

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF DYSLEXIC SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS ON PRACTICE PLACEMENTS

G. A. AWOSIKA

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the School of
Childhood and Social Care, University of East London for the Professional
Doctorate in Social Work**

February 2025

Abstract

Dyslexia affects five to ten per cent of individuals, impacting their reading, writing, spelling and speaking abilities (Shaywitz and Shaywitz, 2020). Although the exact causes of dyslexia are unknown, those with the condition can achieve academic and professional success with appropriate support (Gibbs and Elliott, 2020). Dyslexia can also cause difficulties in information processing, communication, time management and task performance (Hollinrake *et al.*, 2021), posing particular challenges for trainee social workers who are obliged to meet the nine domains of capability outlined by the British Association of Social Workers when on placement. Furthermore, they need to meet the professional standards set by Social Work England (2021a) to be eligible for registration as social workers. These standards emphasise the importance of support during practice placements to ensure students develop the necessary skills and knowledge. Scholars also recognise the issues with the quality of written work and emphasise the need for targeted support to address these challenges and prevent placement failure (Roulston, Collins and Reilly, 2021).

This study investigates the experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their practice placements in London, providing valuable insights. Data is gathered through semi-structured interviews with 15 social work students with dyslexia and examined using both a phenomenological philosophical approach and techniques from Braun and Clarke's system of thematic analysis (2006).

The findings shed light on the challenges faced by the participants during placements, including stigma, discrimination and emotional distress.

Recommendations include implementing advocates or additional support to aid dyslexic students and a mediator model is proposed as a framework with which to aid professionals involved in the support of dyslexic students during their placements.

Acknowledgements

I am profoundly grateful to the Holy Spirit for His guidance and inspiration as I navigated through this academic journey. His presence and wisdom, as reflected in passages such as Philippians 4:13, 2 Corinthians 12:9 and James 1:5, gave me strength and encouragement.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my beloved family for their unwavering support. I extend my deepest gratitude to my husband and children, Irene, Alan and Helen, as well as my cherished grandchildren, Zion and Zoe, for their love, understanding and encouragement throughout this endeavour.

I am indebted to the intellectual community and support network I found during online university chat sessions. Special thanks to my esteemed supervisors, Dr Robin Mutter and Dr Dawn Ludick, whose guidance, encouragement and insights were invaluable in shaping this work. I also want to thank Professor Gerry Czerniawski, Professor Jo Finch and Careen Angela Hanson for their support and mentorship.

Furthermore, I am thankful for the camaraderie and support of my colleagues, whose collaborative spirit and sense of humour made challenging times more manageable. Their inspiration, guidance and reassurance played a significant role in completing this project.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation, with heartfelt gratitude, to my beloved husband, children and grandchildren. Their unwavering support and encouragement have been the cornerstone of my academic journey. They stood by me in moments of doubt and difficulty, offering steadfast faith and belief in my abilities.

I also extend my sincere thanks to my dear parents and Mrs Joan Cooke, who have passed away. Their influence and teachings on perseverance continue to inspire me. Their unwavering support and belief in my potential have guided me through challenges and setbacks. Though they are no longer with us, their memory remains a source of strength and inspiration.

Table of contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of contents	v
Definitions of terms	x
Abbreviations	xi
List of figures and tables.....	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the study	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.1.1 Context and background	1
1.1.2 Rationale	3
1.1.3 Significance and implications	6
1.2 Practice learning in social work	7
1.2.1 Dyslexia in practice placements.....	9
1.2.2 Dyslexia: strategies to maximise strengths.....	13
1.2.3 Importance of inclusive practices	16
1.3 Research objectives and questions	17
1.4 Approaches to the research	18
1.5 Overview of the structure of the thesis.....	18
1.6 Summary of Chapter 1	19
Chapter 2: Literature Review	21
2.1 Introduction	21
2.2 Literature search strategy.....	22
2.3 Historical perspective and theories of dyslexia	23
2.4 Models and concepts of disability	26
2.4.1 The medical model.....	27
2.4.2 The social model	27
2.4.2.1 Critical disability theory	29
2.4.3 The biopsychosocial model.....	30
2.4.4 Neurodiversity	31
2.4.5 Criticisms of these models and concepts.....	32
2.5 Challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia	33
2.5.1 Phonological processing deficits in dyslexia	33
2.5.2 Rapid automated naming deficits as predictors of dyslexia.....	34
2.5.3 Neurological basis of dyslexia.....	36
2.6 Screening and diagnosis	37
2.7 Legal framework and reasonable adjustments	37
2.8 Specific problems with placement learning.....	38
2.9 Mediating learning for students with dyslexia.....	41
2.10 Gaps in the literature	43
2.11 Summary of Chapter 2	46
Chapter 3: Methodology	48
3.1 Introduction	48
3.2 Philosophical underpinnings.....	48

