

Assessing levels of dyslexia within a group of multilingual learners in order to improve teaching practice, target setting and achievement

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Background

ESOL learners in the WEA are taught in a variety of community settings. Four pilot groups were originally chosen for this particular research, although eventually three groups were used. One group were Bengali, a second group were mainly Urdu speakers and the third group were mainly Polish speakers.

Achievement was an issue which had been raised following the inspection and it was considered useful to re-evaluate assessments used to assess starting points. Some learners were identified as having returned to the class without having passed exams or made the progress expected.

Many ESOL learners find it “hard to detect individual words in a stream of sound,” (Schellekens) and it could be argued that the importance of a good auditory memory is particularly vital in second language learners in order that they can understand spoken language. On average, second language learners need exposure to new vocabulary items “6-7 times before they acquire the meaning of a word” (ibid) and so emphasis on memorising and recalling is vital for progression. Any learning differences which affect recall of sounds or visualisation of words hinder the learning of a second language which is already a massive hurdle for many of learners attending our classes.

Research questions asked:-

In this project I wanted to investigate the following points:-

- Was it possible that some ESOL learners were not progressing due to learning differences?
- If so, what assessments were available to assess any learning differences?
- How useful/easy to use were such assessments?
- Did tutors recognise learners within their own groups who may need further assessment?
- Was there a training need here which was not being addressed?

Findings

Results of the free writing exercises were added to the ELTwell database, where the results were compared to the average.

The free writing indicated more than a simple numeric result (see appendix iii). It was a useful indicator of letter formation, fluency of writing, use of lined paper, speed of writing and levels of concentration. Also, some learners refused the opportunity to write in their first language. One group did not trial the materials and did not choose to do this exercise. There was possible embarrassment in admitting that they could not write in their first language. However, the learners who took part in the pilot were keen to show off their prowess and proudly presented one page of A4 written script. Some expressed surprise at being asked to write in their own language and expressed pleasure at being able to express themselves in this way.

The scanning exercise was problematic in explaining how the task would be performed. Almost all learners took a very long time to complete this exercise (see appendix iv).

Two brief case studies indicated background of learners, their comments on the exercises completed and their own feelings. This was important to have a more holistic view of ability, as recommended in the introduction to the materials.

Eleven tutors contributed to a survey (see appendix i). The results (see appendix ii) indicated that there are occasional concerns about some learners, which may result in a test for learning differences if the learners had not been ESOL learners. Further training was considered a desirable outcome by some. Few, if any, ESOL learners had declared that they had a learning difficulty or dyslexia.

Issues

Consent forms used were from the ELTwell website and were useful. It was necessary in some cases for more fluent learners to translate the meaning of these and the purpose of the tests. Without this assistance in translating, I would not have been able to be certain that consent had been given.

The scanning exercise proved difficult for learners from Pakistan. I could not be sure that the exercise was affected by left/right or right/left confusion when reading the script. I felt that this did not in itself invalidate the exercise.

The timing of the assessment was not ideal as it was during the final term of the course. Learners were concentrating on preparing for exams and I had to be careful to ensure that extra activities were not seen as interfering with the main purpose of their attendance at the session. A two hour class is brief enough and so the piloting of these materials was fitted in when possible. Ideally, time is given outside of the normal session and if a need for further assessment is shown, then 1:1 time with the learner is essential.

It is necessary to explain to learners the results of the assessments they tried. Sensitivity is obviously needed and, in some cultures, “learning difficulty” or “learning difference” are not terms with which they would be familiar. The assessments were useful as additional information to that I had already gathered by observation and prior knowledge of the learners.

Recommendations

- Development of a training package to develop further awareness/expertise amongst ESOL tutors
- Use further assessments with learners identified
- Support arranged for any individuals identified
- Tracking of progress of learners who receive extra support
- Collaborative working to pool information

Bibliography

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Kosel K, (2011), *Beyond Language Needs: Identifying causes for underachievement in students who speak English as a second and foreign language*, Bradford College

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Appendix i

Questionnaire for Tutors (through www.surveymonkey.com)

