslexic pupils and to understand how they are approached in education by their teachers. The purpose is also to distinguish, from a teacher’s perspective, what type of difficulties dyslexia represents. The main interest is to investigate if there are any differences in what the research says about dyslexia and how it is perceived by teachers who are working with dyslexic pupils. The method of gathering information in this essay is based on interviews with regular teachers who have Swedish and English as their main subjects, as well as interviews with special education teachers. This is combined with examining research on the topic. A set of schools driven by the municipality in Kalmar were chosen for this essay, which restricts the number of interviews. This essay concludes that the interviewed teachers provided a successful education for dyslexic pupils. A successful concept was to provide computers to dyslexic pupils to assist and alter their learning process.
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1. Introduction

Literacy skills are often equated with intelligence (Thomson & Gilchrist, 1996:3). This type of thinking can appall some people, especially those who struggle with literacy as dyslexics do. People with dyslexia have trouble coping with text in written form; however, this does not mean that they are less intelligent (Høien & Lundberg 1992:53). Dyslexia is described as a phonological difficulty that causes complications when trying to connect sound with orthographic symbols. As a result of these complications, dyslexia has a negative impact on a pupil’s learning process. Nevertheless, this does not mean that dyslexic pupils cannot learn like everyone else; they only need additional time and alterations in their education. Therefore it is of importance that dyslexic pupils will be provided with adjustments suited for their needs (Myrberg 2007:13).

The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) states that education in schools should be adapted for all individuals’ qualifications and needs depending on the pupils’ difficulties to reach the criteria in each subject. This statement is essential for dyslexic pupils since it gives them the right to acquire the extra help they need. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate’s (Skolinspektionen) purpose is to supervise that the requirements by the Swedish National Agency for Education are followed throughout schools in Sweden. Their purpose is not only to supervise; they also provide guidance and advice to develop schools on the basis of legislation.

In 2010, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate investigated schools in Sweden in order to estimate their knowledge about dyslexia and the quality of support given to dyslexic pupils (Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2011:5ff). The result of the investigation demonstrated that dyslexic pupils were to some extent provided the help they needed. However, it was shown that the assistance offered to these pupils was not efficient enough.

Dyslexia has been a recognized language learning disability for a long time, yet it is only during the past few decades that research has identified what causes dyslexia and how dyslexic pupils can overcome the main obstacles to some degree (Myrberg 2007:37). For this reason, it is of importance to investigate how schools are working with dyslexia, if they are aware of the pupils’ difficulties and their approach towards them.
This essay focuses on dyslexic pupils in upper secondary school in Kalmar. Based on a report (Kvalitetsgranskning 2011:8) performed by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate this study reviews the result of the report and compares it with the work accomplished in Kalmar. In the report, it was clearly shown that dyslexics were not given appropriate support in all subjects.

According to the Swedish National Agency for Education English is a language which increases the individuals’ opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts. This statement and the fact that English is a language based subject are the foundation of this study, to see how dyslexic pupils’ language disability affects the learning of English. This essay will investigate what type of aids dyslexic pupils are given to enable their second language learning. The study will distinguish where in the learning process pupils can come across obstacles and how this implicates on English as second language learning. In consideration of the above mentioned; the research questions for this essay are:

- What difficulties do pupils with dyslexia encounter when learning English as a second language?
- What support can dyslexic pupils be provided with to overcome their difficulties?
- What are upper secondary schools in Kalmar currently doing to help pupils with dyslexia?

The method of investigating the upper secondary schools in Kalmar consists of interviews with teachers and special education teachers. Interviews were chosen because it provides the most fulfilling insight in how teachers actually work with dyslexic pupils. In the last part of this study these interviews will be compared with previously established research to be able to estimate if there are any differences in what research says about dyslexia and how it is perceived amongst teachers and what they think can be done to facilitate dyslexic pupils.
2. Background

Dyslexia is a neurobiological disorder that affects the central nervous system, which means that a person who is a poor reader does not necessarily have to be dyslexic (Nijakowska 2010:33). A person who is a poor reader is able to improve their reading skills (ibid:8) and by reading more the person will develop their fluency in reading. Dyslexia’s effects on a person are more than only being a poor and slow reader (IDA A[www]). Persons with this disorder can improve their reading to some degree but in the end the effects of their disorder will remain their whole life (ibid:[www]).

In the multilingual society we live in today learning foreign languages is of importance (Nijakowska 2010:66). Due to a disability such as dyslexia everyone might not have the same possibility to learn another language (Samuelsson 2009:5). Dyslexic persons have severe problems with learning English because of the language structure. Since persons without a disorder can find it hard to learn a second language, persons with dyslexia will find it even harder to learn (ibid:22). Dyslexic pupils do not have difficulties in all subjects, however it is clearly displayed when they are learning a second language (ibid:66). According to Høien and Lundberg (1992:37), having dyslexia can cause low self-esteem because of their lack of development and success in a subject in comparison to the other pupils in their class. Consequently, this low self-esteem can place them in a negative spiral that will further affect their learning possibilities. By not feeling successful in their education it is possible that dyslexic pupils will fall further behind than they already have in consideration of their learning implications.

2.1 Defining dyslexia

Over the years there have been several definitions of dyslexia and they still vary in different parts of the world due to the fact that defining dyslexia is not an uncomplicated assignment (Gustafson 2009:14).