3.2.1 A brief description of three key research paradigms	49
3.2.1.1 Positivism	49
3.2.1.2 Interpretivism	49
3.2.1.3 Pragmatism.....	50
3.2.2 Paradigmatic context of this study	50
3.2.3 Ontology and epistemology	51
3.2.4 Constructivism.....	53
3.2.5 Researcher positionality.....	54
3.2.6 Inclusivity.....	56
3.2.7 Transformational approach	57
3.2.8 How the theory informed the practice	57
3.3 Research methodologies considered.....	59
3.4 Hermeneutic phenomenology.....	61
3.4.1 Enhancing the suitability of phenomenology	64
3.4.2 Addressing the limitations	64
3.5 Development of the research questions	65
3.6 Strategies for ensuring the quality, rigour and validity of the research and its findings	66
3.6.1 Reflexivity.....	67
3.6.2 Bracketing (epoché).....	70
3.6.3 Dasein	71
3.7 Recruitment strategy and process	72
3.7.1 Participant characteristics	73
3.7.2 Ethical considerations	73
3.8 Data collection.....	74
3.9 Data analysis.....	76
3.9.1 Reflexive thematic analysis.....	76
3.9.1.1 Stage 1: Familiarisation with the data	77
3.9.1.2 Stage 2: Generating initial codes.....	77
3.9.1.3 Stage 3: Searching for themes	78
3.9.1.4 Stage 4: Reviewing themes	78
3.9.1.5 Stage 5: Defining and naming themes	78
3.9.1.6 Stage 6: Producing the report.....	79
3.9.2 Leveraging NVivo for transparent and systematic data analysis	79
3.9.3 Coding	80
3.10 Security of the data	81
3.11 Summary of Chapter 3	82
Chapter 4: Findings	84
4.1 Introduction	84
4.2 Participant demographics	84
4.3. Emerging themes	84
4.3.1 Theme 1: Being a social work student with dyslexia	85
4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Sense of contribution.....	86
4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Challenging tasks.....	87
4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Pressure.....	89
4.3.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Provision of resources.....	90
4.3.1.5 Sub-theme 5: Support from colleagues	90
4.3.1.6 Sub-theme 6: Special consideration from the organisation.....	91
4.3.1.7 Sub-theme 7: Placement learning opportunities	92
4.3.1.8 Sub-theme 8: Institutional support	92

4.3.1.9 Summary of Theme 1	93
4.3.2 Theme 2: Being diagnosed with dyslexia	93
4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Emotions at diagnosis	94
4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Fear and anxiety at disclosing dyslexia	97
4.3.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Strategies to conceal dyslexia	100
4.3.2.4 Sub-theme 4: Motivations for disclosing dyslexia	101
4.3.2.5. Summary of Theme 2	103
4.3.3 Theme 3: The positive and negative experiences of students with dyslexia on placement.....	104
4.3.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Positive perceptions	104
4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Negative perceptions.....	107
4.3.3.3 Gender and cultural considerations in placement preferences	108
Summary of Theme 3	109
4.3.4 Theme 4: The impact of dyslexia on daily placement tasks	109
4.3.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Slow performance	111
4.3.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Stress from attempting to meet expectations	112
4.3.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Learning difficulties.....	113
4.3.4.4 Sub-theme 4: Varied impressions.....	113
4.3.4.5 Sub-theme 5: Social isolation	114
4.3.4.6 Summary of Theme 4	115
4.3.5 Theme 5: Measures to enhance placement learning experiences	116
4.3.5.1 Sub-theme 1: Create dedicated placement office	116
4.3.5.2 Sub-theme 2: Provide all necessary resources	116
4.3.5.3 Sub-theme 3: Foster a supportive culture	117
4.3.5.4. Sub-theme 4: Provide training for social work professionals	118
4.3.5.5 Summary of Theme 5	119
4.4 Summary of Chapter 4	119
Chapter 5: Discussion	121
5.1 Introduction	121
5.2 Discussion on the emergent themes.....	121
5.2.1 Theme 1: Being a social work student with dyslexia	121
5.2.2 Theme 2: Being diagnosed with dyslexia	126
5.2.3 Theme 3: The positive and negative experiences of students with dyslexia on placement.....	130
5.2.3.1 Gender and cultural considerations	132
5.2.4 Theme 4: The impact of dyslexia on daily placement tasks	132
5.2.5 Theme 5: Measures to enhance placement learning experiences	133
5.3 Introduction to the mediator model as a framework for supporting dyslexic students on placement	134
5.3.1 Key applications and stakeholders	138
5.3.2 Participant comments shaping the mediator model.....	141
5.3.3 Context and alignments	143
5.3.3.1 Integration with the practice learning agreement	144
5.3.3.2 Alignment with higher education assessments and individual support plans	145
5.3.4 The mediator model: A guide for stakeholders	146
5.3.5 When the mediator model should be implemented	149
5.3.6 Revised practice: The impact of the mediator model.....	150
5.3.7 Fitness to practise	151
5.3.8 The mediator model as a framework, not a role	153
5.3.9 Reasonable adjustments	154
5.3.10 Acknowledging the debate on learning preferences	155
5.3.11 Call to action	156

5.4 Summary of Chapter 5	156
Chapter 6: Implications, recommendations and dissemination	158
6.1 Introduction	158
6.2 Implications and recommendations for practice placements	158
6.2.1 Implications for practice educators	159
6.2.2 Recommendations for practice educators and stakeholders	160
6.3 Implications and recommendations for Higher Education institutions	161
6.3.1 Early identification and intervention	161
6.3.2 Support systems	162
6.3.3 Accessible learning resources	162
6.3.4 Peer networks and community building	162
6.4 Implications and recommendations for policy and regulation	163
6.4.1 Implications for government policy	164
6.4.2 Mediator model-based recommendations for policy change	165
6.4.3 Recommendations for institutional policy change	166
6.4.3.1 Flexible assessment policies	167
6.4.3.2 Placement policies	167
6.4.3.3 Training policies	167
6.4.3.4 Resource allocation policies	167
6.4.3.5 Accountability mechanisms	168
6.4.3.6 Advocacy, awareness and policy promotion	168
6.4.3.7 Collaborative networking	168
6.4.3.8 Regular briefing sessions	168
6.4.3.9 Flexible and accessible policies	169
6.5 Further recommendations for future practice	169
6.6 Dissemination strategy	169
6.6.1 Academic and professional engagement	170
6.6.2 Workshops and training	170
6.6.3 Collaboration with professional bodies	171
6.6.4 Online resource repository	171
6.6.5 Policy engagement	171
6.7 Emergent challenges and opportunities	171
6.8 Summary of Chapter 6	172
Chapter 7: Conclusion	173
7.1 Introduction	173
7.2 Addressing the research questions	174
7.3 Practice gap	175
7.4 The study's contribution	175
7.5 Limitations of the study	176
7.6 Researcher's reflections	178
7.7 Summary of Chapter 7	179
7.8 Closing remarks	179
References	181
Appendices	200
Appendix A: Approved UEL ethics application	200
Appendix B: Participant information sheet	202
Appendix C: Participant consent form	206
Appendix D: Participants' debrief form	207