- 1) How many ESOL learners do you teach each academic year (approximately)
- 2) Do any of your ESOL learners
 - a) Fail exams more than once in an academic year?
 - b) Return for several years to work at the same level?
 - c) Fail to make progress as you would expect?
- 3) Have you observed any of the following in your ESOL learners? Please tick all relevant answers.
 - a) Short term memory problems?
 - b) Poor awareness of time?
 - c) Problems maintaining concentration?
 - d) Underdeveloped social communication skills?
 - e) Weak phonological awareness?
 - f) Slow processing speeds?
 - g) Sequencing and organising difficulties?
- 4) Have any of your ESOL learners declared a learning difficulty/difference to you?
- 5) If yes, which learning difficulty/difference have they declared?
- 6) Have you had access to material to assess learning difficulties/differences in your ESOL learners?
- 7) Have you had access to CAML (Cognitive Assessments for Multilingual Learners) from ELTwell?
- 8) Have you had any training to assess ESOL learners for learning difficulties/differences?
- 9) Would you be interested in further training to assess for learning difficulties/differences in ESOL learners?
- 10) Do you have any other comments, questions or concerns?

Appendix ii

Questionnaire for Tutors (through www.surveymonkey.com) with answers

1) How many ESOL learners do you teach each academic year (approximately)

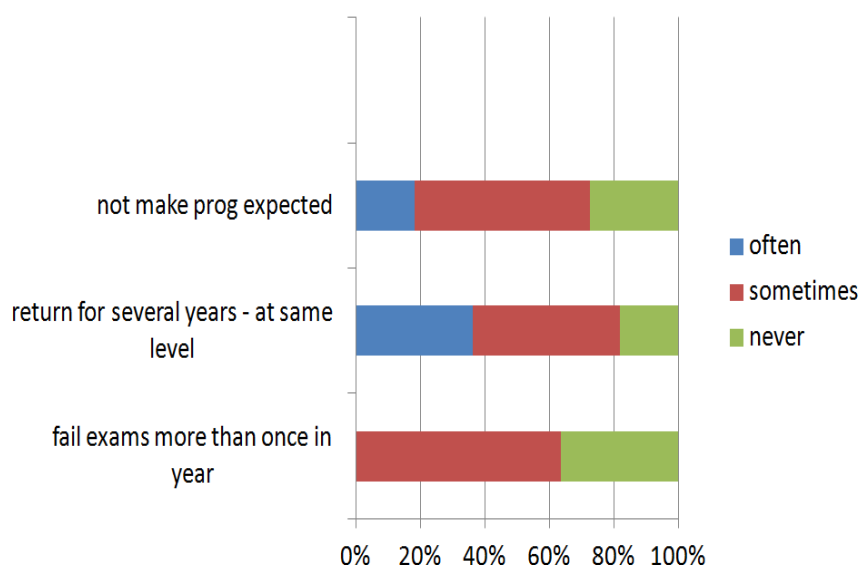
Various answers from 10-60

2) Do any of your ESOL learners

- d) Fail exams more than once in an academic year?
- e) Return for several years to work at the same level?
- f) Fail to make progress as you would expect?

See chart below

Do any of your ESOL learners do the following?



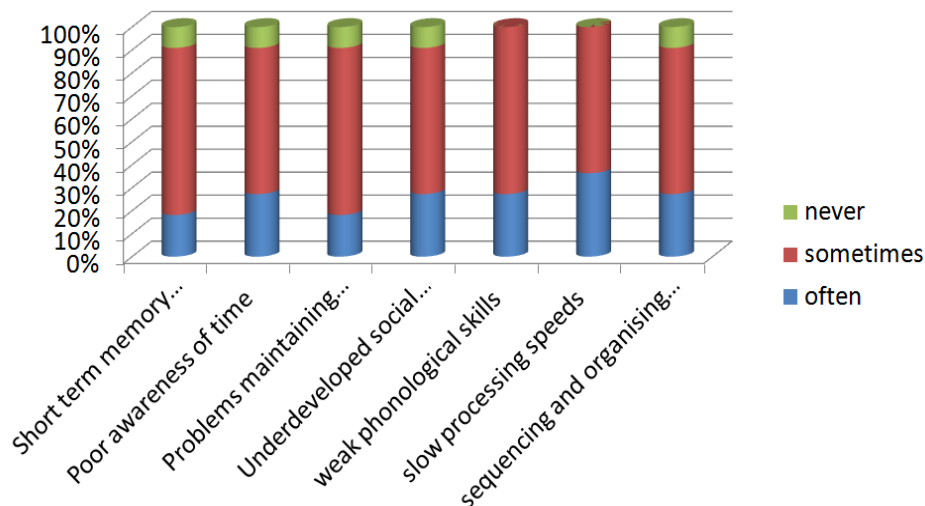
3) Have you observed any of the following in your ESOL learners? Please tick all relevant answers.