In 1968 the World Federation of Neurology stated an international definition of dyslexia as follows:

A disorder manifested by difficulty in learning to read, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and sociocultural opportunity. It is dependent upon fundamental cognitive disabilities which are frequently of constitutional origin (Dyslexiföreningen [www]).
Even though this definition does not address all of the main issues with dyslexia, this declaration has been accepted during a long period of time. In 2002 the International Dyslexia Association updated this definition with a complementary version which conveys more of decoding, and understanding of phonological difficulties and of how dyslexia is manifested (Gustafson 2009:12). Their definition of dyslexia is as followed:

It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and / or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge (IDA A [www]).

The hindrances that occur from the disorder dyslexia come from alterations of the brain that consequently affect the abilities to process auditory and/or visually presented information (Schneider & Crombie 2003:3). Dyslexia is a disability that affects the language-based learning (IDA A [www]) which indicates a special form of reading- and writing difficulty (Høien & Lundberg 1999:17). This means that a person struggles when encountering words (ibid:17). Even if the primary indications of dyslexia are complications with reading and writing, the person’s pronunciation can also be affected (Høien & Lundberg 1992:37f; IDA A [www]). Dyslexic people might also suffer from short term memory loss and therefore have a hard time labeling objects (Høien & Lundberg 1999:37ff). These different obstacles could result in further complications during their education since their whole learning process involves these aspects, as well as their ability to gain knowledge (Nijakowska 2010:5). Dyslexia is often connected with slow and poor reading (Høien & Lundberg 1992:43). There are some dyslexic persons who seem to be fast readers but they are actually guessing their way through the text. Therefore, the importance lies in considering pupils comprehension of the text and not merely their reading speed (ibid:43).

The most general problems for dyslexic people are decoding and encoding (Nijakowska 2010:9). Decoding means that a person is attaining language information from written or oral sources by listening or reading. Encoding is used when producing the language information in
written or oral form through writing or speaking (Schneider & Crombie 2003:4). Dyslexia can be divided into several subgroups where the main classifications are auditory and visual dyslexia. Having auditory dyslexia indicates that the person has difficulties with associating the correct sound with a letter, or knowing how the letter is vocalized in a specific content (Høien & Lundberg 1992:46). The consequences of this dyslexic category will restrain the language development (ibid:49). The second form, visual dyslexia, signifies that a person has difficulties remembering letters and often confuses letters that are similar to each other (ibid:46). When a person does not remember how a word is spelled, they spell it exactly how they think the word is being pronounced (ibid:49). An example of this is: “The Grin hatted Chuh-ristmas” – “The Grinch hated Christmas” (McGuinnes 1997:23). It is also characteristic for dyslexic persons to swop the letters in a word, also known as reversal errors (Høien & Lundberg1999:91). One example of this is: “sun” will be “nus” [my translation] (ibid:91). A person does not have to have difficulties in both the auditory and visual channels to be diagnosed with dyslexia (Myrberg 2007:12). A person has a reading disability regardless if they can decode a text but do not understand auditory words or vice versa. (ibid:12).

Some dyslexic persons find it hard to recognize and remember the combination between the sound of a word and its spelling (Reid 2007:11). Words such as “elephant” and “physical” consisting of “ph” spelling but are pronounced as it would be spelled with an “f” will consequently be complicated for a dyslexic person (ibid:11). It has been shown that in longer texts a dyslexic person has an enhanced reading comprehension than when dealing with a single word. This is because they often focus on the content of the text rather than noticing every single word in itself (ibid:13). This is called semantic confusion and occurs when the reader understands the context but do not read the text accurately, thereby confusing words with similar meaning (ibid:11).

The definition of dyslexia comprises reading and writing difficulties. A person with dyslexia has issues with decoding and encoding and therefore the persons’ learning process might be affected. With the understanding of these difficulties, it is essential to offer appropriate support.

2.2 Help for dyslexic pupils

Dyslexia is referred to as a learning disability on the basis of the difficulties a pupil can encounter when trying to succeed academically in a typical instructional environment (IDA A
Their learning disability qualifies them to attend in special education, accommodations or extra support services (ibid:www). Furthermore, failure to identify dyslexia in an early stage can have an accumulative effect for the pupil (Christo, Davis & Brock 2009:1). Pupils with learning complications will not put themselves in situations where their knowledge can seem insufficient and therefore the pupils will have a negative attitude towards learning (Swalander 2009:189f).

Today there is a great deal of information about distinctions of dyslexia and a variety of resources that can impact in teaching practice (Reid 2007:4). At the same time, the escalation in knowledge about the disability can result in problems for teachers due to the fact that researchers do not agree on how dyslexia is manifested. This can create confusion amongst teachers in how to interact with pupils (ibid:4). The pupils need their teachers’ support to progress their capability in reading and writing, because these abilities are fundamental for academic success (Christo, Davis & Brock 2009:1). According to Reid (2007:4), teachers have to have an understanding for dyslexia, its manifestations and how it can impact on a pupil’s education. The issues dyslexic pupils come by in their learning process need to be recognized by teachers when planning lessons (Thomson & Gilchrist 1996:203ff). If this is done, the pupils’ need of assistance will be considered and can lead to a successful learning environment. In addition, it is essential to emphasize the strengths and talents pupils acquire, to sustain a positive learning situation which will motivate them (ibid:203ff).