Appendix E: Participant recruitment email	208
Appendix F: Participant recruitment poster	209
Appendix G: Interview schedule/prompt questions	210
Appendix H: Data analysis report	211
Appendix I: A personal journal of reflection	234
Appendix J: Participant profiles	236

Definitions of terms

Professional Standards	Social Work England's (SWE) Professional Standards (SWE, 2021a) set out the core expectations for all registered social workers in England. These standards provide a framework for professional accountability and are fundamental to ensuring the delivery of safe and effective practice. Social work students are required to demonstrate that they meet these standards during their training to become eligible for registration as qualified practitioners.
Practice Placement Guidance	The Guidance on Practice Placements (SWE, 2021b), part of SWE's Education and Training Standards, outlines the requirements for practice placements in social work education. This guidance ensures that students are provided with high-quality learning opportunities to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours necessary for professional practice. It also emphasises the need for students to evidence their ability to meet the Professional Standards during placements, which is a key component of their training and assessment.
Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)	The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) outlines nine interrelated domains for professional development in social work. It recognises the complexity of social work and provides a framework for assessing and developing professional capabilities across these domains (BASW, 2018). These domains are designed to ensure that social workers develop a holistic set of skills and knowledge necessary for effective practice.
Practice learning	Practice learning is a vital component of the social work degree. It allows students to apply theoretical knowledge, skills and values in real-life situations. It aims to meet the PCF standards and facilitate students' professional development (BASW, 2018).
Placement Learning Agreement (PLA)	The placement learning agreement (PLA) is the outcome of a meeting involving the student, placement agency, onsite supervisor, practice educator (PE) and placement tutor. It clarifies arrangements and opportunities to support the student's learning and serves as the foundation for the placement (BASW, 2018).
Placement learning opportunities	Placement learning opportunities enable students to achieve professional standards and meet the knowledge and skills requirements outlined in the PCF. These opportunities enhance students' knowledge and skills, aligning with the expectations of their level of placement (BASW, 2018).

Abbreviations

BASW	British Association of Social Workers
PCF	Professional Capabilities Framework
PE	Practice educator
PEPs	Practice Educator Professional Standards
PLA	Placement Learning Agreement
SWE	Social Work England

List of figures and tables

Figure 1: Diagram representing the alignment between my theoretical stance and research approach.....	57
Figure 2: Mind map for diagnosis and disclosing dyslexia.....	93
Figure 3: Mind map for experiences of being dyslexic (positive and negative experiences at placement).....	104
Figure 4: Visual representation of the mediator model as a framework	135
Figure 5: The mediator model: a framework for supporting social work students with dyslexia on placement	136
Figure 6: Thematic Map 1 of participant themes.....	229
Figure 7: Thematic Map 2 of participants themes.....	230
Figure 8: Thematic Map 3 of participant themes.....	231
Figure 9: Thematic Map 4 of participant themes.....	232
Figure 10: Thematic Map 5 of participant themes	233
Table 1: Themes related to dyslexia experiences during placement.....	85
Table 2: Revised practice outcomes	148
Table 3: Summary table and extract of coded transcript 1–15	211
Table 4: RQ 1 – Support being provided to students with dyslexia on practice placement.....	215
Table 5: RQ 2 – Impact of dyslexia on daily placement tasks	219
Table 6: RQ 3 – Reasonable accommodations by the placement providers.....	223
Table 7: Experience as social work students with dyslexia	227

Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

“I don’t suffer from dyslexia; I live with it. I suffer from the ignorance of people who think they know what I can and cannot do”. (Erica – member at www.LearningAlly.org).

1.1 Introduction

This thesis explores the lived experiences of 15 social work students with dyslexia during practice placements. A phenomenological approach is used to explore participants’ perceptions, the impact of dyslexia on their placement learning and the changes they feel would enhance their placement experiences. This primary research involves in-depth interviews with participants, aiming to uncover the unique challenges they face and the strategies they employ to overcome obstacles and capitalise on their strengths (Smith, 2020a; Qureshi *et al.*, 2023; Oliver, 2013; Rybas, 2023).

1.1.1 Context and background

Dyslexia, a specific learning disability, significantly impacts individuals’ reading, writing and spelling abilities. However, many individuals with dyslexia possess unique strengths, such as creativity, problem-solving skills and resilience (Gibbs and Elliott, 2020), all of which are vital capabilities in the field of social work. Understanding the lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia is, therefore, crucial for developing effective support systems and promoting inclusivity within social work education (Gant and Hewson, 2022) so that people with the valuable natural abilities that social work demands are not lost to the profession.

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the need to support students with dyslexia in higher education in general. According to the British Dyslexia Association (2020), approximately ten per cent of the population is affected by dyslexia to varying degrees. This prevalence suggests that a considerable number of students in higher education, including those in professional courses like social work, are navigating their academic journeys with dyslexia. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (2022) reported an increase in the number of students disclosing dyslexia, indicating a greater awareness and acceptance of learning disabilities within academic institutions.

Social work education presents unique challenges and opportunities for students with dyslexia. The curriculum often includes extensive reading, complex writing assignments and practical placements that require strong organisational and communication skills. These demands can be particularly challenging for dyslexic students who may struggle with traditional learning methods. However, the practical nature of social work also allows dyslexic students to leverage their strengths, such as empathy, innovative problem-solving and strong interpersonal skills, which are highly valued in social work practice (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019).

