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Diversity in Educational Approaches: Mentoring as a Tool to Support Students Diagnosed with Dyslexia and at Risk of Social Maladjustment

Abstract

The modern education system faces the challenge of meeting the needs of students with dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment. Such students often encounter learning difficulties, which can lead to reduced self-esteem, withdrawal from school life, and problems with social adaptation. Mentoring, based on individual relationships, represents a promising support tool, helping to overcome educational barriers, develop social skills, and better understand emotions. This article highlights the importance of mentoring as a form of support for students with dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment. Mentoring helps build positive self-esteem, develop interpersonal skills, and cope with emotional challenges, which is crucial for young people at risk of social exclusion. Examples of programs demonstrate the positive impact of mentoring on educational outcomes, social integration, and the reduction of emotional problems. Research confirms that long-term mentoring relationships bring lasting benefits, such as increased motivation, higher self-esteem, and better social functioning.

Keywords: mentoring, student with dyslexia, student at risk of social maladjustment, educational support, emotional support.

Introduction

The contemporary education system is confronted with the challenge of addressing the diverse needs of students, particularly those grappling with a dual

diagnosis of specific learning difficulties and the risk of social maladjustment. Students diagnosed with dyslexia often face significant barriers in the educational process, which can lead to diminished self-esteem, withdrawal from school life, and, consequently, challenges with social adaptation. The coexistence of dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment presents a particularly complex challenge for teachers and specialists, necessitating a tailored and multifaceted approach.

One promising tool for supporting students in such circumstances is mentoring. In the academic literature, mentoring is defined as a relationship between a more experienced individual (mentor) and a student (mentee), in which the mentor serves as a guide, advisor, and provider of emotional support¹. Such relationships can play a pivotal role in assisting students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment in overcoming educational barriers, developing social skills, and gaining insight into their emotional states. Mentoring enables an individualised approach to a student's needs, fostering academic achievement and emotional and social development—crucial elements for students at risk of social maladjustment. Mentoring also encompasses advisory support, academic performance monitoring, and assistance with planning and achieving success (Karwala, 2007, cited in Butarewicz, Potoniec, 2013).

Mentoring can take various forms depending on the context, location, and individuals involved (Aspfors, Fransson, 2015). Mentoring should not be conflated with coaching or consulting as an effective method for fostering personal and professional development, as these are based on entirely different principles. Coaching focuses on the individual's resources and skills, aiding them in discovering knowledge through questioning. At the same time, mentoring completely depends on the mentor's expertise and experience, with the mentor guiding the mentee's development. Mentoring can take various forms: formal or informal, personal or organisational, regular or sporadic, conscious or unconscious, and individual or group-based. Additionally, it is worth highlighting the practice of remote mentoring, known as e-mentoring and peer mentoring (Hnat, 2023).

This article aims to elucidate the role of mentoring as a tool for supporting students with both a diagnosis of dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment. It will present the findings of research demonstrating how mentoring impacts educational progress, motivation, and the development of social skills in these students. Furthermore, the article addresses the practical aspects of implementing mentoring programs in schools, emphasising the importance of selecting suitable mentors and tailoring programs to meet the diverse educational needs of students.

Evaluating the effectiveness of mentoring in working with students diagnosed with both dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment will allow for rec-

¹ Retrieved from: <https://www.promentor.pl/czym-jest-mentoring>.

ommendations for further research as well as guidance for educational practitioners. Given the growing demand for personalised teaching methods, particularly in the context of students with diverse educational needs, the topics discussed in this article are gaining importance and constitute a vital element in the ongoing discourse concerning the future of education.

Dyslexia and the Risk of Social Maladjustment: A Dual Challenge

Although the relationship between specific learning difficulties in reading and writing and emotional and social disorders remains a subject of discussion, dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment undoubtedly affect the emotional and social functioning of those who experience them (e.g., Svetaz, Ireland, Blum, 2000; Humphrey, Mullins, 2002; Kavale, Mostert, 2004; Wiener, Tardif, 2004; Maag, Reid, 2006; Eissa, 2010; Peleg, 2011; Gallegos, Langley, Villegas, 2012).