Everyone is their own individual and for that reason teachers cannot assume that all dyslexic pupils can be addressed in the same way (Høien & Lundberg 1992:43; IDA B [www]). Education in schools should be adapted to each individual’s needs and requirements to sustain a positive learning process (National Agency of Education 2011[www]). All teachers who interact with a dyslexic pupil have to work with the same approach and accommodations that have been successfully established (IDA B [www]; Thomson & Gilchrist 1996:197). When teachers give instructions, the amount of information needs to be reduced if there are dyslexics with auditory problems in the classroom, because of their problems with short term memory (Thomson & Gilchrist 1996:203ff). Flexibility in the learning process is a crucial part of teaching, just as well, the assignments ought to be narrowed down for identification (ibid:203ff). By only using one learning technique dyslexic pupils might not process information as easily as they would have if they had various learning techniques, since not all techniques are suited for dyslexics. Therefore teachers have to teach pupils with this disorder to attain certain strategies to gain information in their own way. If
they learn these strategies they will not be depended on teachers as much as before (Schneider & Ganschow 2000:73). This will furthermore contribute to a positive learning environment for pupils (ibid:73). A successful way to improve knowledge with dyslexics is to have a trustful relationship between teacher and pupil, which will enforce a pupil to engage in learning outside their comfort zone (ibid:4). If it is not possible for teachers to provide this, it is important to have access to special education teachers (Høien & Lundberg 1999:272).

Today teachers have access to various resources which provide dyslexic pupils with support, and by taking advantage of these resources the learning process can become more manageable (Thomson & Gilchrist 1996:205). During the last decade there have been different resources such as Dictaphones, CD-ROMs, audiotapes and Quicktionary pens (Schneider & Crombie 2000:76ff). Dictaphones enables recording a voice for later use, which can be used by teachers to record information for the pupil, or the other way around. A Quicktionary pen is used as a digital dictionary which scans the word and an explanation will appear on the display and the word can also be pronounced (ibid:89). Audio tapes and CD-ROMs provide written information with a voice where the information contained in the books could instead be listened to (ibid:76). Today these resources are all in use, and because of the advent of ICT technology, they can also be retained in a computer. By giving dyslexic pupils access to a computer they will also gain access to all these different aids by themselves (Schneider & Crombie 2000:78; Høien & Lundberg 1999:290). Resources of this type will help pupils in their reading and writing skills and together with acquired help they can both gain and produce information in a more manageable way. They can also preserve previous information that they can take part of later on in their education (Dahlin 2009:53f). During the learning process it can be of importance to connect both auditory and visual channels. Listening to a text and being presented with pictures at the same time can increase their understanding (Schneider & Crombie 2003:78). Some dyslexics learn by interacting with their hands, so called kinesthetic-tactile. This means that they see and move different objects in front of them when learning. Opportunities to do so will ease their weakness in the auditory and visual channel. Unfortunately this type of learning is not used as much as it could be, although using computers in the learning process will improve this type of resource (ibid:78).

In other words, by incorporating technological strategies in the learning process both teachers and pupils will benefit from it. Teachers will become more supportive for the pupil since they can provide more help, and pupils will to a certain degree be independent learners. Having this combination throughout will affect the education in a positive way, especially in
English, which is a language based subject and therefore will generate difficulties for dyslexic pupils.

### 2.3 Second language learning with dyslexia

The possibility of learning a second language is something individual: therefore the attainment of a second language varies among learners (Lundberg 2002:170). Today people are not only interacting with English in classrooms, but also through television programs, movies, music and the Internet. This brings the learning environment outside the classroom and integrated in the pupils’ lives. Their language skills are developed in other ways and not merely through a language educator (Schneider & Crombie 2003:75). However, having an understanding of the conversational language is not the same as developing academic proficiency in English, and it is here pupils often struggle (Lundberg 2002:168). There are different theories of what aspects influence the learning of a second language. Some researchers argue that the socio-cultural factors, the everyday interaction with the second language as well as fluency in the native language (L1) will affect the ability to successfully learn a second language (L2) (Sparks & Ganschow 1991:9; Miller-Guron & Lundberg 2000:43).

The English language has a “deep” orthography that could induce difficulties when learning. Learners of a second language have to be aware of the basic building blocks in the language, the phonemes, as well as the “complex abstractions of orthographies” (Lundberg 2002:179). These difficulties with the English language are applicable for all learners, but especially for dyslexic pupils. Having dyslexia can create immense obstacles when learning a second language. The main obstacles dyslexic pupils can encounter when learning a foreign language can be related to their deficiency in the phonological system (Lundberg 2002:174).

In some languages a letter is always pronounced in the same way, however in the English language a letter can correspond to different pronunciations and words that are pronounced the same way are spelled differently (Nijakowska 2010:22). Dyslexic pupils may not be able to notice similarities and differences between print symbols and their related pronunciations in a L2 as they would in their L1 (Schneider & Crombie 2003:5f). The L1 proficiency will determine the outcome of the L2 learning; having a stronger or weaker L1 proficiency results into a better or poorer L2 learning (Lundberg 2002:169; Jacobson 2009:253). In learning a language both decoding and encoding are important, and here the L2 is also influenced of the
ability to gain information through written and oral sources in their L1 (Schneider & Crombie 2003:4).