The importance of inclusive education practices has been emphasised in various policy documents and legislative frameworks. The Equality Act 2010 in the United Kingdom (UK) mandates that educational institutions provide reasonable adjustments to support students with disabilities, including dyslexia. This legal framework aims to ensure that students with dyslexia have equal access to education and can achieve their full potential. Despite these legal requirements, however, research indicates that the implementation of support measures is often inconsistent, particularly during practical placements (Gibbs and Elliott, 2020; Roulston, Collins and Reilly, 2021).

Furthermore, the transition from academic settings to placement environments can be a significant hurdle for dyslexic students. Placements are integral to social work education, offering students the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. However, the variability and complexity of placement environments can pose additional challenges. Placement supervisors may not always be aware of the specific needs of dyslexic students or how to effectively support them, leading to a lack of consistent accommodations (Disabled Students' Allowance Quality Assurance Group, 2019).

Recent studies have highlighted the need for improved training and resources for placement supervisors to ensure they can provide adequate support for dyslexic students. For example, Gant and Hewson (2022) and (Salisbury *et al.*, 2024) suggest that providing supervisors with training on dyslexia and inclusive practices can enhance the placement experience for dyslexic students. Additionally, integrating assistive technology and providing tailored support

plans can help dyslexic students manage the demands of their placements more effectively (Mortimore and Crozier, 2006).

Thus, this study is shaped by the broader discourse on inclusivity in education and the specific challenges faced by dyslexic students in professional courses. By exploring the lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia, this research aims to contribute to the development of more effective support systems that not only address the challenges but also recognise and harness the strengths of dyslexic individuals. This approach aligns with the growing emphasis on strengths-based perspectives in social work and education, which focus on leveraging individuals' abilities and potential rather than solely addressing their deficits (Saleebey, 2006).

Understanding the context and background of dyslexia in social work education is essential for creating inclusive learning environments that support the success of all students. This study seeks to bridge the gap in existing literature by providing insights into the specific experiences of social work students with dyslexia, thereby informing the development of more effective support strategies and promoting a more inclusive approach to social work education.

By presenting comparative data and exploring the broader context, this research seeks to underscore the importance of tailored support for these students while recognising their valuable contributions to the field.

1.1.2 Rationale

The rationale for this study stems from the significant gap in the existing literature regarding the specific needs and strengths of dyslexic students in social work education. While much research has focused on the challenges faced by students with dyslexia in general education, there is a lack of focused studies on those pursuing professional degrees in social work. This research is necessary to understand the unique demands of social work education and how dyslexic students navigate these challenges. The study aims to inform educational practices and support mechanisms, enhancing the academic and professional outcomes for dyslexic students in social work programmes. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing effective, inclusive educational strategies that recognise the concept of neurodiversity and leverage the strengths of dyslexic individuals, such as their creativity, problem-solving skills and empathy, which are highly valuable in social work practice.

The insights gathered through this research are intended to shed light on the unique challenges faced by these students and, importantly, to propose improvements that can enhance their learning experiences during placements. Despite the availability of support services within universities, it is imperative to recognise that dyslexia can hinder the development of crucial professional skills necessary for successful practice.

Studies indicate that social work students with dyslexia have a higher rate of placement failures compared with their peers without dyslexia. Richardson and Wydell (2003) found that 35 per cent of students with dyslexia failed at least one placement, compared with 10 per cent of non-dyslexic students. Similarly, Roulston *et al.* (2021) identified that the reasons for failing practice placements often included issues directly linked to the competencies that dyslexic students find challenging, such as written communication and organisational skills. Understanding these unique challenges highlights the need for targeted support to help dyslexic students succeed in social work programmes.

There is evidence that reasonable adjustments for dyslexic students in social work placements are not always effectively implemented. A survey conducted by Cooper (2018) revealed that 60 per cent of dyslexic students felt that the accommodations provided during their social work placements were inadequate, and many reported that their needs were not fully understood or met by placement supervisors. Furthermore, Roulston, Cleak and Vreugdenhil, (2018) emphasised that the failure to implement effective accommodations was a significant factor contributing to placement failures. A lack of effective support can lead to increased stress and difficulty in meeting placement requirements. Common adjustments, such as extended deadlines, use of assistive technology and tailored supervision are crucial but often inconsistently applied. According to the British Dyslexia Association (2017), reasonable adjustments for students with dyslexia include allowing extra time for tasks, providing materials in accessible formats and using software that supports reading and writing. Despite these recommendations, inconsistencies in the application of adjustments remain a significant issue in social work practice learning compared with other courses (Gant and Hewson, 2022).

Improving the implementation of these adjustments is essential to 'levelling the playing field' for dyslexic students in social work placements.

The challenges faced by dyslexic students in social work are not limited to placements but also extend to classroom settings. Research by Mortimore and Crozier (2006), as well as Gant and Hewson (2022), shows that students with dyslexia often struggle with lecture-based learning, note-taking and written assignments, which are prevalent in classroom settings. Furthermore, these classroom challenges can affect overall academic performance and confidence, making it harder for students to succeed in their placements. Difficulties in processing lecture material and taking effective notes can result in gaps in knowledge that are critical for practical application during placements.

Therefore, addressing the needs of dyslexic students in both classroom and placement settings is crucial for their holistic success in social work education.

Many social work students are diagnosed with dyslexia late or are unaware of their condition, which impacts their ability to access necessary support. Henderson (2015a) found that 25 per cent of dyslexic students in higher education were diagnosed after starting their degree programme. In addition, many students reported not disclosing their dyslexia due to fear of stigma and discrimination. Late diagnosis and non-disclosure can prevent students from receiving timely and appropriate support, exacerbating their difficulties. Without official recognition of their dyslexia, students may struggle unnecessarily, impacting their academic and placement performance. Encouraging early diagnosis and creating a supportive environment for disclosure can help ensure that dyslexic students receive the support they need from the outset of their studies.