Specific learning difficulties often co-occur with behavioural problems. Students affected by these difficulties typically require educational, social, emotional, and behavioural interventions.

Educational challenges and difficulties related to cognitive abilities, particularly those involving auditory and visual processing and language skills, can significantly and negatively impact students' emotional well-being. These issues often lead to school dropout, mental health disorders, and prolonged high levels of stress. Numerous studies indicate that students with learning difficulties frequently face social problems, behavioural disorders, and struggle with anxiety or depression. Repeated academic failures further deplete their resources. Research shows that multiple experiences of poor school performance may contribute to the development of emotional difficulties. Attribution theories suggest that students with learning difficulties are more likely than their peers to develop negative thinking patterns, where success results from external, variable factors. At the same time, failure is attributed to internal causes. As a result, individuals with these learning difficulties may exhibit more emotional symptoms than their peers without such challenges (Firth, Frydenberg, Steeg, Bond, 2013; Piedra-Martínez, Soriano-Ferrer, Arteaga, 2017; Livingston, Siegel, Ribary, 2018; Sainio, Eklund, Ahonen, Kiuru, 2019).

Many researchers point out that learning difficulties during schooling can lead to emotional, social, and behavioural problems. Frequently, students facing these difficulties experience both externalising disorders, such as hyperactivity, oppositional defiant behaviours, and conduct issues, as well as internalising disorders, including anxiety and depression (Martínez, Semrud-Clikeman, 2004; Carroll, Iles, 2006; Knivsberg, Andreassen, 2008; Huc-Chabrolle, Barthez, Tripi,

Barthelemy, Bonnet-Brihault, 2010; Mammarella et al., 2014; Boyes, Leitao, Claessen, Badcock, Nayton, 2016; Cristofani et al., 2023).

Students diagnosed with specific learning difficulties exhibit higher levels of internalising symptoms, such as separation anxiety, generalised anxiety, and social anxiety, compared to their peers without such difficulties. Moreover, students with dyslexia are more likely to display somatic and depressive symptoms. Regarding externalising disorders, oppositional defiant behaviours and conduct issues are commonly observed among students with specific learning difficulties. The most frequently co-occurring disorder, however, is ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), diagnosed in 25% to 45% of students with specific learning difficulties (Willcutt et al., 2013; Horbach, Mayer, Scharke, Heim, Günther, 2020; Fabiano et al., 2021).

Exciting results are provided by Eric G. Willcutt and Bruce F. Pennington (2000) studies. They argue that students with specific learning difficulties are more often diagnosed with conduct disorders and ADHD compared to other categories of developmental disorders. Additionally, there is a higher likelihood that they will meet the diagnostic criteria for oppositional defiant disorder and ADHD, resulting in a dual diagnosis. Meanwhile, Linda Visser and her team (2020) emphasise that students with specific learning difficulties more frequently exhibit mental health problems compared to children without such difficulties. In a study involving over 3,000 children aged 9-10, the rates of co-occurring disorders were as follows: 21% of those with specific learning difficulties were diagnosed with anxiety disorders, 28% with depression, 28% with ADHD, and 22% with conduct disorders.

Although studies on the behaviours of adolescents with learning difficulties are relatively rare, there is evidence suggesting that as these students age, they continue to be more vulnerable to experiencing loneliness, stress, and anxiety (Lackaye, Margalit, 2006; Feurer, Andrews, 2009; Wilson, Armstrong, Furrie, Walcot, 2009). Additionally, these individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of aggression, tendencies toward delinquency, and a greater inclination to engage in risky behaviours (McNamara, Vervaeke, Willoughby, 2008).

Rebellious and aggressive behaviours may be secondary responses to difficult situations, serving as a means of coping with them (Dahle, Knivsberg, Andreassen, 2011; Selenius, Hellström, Belfrage, 2011; Pierce, Wechsler-Zimring, Noam, Wolf, Tami Katzir, 2013). Such behaviours can also result from difficulties in phonological processing, where challenges in understanding sounds may contribute to aggression. Students with dyslexia may also avoid new challenges due to limitations in short-term auditory memory and information processing, leading to adverse reactions in unfamiliar and demanding situations (Li, Chen, 2017; Yasir et al., 2023).