However, because of predicaments with learning a language some educators believe that dyslexic pupils should not have to learn a second language since it will only generate even more obstacles in their education (Schneider & Crombie 2003:5f). The complexity dyslexics have to process in their native language is sufficient enough for them, and they should therefore not attempt to learn an L2 (ibid:5f). If one’s native language is a small language, the value of being able to manage a cross-cultural language such as English increases radically, even if dyslexics have a disability to attain languages (Helland & Kaasa 2005:41). Therefore, the issue is not whether dyslexics should learn a second language or not, but rather how to integrate them successfully in the education given the resources that are available (Schneider & Crombie 2003:5f:1). It will not be beneficial for the pupils to not develop a second language: therefore it is significant to make both pupils and teachers realize the benefits that will be achieved and not only see the obstacles (ibid:1f). However, even if the problems when learning a second language are “language-related”, struggling pupils will still be able to learn (ibid:13).

Consequently, a pupil who is a poor reader in their L1 is assumed to be less efficient in their L2. These assumptions cannot be applied for all dyslexics. Miller-Guron and Lundberg (2000:43) indicate that teachers in Sweden have occurred dyslexic pupils who prefer to gain information in their second language, English. The approach to the language is central for dyslexic pupils and with clear instructions the pupils will have a good chance to succeed (Schneider & Crombie 2003:13). Clear instructions combined with technological resources will make a great difference when learning a second language. Furthermore, activities connected to these resources will help the pupils overcome obstacles and simplify their learning process in their continued development (ibid:78).

In other words, the understanding of how to learn a second language and how a person processes a second language are far from established (Lundberg 2002:166). The majority of dyslexic pupils will struggle when learning English as a second language although support can be provided that will ease the process. The support will only help to a certain degree and adjustments in the learning process should be made to make second language learning more achievable for dyslexic pupils.
3. Method and material

In this section there will be a description of the procedure when gathering material for this essay and the problems that occurred due to the limitations. The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of how schools in Kalmar are working with dyslexic pupils. This is accomplished by interviews with regular teachers and special education teachers, and they will be explained further on in table 1.

3.1 Choice of method

The method used in this essay was personal interviews. Collecting information through interviews was found to be the most useful way, because the answers from the teachers would become more detailed. A positive effect with interviews was that the answers were discussed and followed with subsequent questions. The respondents were not given the questions before the interviews were taking place in the purpose of attaining more reliable data. By only presenting the questions at the interview the interviewees could not prepare or rehearse on what to answer and that would result in more sincere answers.

3.2 Selection

Limitations were made to interview teachers working in municipal schools in Kalmar. Municipal schools were selected due to the fact that municipality schools have the same foundation and the same financial contribution. Teachers with the subject combination of Swedish/English were given preference since they had insight in language development in both Swedish (L1) and English (L2).

For the interviews nine teachers were contacted by e-mail to gauge their interest in participating, but three of them were not able to take part. Of the ones who were participating, three were regular Swedish and English teachers and three of them were special education teachers in the same subject. They were later on individually contacted by e-mail with further explanation of how the interview was to be carried out. The teachers were asked for how long they had been teaching and they had between 10- and 40 years of experience which is of advantage for this study. Thereafter a date for the interview was determined.
Table 1: Description of the participating interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Female/Male</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Type of teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Special education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Special education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40 years</td>
<td>Special education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows the gender of teachers, how many years they have been teaching and if they are a regular teacher or a special education teacher. This is demonstrated to develop an understanding of the interviewees, but also to see if their answers will have anything to do with what type of teacher they are and how long they have been working.

3.3 Procedure of the interviews

The interviews were carried out with the help of a question guide which can be found in the appendix. They were constructed in a way which gave the respondents room for making extensive answers that could be discussed with the interviewer (Jacobsen 1993:19). The initial questions were the same to all interviewees so that answers that were given could be compared with each other. However, depending on how and what they answered, the interview could take a different course and other questions might be added to make a better understanding of the information that was given (Kylén 2004:39).

The construction of the questions was based on information given about dyslexia in the background section and therefore divided into three parts: defining dyslexia, English and dyslexia, and resources for dyslexic pupils. The first part, defining dyslexia was constructed from the characteristics of dyslexia (reading and writing difficulties) and the principles given by the Swedish National Agency for Education that all pupils have the right to an adapted education. This was in order to establish how teachers perceive dyslexia and what affects it could have on pupils’ education in form of limitations in the learning process. The second part, English and dyslexia, was constructed to see how dyslexia is manifested in the English
language. Through this a comparison between learning Swedish as their native language and English as a second language could be established. This is why teachers with the subject combination Swedish/English were preferable. The third part, resources for dyslexic pupils, considered technological resources in form of audiotape, dictionary and spelling programs. According to research, today computers can provide these resources but it was also of importance to consider an adequate contact between teacher and pupil.

The interviews were carried out by presenting the respondent with the questions and recording what was said as well as writing down the most important parts. By recording the interviews it would be easier to control the answers so that a correct comprehension of what was said was made. The interviews as well as the questions were in Swedish and later on translated into English.