Dyslexia presents similar challenges in nursing programmes, indicating a broader issue within practice-based learning environments. A comparative study by Morris and Turnbull (2007) revealed that both social work and nursing students with dyslexia reported significant challenges with placement assessments and practical tasks. The study found no significant difference in the prevalence of dyslexia-related difficulties between the two disciplines. This similarity suggests that the issue lies in the nature of practice-based learning, which requires skills that dyslexic students typically find challenging. Both fields demand elevated levels of reading comprehension, written communication and organisational skills, which are areas of difficulty for dyslexic students.

Recognising the common challenges across practice-based disciplines can help

in developing comprehensive support strategies that benefit all students with dyslexia, regardless of their field of study.

One of the critical reasons why the placement element is particularly lacking support for dyslexic students is the complexity and variability of placement environments. Unlike classroom settings, where accommodations can be standardised and consistently applied, placements occur in diverse, real-world settings where supervisors may not be fully trained or aware of the specific needs of dyslexic students. According to the Disabled Students' Allowance Quality Assurance Group (2019), while Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are required to provide support, the implementation in placements is often inconsistent. This inconsistency is partly due to the reliance on placement supervisors who may not have the same level of training or resources as academic staff.

Furthermore, the assessment process for students in placements involves practical, hands-on tasks that are not easily adapted to standard accommodations. The statements of need – which outline required adjustments – and funding for equipment such as assistive technology are crucial. However, the application of these adjustments in a dynamic field environment can be challenging. Gant and Hewson (2022) noted that while students might receive assistive technology, using it effectively in fast-paced or unpredictable placement settings can be problematic.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to ensure that placement supervisors are adequately trained and that support mechanisms are adaptable to various placement environments. This also involves ensuring that the assessment processes for students in placements are designed to accommodate the needs of dyslexic students effectively, allowing them to demonstrate their competencies without being disadvantaged by their condition. By adopting a strengths-based approach, recognising the unique attributes dyslexic students bring to the profession and ensuring appropriate support, it is possible to enhance their contributions to the field.

1.1.3 Significance and implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, placement providers and the social work profession. By uncovering the unique challenges faced by social work students

with dyslexia, this study can inform the development of more inclusive and supportive learning environments. Additionally, the study aims to highlight the strengths and contributions of these students, challenging the negative stereotypes and misconceptions often associated with dyslexia (Gant and Hewson, 2022).

This study's significance also extends to the broader field of disability studies, as it emphasises the importance of understanding the social and environmental factors that contribute to disability.

This study develops a framework, called the mediator model, for addressing the issues that arise for students with dyslexia on learning placements in a manner that is systematic and consistent, emphasising the critical role of support systems and accommodations in facilitating their success. It provides empirical evidence demonstrating how certain mediating factors significantly impact the experiences and outcomes of students (Roulston *et al.*, 2021).

Policymakers can draw benefits from this research as it informs them on how to enhance practice placement guidance for students with dyslexia while adhering to the principles of the social model of disability. Finally, the combined approaches of this study contribute to the development of more inclusive, accommodating and empathetic approaches to support, policy formulation and professional awareness, advancing the field for the benefit of all stakeholders (Jones and Smith, 2021).

1.2 Practice learning in social work

The importance of practice learning in social work education cannot be overstated. Social Work England (SWE) has created a regulatory framework for practice learning (SWE, 2021a), ensuring that students meet the necessary professional standards and knowledge and skills statements to qualify for registration. Practice placements are a critical component of social work education, providing students with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings and develop essential skills under the guidance of experienced practitioners. The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) complements these standards by outlining the capabilities required for effective practice, further supporting the development of competent social workers. In the field of social

work, the successful completion of placements and the compilation of a portfolio of evidence are essential components of training (BASW, 2018). This portfolio serves as a comprehensive record of the student's progress, showcasing their knowledge, skills and adherence to professional standards. It includes various materials such as reports, case studies, reflective journals and presentations, all of which demonstrate the candidate's ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations. SWE acknowledges the pivotal roles of practice educators (PEs) and Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) in upholding the quality of practice education.

PEs play a crucial role in supporting social work students during their placements, ensuring that they integrate theoretical knowledge with practical skills. They are registered social workers who provide continuous supervision and support, guiding students through the complexities of real-world social work. This includes offering feedback, assessing progress and ensuring that students meet the required competencies (Coomber, 2019; Manthorpe, Moriarty and Hussein, 2014). PEs assess students' competency levels through direct observation and reflective discussions, ensuring they meet professional standards (SWE, 2021a; Hafford-Letchfield, 2010; Furness and Gilligan, 2014). Constructive feedback helps students identify their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering reflective practice (Bogo *et al.*, 2007).

PEs are responsible for teaching practical skills essential for social work. They create learning opportunities that allow students to practice and refine these skills in a controlled environment (Knight, 2001). By helping students integrate academic knowledge with practical application, PEs enhance their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Warren, 2005). They also serve as role models, demonstrating professional behaviour, ethical practice and effective communication, instilling the values and standards of the social work profession in their students (Taylor *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, PEs help students navigate the complexities of the work environment, including interprofessional collaboration and organisational dynamics (Hughes, 2018).

PEPS ensure that PEs uphold the quality of practice education. PEPS provide a framework for PEs to deliver high-quality supervision and support, aligning with the standards set by regulatory bodies. These standards cover various aspects of practice education, including the planning and delivery of learning

opportunities, assessment of student performance and the provision of constructive feedback. PEPS ensure that PEs are well-prepared, competent and capable of supporting students effectively (Coomber, 2019).