Research on students with learning difficulties and social maladjustment has repeatedly shown that, in addition to typical school problems, these students face numerous challenges in the socio-emotional sphere. These include peer rejection, feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, higher levels of depression and anxiety, as well as more significant behavioural difficulties and a tendency to withdraw compared to children without learning difficulties (Weiner, Schneider, 2002; Dyson, 2003; Al-Yagon, 2007; Estell et al., 2008; Algozzine, Wang, Violette, 2011).

The Role of Mentoring in Supporting Students with Dyslexia and the Risk of Social Maladjustment

For students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment, an individualised approach is crucial for providing adequate support. Each student has different needs, so mentors must use strategies tailored to their mentees' specific difficulties and strengths. In the context of dyslexia, this may include developing compensatory techniques, such as multimedia tools or alternative learning methods that support the learning process. Meanwhile, students at risk of social maladjustment may require more support in areas such as interpersonal relationships and emotional management. An individualised approach allows the mentor to understand the student's specific challenges better, leading to more effective support and improved outcomes in both academic and social life.

Emotional Support and Building Self-Esteem

Mentoring is vital in building the self-esteem of students with dyslexia and those at risk of social adjustment difficulties. These students often struggle with low self-esteem, stemming from their educational challenges and a lack of acceptance from peers. Through regular meetings with a mentor, they receive emotional support, helping them rebuild confidence in their abilities. This process involves empathy and understanding and reinforces positive changes, even small ones, which motivates further development. When students feel supported, their engagement in learning increases and their social relationships improve, directly impacting their overall emotional well-being and academic success.

Research indicates that students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment often struggle with emotional difficulties, such as low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, or anxiety. Additionally, they may have difficulties identifying and understanding emotional signals, which negatively affects their interpersonal relationships. Socially, they may exhibit passive behaviours, fear of interactions, difficulty building and maintaining relationships, and actions that

conflict with social norms, often due to a lack of practical conflict resolution skills (Backer, Neuhauser, 2003; McNulty, 2003; Carroll, Ilnes, 2006; Mugnaini, Lassi, La Malfa, Albertini, 2009; Terras, Thomson, Minnis, 2009; Eissa, 2010; Gallegos, Langley, Villegas, 2012; Haft, Chen, Leblanc, Tencza, Hoeft, 2019; Giovagnoli et al., 2020). According to Ann-Mari Knivsberg and Anne Brit Andreassen (2008), students with dyslexia may experience adaptive and emotional difficulties exacerbated by attention, memory, language, and social problems.

Due to frequent academic failures, students with dyslexia and social adjustment problems may have lower self-esteem. As a result, they find it harder to cope with stressful situations compared to their peers who do not experience such difficulties (Amahazion, 2021).

Aggressive or socially unacceptable behaviours that may occur in adolescents with dyslexia have roots in various factors. These include social and emotional pressure, excessive expectations, difficulties understanding their emotions, and frustration from frequent experiences of failure. Collaboration with a mentor helps alleviate these challenges by offering emotional support and tools for managing emotions (Vaughn, Bos, Schumm, 2006; Krasowicz-Kupis, 2008; Gallegos, Langley, Villegas, 2012).

The Role of Mentoring in Developing Social Skills

Mentoring is a valuable tool for supporting students' social skills development. Students can enhance their communication abilities, learn to collaborate and build relationships through regular interaction with a mentor. In turn, it may assist them in functioning more effectively within peer groups and mitigate the risk of social maladjustment.

Cultivating social skills in students with dyslexia and social maladjustment is critical in fostering their development in educational and interpersonal contexts. Dyslexia is one of the most common specific learning disorders, and social maladjustment, which manifests as difficulties in adapting to social norms and expectations, can lead to isolation, challenges in building relationships, and diminished self-esteem. Consequently, interventions aimed at enhancing social competencies are paramount in enabling these students to function more effectively within the school environment and society.