3.4 Problems and limitations

The size of this essay and the limited time that was given presented some obvious limitations. Therefore it was not possible to include more than a handful of interviews, which means that the scope of the study is restricted. A problem with only interviewing the teachers instead of observing their approach with dyslexic pupils was that the answers could be formatted to favor the school. If that were done, it would definitely have an impact on the result from the interviews.
4. Results

In this section the results from the interviews will be presented and the respondents will be referred to as teacher 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, as stated in table 1 in the method and material chapter. The result is divided into the same three parts that the interview questions contained: defining dyslexia, English and dyslexia, and resources for dyslexic pupils. Each section will start of by presenting the related interview questions. Thereafter in section 4.2, a connection between the teachers’ answers and research presented in the background will be made and a discussion of the results will follow.

4.1 Overview of results

Table 2 below demonstrates what the teachers mentioned during the interviews and their different descriptions of dyslexia. Explanations of the topics are presented below:

Table 2. How teachers describe dyslexia and their education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading/Writing difficulties</th>
<th>Difference in Theory/Practice</th>
<th>Difficulties in learning English</th>
<th>Integrated in classroom</th>
<th>Individual approach</th>
<th>Follow the course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviewed teachers were asked about their perception of dyslexia; if they believed it to consist of reading and writing difficulties. They were also asked if there are differences in how dyslexic pupils are described in research and how they are perceived when teachers approach them, difference in theory and practice. When asking about English it was important to see if the teacher thought it is difficult for dyslexics to learn English. The teachers also expressed their thoughts about if dyslexic pupils should follow the syllabus or not. When talking about dyslexic pupils and how to accommodate them, it was brought up if they were to
be integrated in the classroom, and if teachers should have an individual approach towards them. This was to understand the teacher’s opinion of dyslexics’ possibility in school.

4.1.1 Defining dyslexia

During the interviews the teachers answered the following questions about dyslexia, and their answers are reproduced in this section

- What does dyslexia mean for you?
- How does dyslexia affect the learning process?
- Does dyslexia have any side effects to the education?
- Is there a difference between dyslexia in theory and how it is in practice?

All of the respondents define dyslexia as a form of reading and writing difficulties, although some of the teachers develop their definition further. Teacher 3, 5 and 6 develop the definition by saying that the difficulties lie in connecting sound and phoneme, to not be able to make text and sound into something coherent. Dyslexia is very individual and is being expressed differently from person to person according to teacher 1, 2 and 6. When discussing the difficulties of being dyslexic, teachers 6 highlighted the importance to not only see what is difficult. Teacher 6’s idea on this matter:

People think I work with pupils with difficulties, I see it as working with their potential
[my translation].

There are three teachers (1, 2, and 5) who express that a dyslexic pupil needs to have additional time with assignments than others. Teacher 2, 3, and 5 mention that many pupils are dyslexic even if they have not been diagnosed, but emphasize that either way it is crucial to provide them the help they need. Furthermore, teacher 1 explains that not all dyslexics want to be diagnosed, and without help they will have difficulties coping with their education. Teacher 6 clarifies that even if a dyslexic pupil practices reading and writing, the disorder will always remain.

According to teachers 1 and 2 dyslexia in theory and practice is the same. On the contrary, three of the teachers (3, 4, and 6) emphasize that there is a big difference between
dyslexia in theory and dyslexia in practice. Furthermore, they explain that the evaluations when diagnosing dyslexia, to assess the pupil’s learning disability, diverge from how teachers perceive it when the pupils actually are learning. Something that the majority of the respondents consider important is how teachers approach pupils and their expectations of the pupils. One teacher, number 4, mentions that having an individual approach is necessary and there are no guidelines in how to accommodate dyslexics. Teacher 4’s quotation on how teachers should work with dyslexic pupils:

   It would be more beneficial for the pupil if all teachers involved worked with the same approach [my translation].

In addition to this statement, teacher 6 claims that it is of importance to see the pupil’s capacity and not focusing on the problems. Respondents 3, 4 and 5 emphasize that dyslexic pupils often have very bad self-esteem, and this affects their motivation in their education. Dyslexics can often feel weaker than other pupils, and the pupils’ self-esteem is crucial for academic success.

4.1.2 English and dyslexia

These are the questions given to the teachers when taking about English and dyslexia, how dyslexia affects the pupil when learning English, and their answers are reproduced in this section

- Is there any difference in learning Swedish (L1) or English (L2)?
- What do you perceive as difficult for a dyslexic when learning English?
- What is the crucial difference between learning English for a dyslexic pupil and another pupil?
- Have you ever come across a dyslexic who found English easier to learn?

According to two respondents, 1 and 2, there is no difference between learning Swedish and English: spelling difficulties and grammatical issues are the same. Teachers 4 and 5 talk about difficulties with English, but do not mention that it is harder to learn English than Swedish. The only ones who point out that English is harder to learn because of how the language is built, are teachers 3 and 6. They say that it is hard for a dyslexic pupil to decode and
understand the sounds of letters because spelling and pronunciation differs in the language. The Swedish words are spelt according to how they sound, as opposed to English that can have words that are spelled very differently from how they are pronounced. However respondents 3 and 6 have come across dyslexic pupils who find it easier to learn English as a second language than learning their native language, Swedish.