- h) Short term memory problems?
- i) Poor awareness of time?
- j) Problems maintaining concentration?
- k) Underdeveloped social communication skills?
- l) Weak phonological awareness?

- m) Slow processing speeds?
- n) Sequencing and organising difficulties?

See chart below

Q3 Have you observed any of following?



- 4) Have any of your ESOL learners declared a learning difficulty/difference to you?

Yes 27.27% No 72.73%

- 5) If yes, which learning difficulty/difference have they declared?

They are unsure, can't understand what they read, can't spell etc,

No- but I have wondered about dyslexia on a few occasions,

hearing, visual, short memory lost, problems with concentration, speech and communication etc

- 6) Have you had access to material to assess learning difficulties/differences in your ESOL learners?

Yes 18.18% No 81.82%

7) Have you had access to CAML (Cognitive Assessments for Multilingual Learners) from ELTwell?

Yes 9.09% No 90.91%

8) Have you had any training to assess ESOL learners for learning difficulties/differences?

Yes 18.18% No 81.82%

9) Would you be interested in further training to assess for learning difficulties/differences in ESOL learners?

Yes 72.73% No 27.27%

10) Do you have any other comments, questions or concerns?

Trying to maintain continuous progress with ESOL learners, Moving learners from Level 1 to Level 2 (with success)

Were I not retiring in July, I might be interested in such training

More training for WEA staff on dealing with learning difficulties

Appendix iii

Table of Results - Writing task

Group 1

Given name	Family name	Nationality	First language	Language written	age	gender	Words (per minute)	Lines (total number)	Characters (number or comments)
A		Pakistani	Urdu	Urdu	29	F		10	
B		Pakistani	Urdu	Urdu	55	F		4	
C		Pakistani	Urdu	Urdu	42	F		16	
D		Pakistani	Urdu	Urdu	33	F		16	
E		Pakistani	Urdu	Urdu	34	F		6	
F		Pakistani	Pashto	Pashto	44	F		3	

Fill this in with the results from your group's writing activity and send it to Anne Margaret: ams@ELTwell.co.uk.

The data will be added to the database and you will receive the latest figures for average performances in all available languages.

Group 2

Table of Results – Writing Task

Given name	Family name	Nationality	First language	Language written	age	gender	Words (per minute)	Lines (total number)	Characters (number or comments)
A		Slovakian	Slovakian	Slovakian	37	M	6.5		
B		Polish	Polish	Polish	50	M	8.8		
C		Polish	Polish	Polish	46	F	15.7		
D		Polish	Polish	Polish	35	F	7.6		
E		Polish	Polish	Polish	42	F	16		
F		Slovakian	Slovakian	Slovakian	33	M	3.9		
G		Polish	Polish	Polish	35	F	13.7		
H		Polish	Polish	Polish	30	F	13.9		
I		Polish	Polish	Polish	27	F	19.6		

Fill this in with the results from your group's writing activity and send it to Anne Margaret: ams@ELTwell.co.uk.

The data will be added to the database and you will receive the latest figures for average performances in all available languages.

Group 3

Table of Results – Writing Task

Given name	Family name	Nationality	First language	Language written	age	gender	Words (per minute)	Lines (total number)	Characters (number or comments)
A		Bengali	Bangla	Bangla	29	F		14	
B		Bengali	Bangla	Bangla	31	F		11	
C		Bengali	Bangla	Bangla	44	F		8	
D		Pakistani	Urdu	Urdu	41	F		10	
E		Bengali	Bangla	Bangla	30	F		6	
F		Bengali	Bangla	Bangla	55	F		9	
G		Bengali	Bangla	Bangla	47	F		16	
H		Bengali	Bangla	Bangla	28	F		9	
I		Pakistani	Urdu	Urdu	31	F		18	
J		Afghani	Pashto	Pashto	46	F		9	

Fill this in with the results from your group's writing activity and send it to Anne Margaret: ams@ELTwell.co.uk.

The data will be added to the database and you will receive the latest figures for average performances in all available languages.

Appendix iv

Results of scanning task – group 3

Name	Time	Score
A	11m45s	78.33
B	11m55s	80.55
C	9m30s	65.55
D	10m30s	72.22
E	13m20s	87.77
F	9m2s	62.44
G	8m5s	53.88
H	9m30s	58.88
I	11m5s	79.44

15-52 falls within the average range (based on 1 standard deviation from the mean)