Dyslexia impacts language skills, exacerbating academic challenges. Students with dyslexia may encounter difficulties in reading, writing, processing information, and organising their thoughts, affecting their social interactions. Numerous studies indicate that students with dyslexia are more likely than their peers to experience lower self-esteem, which in turn may lead to social withdrawal, fear of exposure in school settings, and difficulties in establishing and

maintaining relationships. A noteworthy study concerning emotional self-awareness and assessing one's social competencies in adolescents was conducted by Izabella Kucharczyk and Agnieszka Dłużniewska (2017). The authors compared the levels of both variables in groups of individuals with and without dyslexia. The findings revealed that adolescents with dyslexia demonstrated more significant difficulties in analysing their emotions, verbalising their feelings, and being aware of physiological responses in emotionally challenging situations compared to those without dyslexia. The study further indicated that students with dyslexia rated their social competencies lower in such areas as initiating contact, supporting others, expressing emotions in social interactions, assertive behaviour, and developing social skills than their peers without dyslexia. Given that social competencies play a pivotal role in effective societal functioning, the lower levels of these skills among students with dyslexia underscore the need for supportive interventions, such as training programs focused on emotional and social development.

Significant research on improving social skills among students with dyslexia was presented by Haniye M. Esmmaeelbeygi and her team (2020). The authors propose that interventions aimed at increasing mindfulness and enhancing the ability to express one's needs can positively impact the development of social competencies in this group of students. Of particular interest is the fact that the intervention incorporates elements of meditation, which aids in improving relaxation and concentration, thereby fostering the development of social skills.

Conversely, social maladjustment is characterised by difficulties adhering to social norms, impulsivity, challenges in emotional regulation, and frequent conflicts with others. Students experiencing social maladjustment struggle with relationships with both peers and teachers, frequently exhibiting oppositional or defiant behaviour, which further exacerbates their social isolation (Chow, Wehby, 2018).

Examples of Best Practices

In practice, mentoring can take various forms, ranging from regular individual meetings to group programs, where students can work together to develop their skills under an experienced mentor's guidance. In some schools, programs that combine mentoring with other forms of support, such as pedagogical therapy or psychological counselling, allow for a comprehensive approach to student's problems.

In recent years, programs supporting students with specific learning difficulties have shifted their focus not only on academic achievements and adaptation to the school environment but also on their overall well-being, especially in emotional and social development (Cavioni, Grazzani, Ornaghi, 2017).

One auspicious form of mentoring is peer tutoring, which involves collaboration between students of similar age but varying skill levels. Research by Barwasser, Urton, and Grünke (2021) has demonstrated that peer tutoring can effectively support students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment. Peer support facilitates more efficient learning, fosters the development of bonds, and strengthens the sense of belonging within the peer group. A similar view is shared by Stephanie Haft and her team (2019), who argue that mentoring programs with well-prepared teachers and students help mitigate the socio-emotional difficulties of students with specific learning difficulties and ADHD.

One example of a successful mentoring program is the Youth Mentoring Program (YMP). This mentoring program focuses on supporting students with various difficulties, including dyslexia and adaptive challenges. The program includes individual meetings between mentors and students, as well as support in the development of social and emotional skills. YMP aims to improve students' self-esteem, support them in building relationships with their peers, and motivate them to achieve better academic results².

Another program is the DoCS Mentorship Program (DMP). This program is aimed directly at students, combining educational support with social-emotional development. As part of the program, mentors—often adults who have experienced similar challenges—help students manage school-related problems and develop the skills necessary for success in both academic and personal life³.

A further example of a mentoring program is "Kinship of Greater Minneapolis", which supports children and adolescents aged 5–15 with a parent or parents serving a prison sentence. "Kinship" focuses on providing support through individual mentoring, typically lasting around three years. During the program, the mentor builds a strong, trusting relationship with the mentee, meeting weekly. Shared activities like doing homework or going for walks help provide the child with a sense of stability and security, with the mentor becoming a reliable support point in the young person's life. The "Kinship of Greater Minneapolis" program is a model example of a mentoring initiative⁴.

An example of effective practices in supporting students with learning difficulties is peer mentoring. Peer groups act as a natural source of support, enhancing the sense of belonging and acceptance among students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment. Positive relationships with peers increase motivation for learning while reducing the stress associated with the educational challenges these students face. Being part of the school community fosters greater empathy, understanding, and motivation to engage.