All of the respondents state that it is easier for dyslexic pupils to express themselves orally when they learn English. By taking advantage of the oral competence they can develop an interest for the language and therefore perform better. That is why it is beneficial to have oral tests rather than written ones. The biggest issue a dyslexic pupil has is to not be able to understand how the word is spelled. Texts written by a dyslexic pupil cannot be given the same attention on spelling and grammar as other pupils; teachers need to look at the context. Respondent 1 to 5 agree that it is of importance that a dyslexic pupil follows the course even though they express the value to obtain help from special education teachers. Many of the dyslexic pupils that begin the upper secondary school have not learned English at all. In these cases previous teachers have instead focused on developing the pupils Swedish. Teacher 5 does not think it is possible to help them learn how to read and write in English at this state. The teacher continues to explain that the only thing teachers can do at this point is to give them the basic knowledge that the pupils are missing. On the contrary, respondent number 6 does not believe that these types of dyslexic pupils can follow the course: instead the English course will come later on. Teacher 1 had the opinion that help should be provided, teacher 1’s quotation:

If a dyslexic has not been given help before, he/she will often be able to attain help when they start at a new school [my translation].

Both teacher 1 and 6 believe that the multilingual society we live in today makes it is easier for dyslexic pupils to learn English while teacher 5 highlights the technological advancement such as audio files and spelling programs.

4.1.3 Resources for dyslexic pupils

Having established how the teachers described dyslexia and how it implicates on the English language teaching, they answered questions about how to help dyslexic pupils in their
education. The teachers answered the following questions, and their answers are reproduced in this section

- **How do you approach a dyslexic in your teaching?**
- **What determines the resources a pupil can be provided with?**
- **Would you say the learning situation for dyslexic pupils is individual?**
- **In your teaching, do you use any resources, and if so, to what extent?**
- **What decides what resources the school could provide?**

All of the respondents experience that their school provides excellent support and resources for their dyslexic pupils. Teacher 5 emphasizes the importance of all teachers providing help, teacher 5’s quotation:

> All teachers should be enlightened with what type of resources that can be provided and work together for a positive learning environment for the pupil [my translation].

It is the pupils themselves that decide what kind of support they want to use and to what degree. All new teachers are given information about dyslexia to broaden their understanding. Even if all teachers are given information about dyslexia, teacher 3 knows that the approach with dyslexic pupils is not the same from all teachers. Teacher 3’s quotation on this problem:

> It would be beneficial for the pupils if all teachers approach them in the same way, but unfortunately that is not the case [my translation].

Some dyslexics use different aids that will assist in their education while others do not want to realize that they have a problem and therefore are not given the support that they might need.

Furthermore, they all agree that the education needs to be evident for all pupils. Teachers need to have an individual approach and by having an individual approach teachers can easier estimate what type of resources that would be beneficial for each pupil. Every respondent believes it is significant to integrate dyslexic pupils in the classroom together with other pupils so that they feel included. By not integrate them in the classroom, dyslexic pupils might feel more exposed. They explain further that teaching should be adapted with different tactics to function for all pupils. That is why teachers need to devote careful consideration to planning and to the material given to the pupils. Since dyslexic pupils are supposed to be
integrated in the classroom, interviewees 3, 4, 5 and 6 mention that dyslexic pupils can be given help from special education teachers when time is given.

All the teachers who were interviewed think that a computer is a very helpful resource to give to dyslexic pupils. The computers make the pupils’ learning process easier due to the fact that computers have the beneficial resources that a dyslexic pupil need. With help of the computers, resources will be more easily available, such as audio files which enable pupils to read texts and connect them to sounds from an audio book. With the help of these resources the pupils are not being excluded or as exposed in the classroom as they might have been before. Teacher 2 mentions that dyslexia is accepted today, something it might not have been before, teacher 2’s quotation when mentioning this:

Having dyslexia is not as shameful as it has been before [my translation].

The respondents’ opinions are that dyslexic pupils learn better when they are given the possibility to listen to texts rather than reading them. Having the possibility to take pictures of a teacher’s presentation in case of writing on the board, Power Points etc. let pupils pay more attention to what is said and then connect it to the pictures. The respondents further explain that technological resources that could be provident to dyslexics are constantly changing. It is important to use all resources that can be provided and have different methods for the learning process. They continue by explaining that it is the pupil who decides what type of resources they want to use, even if a teacher recommends a specific type of resource. Teacher 6 also highlights that if appropriate resources are given, it will facilitate dyslexics’ difficulties and the education may not be so complex. Some dyslexics are well aware of the problems their disability could cause and are therefore working hard to let it affect the learning as little as possible.

Teacher 4 emphasizes that it is essential to motivate and explain to a pupil that the fault is not theirs, it is the situation. When teachers motivate a pupil they ensure that the pupil does not fall into a negative spiral.

4.1.4 Summary of results
The interviewed teachers were all of the same opinion about how to define dyslexia and how it should be approached in the education. They all explain that dyslexia is a disability and that dyslexic pupils need to be provided with various adjustments. Furthermore some of the interviewees consider English harder to learn for dyslexic pupils because of the language structure. However, together with resources such as computers it will make the learning process easier. When the type of resources to be used was discussed most of them highlighted computers as the most beneficial resource. They explain further that with the help of computers the dyslexic pupils have the opportunity to express themselves orally since computers facilitate their education so the pupils can focus on their strengths. Not only technological resources were regarded to be beneficial, but also the fact that motivating the dyslexic pupils would be valuable for their education.

4.2 Analysis and discussion

The teachers all thought that adjustments had to be made for dyslexic pupils. The resources that were mentioned and discussed the most were computers and giving them the opportunity to express themselves orally. Only two teachers mentioned the importance of motivating the pupils.