In addition to PEPS, the PCF, developed by the BASW, serves as a complementary guide. The PCF outlines the requisite capabilities for effective practice, providing a structured approach to developing the skills, knowledge and values necessary for professional social work. It covers domains such as professionalism, values and ethics, diversity, rights, justice and economic wellbeing, critical reflection and analysis, intervention and skills, contexts and placement agencies and professional leadership (BASW, 2018).

PEs collaborate with educational institutions to ensure that placement experiences align with their learning outcomes (Basnett and Sheffield, 2010). They work with various stakeholders, including clients, colleagues and other professionals, to provide comprehensive learning experiences for students (Cleak and Smith, 2012).

1.2.1 Dyslexia in practice placements

Reflective writing, a cornerstone of social work practice, presents significant challenges for students with dyslexia. Difficulties in organising thoughts, expressing ideas clearly and structuring written assignments coherently can hinder their ability to articulate reflections on practice experiences. This, in turn, affects the depth and quality of their submissions (Garner, 2021). Furthermore, challenges with reading comprehension may impede students' engagement with academic literature, policies and case studies, limiting their ability to critically analyse and apply theoretical concepts in practice. Dyslexia-related delays in processing written information can also slow the learning pace and make it difficult for students to keep up with placement demands (Gant and Hewson, 2022).

Gant and Hewson's (2022) empirical study underscores the unique challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia in both academic and placement environments. The study highlights heightened anxiety, self-doubt and physical exhaustion stemming from managing dyslexia alongside the rigorous demands of social work education. These challenges not only undermine students' confidence but also affect their ability to engage fully with their learning, particularly in high-pressure placement settings. The authors note that

difficulties in processing information, managing workloads and meeting deadlines can overwhelm students, exacerbating feelings of stress and reducing their overall well-being. Gant and Hewson (2022) call for educators and placement providers to adopt inclusive approaches, such as tailored support, reasonable adjustments and clear communication, to empower students with dyslexia and enable them to succeed. They further advocate for the development of best-practice guides to ensure more consistent and effective support strategies in social work education.

Earlier research by Hunt and Mathews (2018) similarly highlights the importance of tailored strategies that integrate theoretical frameworks with practical support. They argue that creating an inclusive placement environment is essential for enabling students with dyslexia to thrive. These authors also discuss specific challenges faced by these students, such as difficulties in participating in group activities and discussions. Issues like slow verbal information processing, trouble following complex conversations and articulating thoughts can lead to frustration, anxiety and self-doubt, further limiting active participation in placement activities. Additionally, the expectation to compile a comprehensive portfolio of evidence while managing dyslexia-related challenges can intensify pressure, negatively impacting students' confidence and well-being. Hunt and Mathews (2018) advocate for targeted strategies to alleviate these burdens, aligning their findings with Roulston, Cleak and Vreugdenhil (2018), who emphasise the critical role of support systems and accommodations in enhancing placement experiences.

While dyslexia often presents challenges, it also brings unique strengths that can enrich placement settings. Dyslexia is associated with creative thinking, visual problem-solving and the ability to see connections between unrelated concepts (Smith, 2021; Qureshi *et al.*, 2023). Leveraging these strengths can allow students with dyslexia to contribute innovative solutions to complex social issues. Additionally, their interpersonal communication skills, empathy and resilience – shaped by their lived experiences – can enhance their ability to connect with individuals and advocate effectively for vulnerable populations (Riddick, 2013; Smith, 2021). Highlighting these strengths not only empowers students with dyslexia but also enriches the social work profession through diversity of thought and perspective (Snowling, 2019; Gibbs and Elliott, 2020).

Despite increasing recognition of dyslexia in social work education, significant gaps remain in understanding how it specifically affects students' placement experiences, where theoretical knowledge is applied in real-world settings. Existing literature acknowledges the presence of dyslexia among social work students and its challenges in professional education, yet limited research explores the specific barriers they encounter, the strategies they employ to navigate placements or the accommodations required to support their success (Garner, 2021). This lack of understanding is particularly concerning given the critical role of placements in developing the competencies needed for professional social work practice (Hepburn, 2021). Addressing these research gaps is essential for fostering inclusivity and improving placement outcomes for students with dyslexia.

Garner (2021) points out that the academic and practical demands of placements can exacerbate the challenges faced by students with dyslexia. Reflective writing tasks, a cornerstone of social work placements, often require the organisation of thoughts, clear expression of ideas and structured presentation of reflective insights. For students with dyslexia, these requirements can be especially daunting, leading to struggles with articulating their experiences and producing high-quality reflective submissions. Similarly, difficulties in reading comprehension and processing written material can hinder students' engagement with essential resources, such as policies, case studies and academic literature, reducing their ability to integrate theory into practice effectively.

Gant and Hewson (2022) build on these insights, highlighting the emotional toll of navigating dyslexia during placements. Their empirical study found that students with dyslexia often experience heightened anxiety, self-doubt and exhaustion, stemming from the dual burden of managing their condition and meeting placement demands. The pressure to perform in a professional environment, coupled with challenges such as processing information and managing tight deadlines, can overwhelm students, significantly affecting their confidence and ability to engage fully in learning opportunities. This lack of understanding and accommodation for dyslexia-specific barriers perpetuates feelings of inadequacy and alienation among students.

Hunt and Mathews (2018) similarly emphasise the additional pressures faced by students with dyslexia in placements, such as the expectation to compile a comprehensive portfolio of evidence while managing their condition. They argue that inadequate support during placements can exacerbate existing challenges, making it difficult for students to participate actively in discussions and group activities. Difficulties in processing verbal information, following complex conversations and articulating thoughts can further isolate students and limit their ability to contribute meaningfully to team dynamics. These findings align with Roulston *et al.* (2023), who highlight the critical need for robust support systems to address the compounded pressures experienced by students with dyslexia during placements.