² Retrieved from: <https://youthmp.org>

³ Retrieved from: <https://docs.rutgers.edu/mentoring>

⁴ Retrieved from: <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/41-1624831>

Support for students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment can take various forms, such as assistance with learning, sharing notes, or explaining the content presented in class. Collaboration with peers facilitates the development of socio-emotional competencies, positively influencing their self-esteem and reducing the risk of social exclusion. Positive attitudes from peers, such as a willingness to help and understanding, can minimise problematic situations and strengthen the community.

It is also important to note that the role of peers in the support process goes beyond direct assistance. Peer mentoring plays a crucial role in fostering a positive school climate that encourages the acceptance of diversity in students' abilities and needs.

Mentoring programs are an effective support tool for students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment. Through an individualised approach and a long-term mentor-student relationship, these programs can significantly enhance academic outcomes and foster the development of social and emotional competencies, thereby improving students' overall quality of life. Further research into the effectiveness of different forms of mentoring could assist in optimising these programs and better tailoring them to the specific needs of students.

Conclusions

Mentoring is an effective tool for supporting students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment. Through an individualised approach, emotional support, and the development of social skills, mentoring can significantly improve educational outcomes and the quality of life for these students. In light of modern education's increasing challenges, it is worth considering the introduction of mentoring as a permanent support measure in schools, particularly for students with special educational needs.

The complexity of the issues faced by students diagnosed with dyslexia and at risk of social maladjustment requires a multifaceted and individualised approach. Mentoring has proven to be an effective means of supporting these students' educational, social, and emotional development. A consistent, trust-based relationship with a mentor allows students to overcome educational barriers, build positive self-esteem and improve their interpersonal skills.

Mentoring programs demonstrate that individual support has a lasting positive impact on both academic performance and the social functioning of students. Particularly valuable are peer mentoring programs, which foster bonds between students and enhance their motivation and sense of belonging within a group.

Mentoring also helps to mitigate the effects of emotional difficulties, such as anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem, which often accompany students with dyslexia and social maladjustment. Programs incorporating elements of mindfulness training and emotional regulation techniques, such as meditation-based interventions, have also yielded positive results.

In summary, the effectiveness of mentoring programs in working with students with complex educational and social needs confirms their value as a support tool. With the growing demand for individualised learning processes, implementing such programs is essential to modern education. Further research into different forms of mentoring can assist in better adapting these programs to the needs of students and ensuring their comprehensive development.

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Różnorodność w podejściu edukacyjnym: mentoring jako narzędzie wspierające uczniów z diagnozą dysleksji i zagrożenia niedostosowaniem społecznym

Streszczenie

Współczesny system edukacyjny staje przed wyzwaniem sprostania potrzebom uczniów z dysleksją i ryzykiem niedostosowania społecznego. Tacy uczniowie często napotykają na trudności w nauce, co prowadzi do obniżonej samooceny, wycofania z życia szkolnego i problemów z adaptacją społeczną. Mentoring, oparty na indywidualnych relacjach, stanowi obiecujące narzędzie wsparcia, pomagając w przezwyciężaniu barier edukacyjnych, rozwoju kompetencji społecznych i lepszym zrozumieniu emocji. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie znaczenia mentoringu jako formy wsparcia dla uczniów z dysleksją i ryzykiem zagrożenia niedostosowaniem społecznym. Mentoring wspomaga budowanie pozytywnej samooceny, rozwój umiejętności interpersonalnych oraz radzenie sobie z wyzwaniami emocjonalnymi, co jest kluczowe dla młodzieży zagrożonej społecznym wykluczeniem. Przykłady programów wskazują na pozytywny wpływ mentoringu na wyniki edukacyjne, integrację społeczną i redukcję problemów emocjonalnych. Badania potwierdzają, że długotrwałe relacje mentoringowe przynoszą trwałe korzyści, takie jak lepsza motywacja, wyższa samoocena i lepsze funkcjonowanie społeczne.

Słowa kluczowe: mentoring, uczeń z dysleksją, uczeń z ryzyka zagrożenia niedostosowania społecznego, wsparcie edukacyjne, wsparcie emocjonalne.