Figure 1. What sort of resources teachers use
The definition of dyslexia given by Høien and Lundberg (1999:17) was similar to the interviewed teachers’ conception of dyslexia. It is described as a disability that entails reading and writing difficulties. The interesting aspect is to see how conceptions differ between regular teachers and special education teachers. The regular teachers saw dyslexia as mere reading and writing difficulties, while the special education teachers define it in more detail, such as having difficulties with connecting sound and phoneme. According to the interviewees all teachers have knowledge about dyslexia and the difficulties that follow. However, even if teachers are well aware of dyslexia and how it should be accommodated in the education, dyslexic pupils are not always given the appropriate help they require in all subjects. In these scenarios it is of importance to underline that some teachers do not provide resources for dyslexics and therefore go against the policy of the National Agency for Education, i.e. that education in schools should be adapted for all individuals’ qualifications and needs. All of the interviewees think that their school is providing good resources for dyslexic pupil. This does not mean that all teachers work with the same approach and might not even know that there are better ways to handle dyslexic pupils. In today’s society it is most likely that schools work with dyslexia to the best of their economical ability. The important part is to see to the pupils’ needs on the basis of the schools’ situation.

All teachers emphasize the importance of having an individual approach to dyslexic pupils. This can be connected to Høien and Lundberg (1992:43) and IDA B ([www]) who mention that dyslexia is individual and the pupils have to be faced individually. In addition, all pupils, dyslexic or not, need to be accommodated differently because they all have different strengths and weaknesses. This is why it is of importance for a teacher to make time to get to know a dyslexic pupil and see what this particular pupil requires.

When side effects of dyslexia were discussed with the interviewees, they brought up low self-esteem as one immense consequence. They further explained that pupils with low self-esteem will not be motivated in their learning process. Why a pupil’s self-esteem will reflect on their education was motivated by the fact that dyslexic pupils struggle considerably more when learning than other pupils. This idea is also articulated by Høien and Lundberg (1992:37) who talk about self-esteem and the importance of pupils having good self-esteem to improve their learning process. It is remarkable that teacher 3, 4 and 5 mention self-esteem as a side effect of dyslexia but only teacher 4 and 6 claim that motivating dyslexic pupils is essential. If the other teachers are well aware of this side effect, why are they not expressing the essential problem of working against low self-esteem?
Nijakowska (2010:22) and Lundberg (2002:179) observe that learning English as a second language is difficult because of the complexity in how the language is built. This is also what teacher 3, 4, 5 and 6 mention when discussing English and dyslexia. Nijakowska (2010:22) explains that a letter in English corresponds to different pronunciations and that words that are pronounced the same way are spelled differently. According to Lundberg (2002:179) and teacher 6 the English language has a deep orthography that can induce difficulties when learning. On the basis of these statements dyslexic pupils should be provided with extra help when learning English so that they have the same opportunity to learn as pupils without disorder. Pupils without disorder can also find English difficult because of the structure. Respondent 5 and 6 mention the fact that some dyslexic pupils begin upper secondary school with no previous education of English. This leads to immense problems for teachers in upper secondary school. To learn English today is valuable because of the multilingual society we have; that is why it is crucial to help dyslexic pupils when learning English. Pupils go to school to learn, and dyslexic pupils need to learn how to overcome their obstacles, not how to avoid them.

Just as Schneider and Crombie (2000:78) talk about computers facilitating the learning of English, it was established from all the interviewees that learning English today is more attainable because different aids are incorporated in a computer. Aids like audio files and spelling programs are possible to access through computers, state Thomas and Gilchrist (1996:205), Schneider and Crombie (2000:76ff) and Høien and Lundberg (1999:290) together with all the respondents. It is thus clear that both the interviewees and established research emphasize the positive aspects of dyslexic pupil using a computer to help them in their learning process. One could ask if teachers forget their own roll in the learning process such as the personal contact between teacher and pupil and to not solely rely on computers. The interviewed special education teachers saw themselves as a resource, but unfortunately they cannot provide help all the time as a computer can. A combination between teacher and electronic resource would probably provide the best help for dyslexic pupils. All technological resources might not be beneficial for all dyslexics; it is once again of importance to highlight the fact that dyslexia is an individual disorder. With an individual approach teachers can understand what a specific pupil needs and then provide the best possible assistance.

Høien and Lundberg (1999:37) & IDA A (www) mention that even though dyslexia’s main characteristics are reading and writing difficulties, a dyslexic can also have
pronunciation difficulties. This is interesting in view of the fact that all teachers thought that because of dyslexics’ reading and writing difficulties, they should be able to express themselves orally and have oral exams. According to the teachers, oral tests give pupils the opportunity to still express their knowledge in a way that is more beneficial for them. This makes one think about what happens if a pupil has dyslexia-related pronunciation difficulties. How will the teachers accommodate them, if the standard solution is to have oral tests with dyslexics? It seems that even if dyslexics’ oral ability is more advanced than their writing proficiency, teachers should not avoid improving the pupils’ written proficiency as well, to achieve a balance in the pupils’ capacity to express themselves.