One area of concern is the limited research on effective strategies and reasonable accommodations specifically tailored to address dyslexia-related challenges in practice placements. While broader studies on dyslexia identify its impact on academic performance, few explore how these challenges translate into professional practice settings (Falzon, 2021). The absence of targeted research inhibits the development of practical interventions that could enhance the placement experiences of students with dyslexia, leading to inconsistencies in the support they receive. Hepburn (2021) underscores the importance of legal frameworks, such as the Equality Act 2010 in the UK, which mandate reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities. However, the implementation of these adjustments often varies across placement providers, reflecting a lack of standardised understanding of how dyslexia specifically affects students' placement experiences.

The limited understanding of how dyslexia affects placements is often partnered with a tendency to overlook the potential strengths that students with dyslexia can bring to their practice. While much of the focus has been on the barriers they face, research by Snowling (2019) suggests that dyslexia is associated with unique cognitive abilities, such as creative thinking and visual problem-solving. These strengths can enable students to approach challenges from innovative perspectives, contributing valuable insights to complex social work scenarios. However, without adequate support and recognition of their abilities, these strengths may remain untapped, further disadvantaging students with dyslexia in placement settings.

Addressing this lack of understanding is critical for fostering inclusive educational and practice environments. By gaining deeper insights into the lived experiences of students with dyslexia, educators and placement providers can develop targeted strategies to mitigate barriers and enhance support systems. This includes offering tailored accommodations, such as additional time for tasks, alternative formats for reflective writing and regular feedback sessions to empower students with dyslexia to succeed in their placements (Hunt and Mathews, 2018; Gant and Hewson, 2022). Moreover, recognising and leveraging the unique strengths of these students can contribute to more diverse and innovative approaches within the social work profession, benefiting the individuals and communities served by social workers (Qureshi *et al.*, 2023).

By addressing these research gaps, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of dyslexia in the context of social work placements, fostering inclusivity, promoting professional success and enhancing the overall well-being of students with dyslexia. This endeavour not only supports the academic and professional development of these students but also enriches the social work field by embracing diversity and inclusion as core values.

This current study aims to fill these gaps by exploring the lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia in the UK, offering a nuanced understanding of their challenges and support needs within the context of UK social work education and practice. The study also engages with the legal framework outlined in the Equality Act 2010, focusing on the requirement for reasonable adjustments in practice placements (Hepburn, 2021; Hunt *et al.*, 2018). By seeking direct input from students with dyslexia, this research aims to identify innovative and effective support strategies that go beyond traditional measures. In doing so, it contributes to the development of inclusive practices that empower students with dyslexia to excel in their placements and professional careers (Stoeber and Rountree, 2021).

1.2.2 Dyslexia: strategies to maximise strengths

Dyslexia, which affects approximately five to ten per cent of the global population, presents both challenges and unique strengths that can be harnessed to enrich social work practice placement learning (Shaywitz and Shaywitz, 2008; 2020). Interestingly, higher education institutions (HEIs) report

a higher prevalence of dyslexia, estimated at 17 to 21 per cent. This discrepancy is often attributed to enhanced identification, reporting and the availability of robust support systems within HEIs (Smith, 2021). Social work education can draw on these insights to implement strategies that maximise the strengths of students with dyslexia, particularly during placements where theoretical knowledge is applied in practical, high-pressure environments.

Students with dyslexia frequently develop exceptional compensatory strategies and resilience, skills honed through their experiences of navigating academic challenges. These abilities can significantly enhance their approach to practice placements, enabling them to think creatively and persevere through complex scenarios (Nalavany, Carawan and Rennick, 2014). Practice educators and placement supervisors can support these students by recognising and building on these strengths, creating environments that celebrate and utilise neurodiverse thinking.

The use of assistive technologies is a transformative strategy for enhancing placement learning. Tools such as text-to-speech software, mind-mapping applications and speech-to-text programs enable students with dyslexia to process and organise information more effectively. These technologies are beneficial during reflective tasks or case analyses, where traditional information processing methods may pose barriers. For example, text-to-speech software can assist students in comprehending complex case studies, while mind-mapping tools can help them structure their reflective writing, ensuring clarity and coherence (Hepburn, 2021).

Providing alternative learning methods that cater to diverse preferences is another essential strategy for enhancing placement learning. For instance, using visual aids, hands-on activities and discussion-based learning allows dyslexic students to engage with material in ways that align with their strengths (Gibbs and Elliott, 2020). In a placement context, this might involve employing role-playing exercises to simulate client interactions or using diagrams to map out intervention strategies. Such approaches not only enhance the learning experience for dyslexic students but also demonstrate the value of diverse methods in professional development.

Creating an inclusive environment is critical for enabling students with dyslexia to thrive during placements. Roulston *et al.* (2021) emphasise that fostering a

culture of acceptance and equity within practice settings reduces stress and empowers students to contribute actively. For example, open communication between students, educators and placement supervisors ensures that reasonable adjustments, such as extended deadlines or alternative assessment formats, are implemented effectively. These adjustments are vital in ensuring that students with dyslexia are not disadvantaged, allowing them to focus on showcasing their abilities and engaging fully with placement activities.

Dyslexia is often associated with unique cognitive strengths, such as creative thinking, problem-solving and the ability to view challenges from multiple perspectives (Kirby and Gibbon (2018; Qureshi *et al.*, 2023). These strengths can be particularly valuable in social work practice placements, where innovative solutions and adaptability are essential. Dyslexic students may bring fresh perspectives to team discussions or propose novel approaches to addressing client needs. Additionally, their heightened empathy, informed by personal experiences of overcoming barriers, can enhance their ability to build rapport with clients and advocate for vulnerable populations (Snowling, 2019; Gibbs and Elliott, 2020).