It is clearly shown through this study that what is said by researcher about how dyslexia should be accommodated in the education is well known among the interviewed teachers in Kalmar. Dyslexia is a complex disability; its main classifications, auditory and visual dyslexia, are the ones schools have knowledge about. Dyslexia can be manifested in many other ways, and this could probably constitute a problem for schools when dealing with dyslexic pupils who have not been diagnosed. However, the work done in the investigated schools to provide dyslexic pupils with the possibility to attain a successful education is to a large extent suitable.
5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers in Kalmar are working with dyslexic pupils in their learning of a second language. The intent was to see how both regular English teachers as well as special education teachers are working with dyslexic pupils. The purpose was also to see what similarities or differences there are between these types of teachers in their approach to dyslexic pupils. The interest to write this essay came from the results in the report Kvalitetsgranskning 2011:8 where it was estimated that Swedish schools are insufficient in their way of working with dyslexic pupils. The purpose to get an insight in how schools in Kalmar are working with dyslexia has to some extent been accomplished. Since limitations were made we can only estimate to a certain degree how teachers in Kalmar approach dyslexic pupils.

According to the respondents in this essay their schools have always given sufficient resources to dyslexic pupils. The resources that they provide are special education teachers and computers with different programs to ease the pupils’ learning process. Dyslexia is accepted as a disability and that is why the schools can provide these resources. It is clearly shown that schools and their teachers are well aware of dyslexia and they work to counteract the pupils’ disabilities in their education.

The result of this essay was to some extent unforeseen. The expectation was to find clearer dissimilarities between regular teachers’ and special education teachers’ approach towards dyslexia. After the interviews it was understood that the respondents had approximately the same understanding of dyslexia and accommodate dyslexic pupils the same way.

It was surprising to see how the teachers worked with different resources and the fact that they altered their teaching to everyone’s advantage. Before starting with this essay because of the result from the report Kvalitetsgranskning 2011:8, the expectation was to find deficits in the schools’ strategies for accommodating the needs of dyslexic pupils. However, the findings of this study were positive.

To develop this essay, one can examine the differences between schools that are failing in handling dyslexic pupils, and schools who are considering dyslexic pupils in their teaching so as to arrive at a more detailed understanding of the particular needs of dyslexics. One can also include a broader geographic area to extend the investigation, allowing insight of how
schools in different counties in Sweden work with dyslexic pupils. This will offer an understanding in whether or not the approach towards dyslexic pupils is depended on the municipality, in such ways as economic or policy aspects. This can further lead to investigations about differences in how independent schools and schools driven by municipalities are working with dyslexia.

Another angle is to compare dyslexia, ADHD and autism and how they are being approached in school. ADHD and autism are disabilities that will affect the learning process just like dyslexia, and a comparison is therefore valid. Are pupils diagnosed with ADHD and autism provided with the same resources as dyslexics? In this case one has to bear in mind that dyslexia has been a recognized disability for a long time, while disorders such as ADHD and autism are relatively new for teachers to come across.
6. References


Schneider, Elke & Crombie, Margaret. (2003). *Dyslexia and Foreign Language Learning* [Electronic resource]


**Journals**


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**Website**

Svenska Dyslexiföreningen. (accessed 8 April 2013) <http://www.dyslexiforeningen.se/?page_id=161>


Appendix

Questions for interview – Dyslexia and English as a second language

Occupation:

Working Years:

School:

The schools number of pupils:

Dyslexia

- What does dyslexia mean for you?
- How does dyslexia affect the learning process?
- Does dyslexia have any side effects to the education? (Self-esteem, acceptance)
- Is there a difference between dyslexia in theory and how it is in practice?

English and dyslexia

- Is there any difference in learning Swedish (L1) or English (L2)?
- What do you perceive as difficult for a dyslexic when learning English?
- What is the crucial difference between learning English for a dyslexic pupil and another pupil?
- Have you ever come across a dyslexic who found English easier to learn?

Resources for dyslexic pupil

- How do you accommodate a dyslexic in your teaching?
- What determines the resources a pupil can be provided with?
- Would you say the learning situation for dyslexic pupils is individual?
- In your teaching, do you use any resources, and if so, to what extent?
- What decides what resources the school could provide?
**Intervju frågor – Dyslexi och Engelska som andra språk**

**Yrke:**

**Antal år inom yrket:**

**Skola:**

**Antal elever på skolan:**

**Dyslexi**

- Vad innebär dyslexi för dig?
- Hur påverkar dyslexi inläreningen?
- Har dyslexi några bieffekter som påverkar skolgången? (självbild, acceptans)
- Finner du att det är någon skillnad mellan hur diagnosen dyslexi är ställd och hur den uttrycker sig i skolan? (Skillnad mellan teori och praktik)

**Engelska**

- Är det skillnad för en dyslektiker att lära sig svenska (modersmål) och engelska (andra språk)?
- Vilka främsta svårigheter anser du en dyslektiker har med att lära sig engelska?
- Vad är den centrala skillnaden i att lära sig engelska för en dyslektiker och en annan elev?
- Har du någon gång mött en dyslektiker som har det lättare att lära sig engelska?

**Hjälpmedel**

- Hur bemöter du en dyslektiker i undervisningen?
- Vad avgör vilket stöd eleven får?
- Skiljer sig lärosituationen från elev till elev?
- Använder du dig av några hjälpmedel, i så fall, i vilken utsträckning?
- Vad är det som bestämmer vilka hjälpmedel ni använder/erbjuder?