A holistic approach to supporting students with dyslexia in placements involves not only addressing their challenges but also leveraging their strengths to foster innovation and creativity. Reframing dyslexia as a difference rather than a deficit and recognising the value that neurodiverse individuals bring to social work can transform practice placement learning. By creating supportive and inclusive environments, educational institutions and placement providers can empower dyslexic students to contribute fully and thrive. This approach benefits both the students and the profession, as their unique perspectives and skills enrich the practice of social work and enhance outcomes for the communities they serve.

Integrating these strategies into placement learning ensures that social work students with dyslexia are supported to achieve their full potential. This not only promotes inclusivity and innovation within the profession but also paves the way for a more diverse and empathetic workforce that can better address complex social challenges.

1.2.3 Importance of inclusive practices

The support and accommodations provided by HEIs play a crucial role in enabling students with dyslexia to enter higher education. Yet, the persistence of systemic barriers and insufficient individualised support can still result in underperformance and frustration for these students (Gibbs and Elliott, 2020).

Promoting awareness and understanding of dyslexia is essential in fostering an environment where individuals feel valued and empowered. This sets the stage for understanding the social and environmental challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia during practice placements. The call for a re-evaluation of disability and the removal of environmental barriers to learning is supported by scholars advocating concrete social and environmental changes to foster inclusivity (Oliver, 2013; Barnes and Mercer, 2010; Riddle, 2020; Tsatsou, 2020; Ziegler, 2020).

Inclusive practices are crucial for ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, have equal access to educational opportunities. This involves not only providing accommodations and support but also creating a culture of acceptance and understanding. Educators and practitioners must be aware of the diverse needs of students and be willing to adapt their teaching methods and assessment practices to accommodate these needs (Qureshi *et al.*, 2023).

In the context of social work education, inclusivity is particularly important because social work is a profession that values diversity, empathy and social justice. As social work students with dyslexia bring unique perspectives and strengths to the field, it is essential to create an environment that supports their development and growth. By promoting inclusive practices, social work educators can help ensure that all students, including those with dyslexia, have the opportunity to succeed and contribute to the profession (Roulston *et al.*, 2021; Gant and Hewson, 2022).

Creating inclusive learning environments requires a commitment to understanding and addressing the specific needs of students with dyslexia. This may involve providing accommodations, as mentioned, but also, it requires a shift in attitudes and perceptions, challenging the stigma and negative stereotypes often associated with dyslexia. By promoting a culture of acceptance and understanding, educators can create a more supportive and empowering environment for students with dyslexia (Gibbs and Elliott, 2020).

1.3 Research objectives and questions

This study aims to uncover the barriers encountered by social work students with dyslexia, identify their support needs and highlight effective strategies and support mechanisms. This research began by asking, 'What are the experiences of social work students with dyslexia during practice placements?', which gave rise to three formalised research questions (RQs).

RQ 1: What is the perception of social work students with dyslexia experiences on placement?

This focuses on understanding the subjective experiences and perceptions of social work students with dyslexia during their placement. It explores how these students interpret and make sense of their placement experiences, including the challenges they face, the support they receive and their overall satisfaction with the placement process. This question aims to uncover students' feelings, emotions and personal reflections on their placement journey (Qureshi *et al.*, 2023).

RQ 2: In what ways does dyslexia impact the daily placement experience?

This question explores the impact of dyslexia on the daily placement experience of social work students. It aims to investigate the challenges and limitations arising from dyslexia, including struggles with reading, writing, time management, communication and task performance. By focusing on specific areas where dyslexia presents barriers or challenges in the context of placement, this question seeks to uncover the practical implications of the condition on students' abilities to fulfil their placement responsibilities effectively, thereby informing the development of targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address these challenges and promoting inclusive practice placement environments (Eplin, 2021; Roulston *et al.*, 2021).

RQ 3: What changes do social work students want to see to enhance their placement experiences?

The third research question shifts the focus towards potential solutions and interventions to improve the placement learning experiences of social work students with dyslexia. It explores actionable steps aimed at addressing the challenges identified in the previous questions and enhancing the overall support and accommodations available to these students during placement.

This question aims to identify best practices, innovative approaches and systemic changes that can promote inclusivity and support the academic and professional success of social work students with dyslexia. Through this inquiry, the study seeks to offer practical recommendations for educators, practitioners and institutions to implement effective strategies and interventions, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for social work students with dyslexia during their placements (Oliver, 2013; Hepburn, 2021; Gant and Hewson, 2022).

In summary, while the first question looks at the subjective perceptions and experiences of social work students with dyslexia, the second focuses on the palpable impact of dyslexia on their daily placement experiences. The third question shifts towards identifying strategies and interventions to address the challenges identified in the first two questions and improve the overall placement learning experiences of social work students with dyslexia. Each question contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and support needs of these students during placement, addressing both subjective and objective aspects of their placement experiences (Qureshi *et al.*, 2023).

1.4 Approaches to the research

This qualitative research takes a constructivist stance situated within an interpretivist paradigm and employs a phenomenological approach to exploring the experiences of social work students with dyslexia. It is guided by principles outlined by Englander (2016) and further informed by the foundational writings of Husserl (1931) and Heidegger (1962). These theorists provide essential insights into the nature and practice of phenomenology that sharply focus on the nuanced experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their placements.

1.5 Overview of the structure of the thesis

This section provides a detailed roadmap of the thesis, outlining the purpose and content of each chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature review – provides an in-depth examination of existing studies and theoretical frameworks related to dyslexia and social work practice placements, identifying gaps in the current literature and establishing the rationale for this study. By critically analysing previous research, this chapter

lays the groundwork for understanding how dyslexia impacts social work students and the effectiveness of various support mechanisms.

Chapter 3: Research methodology – details the paradigmatic philosophy behind the research design, as well as the practical methods for participant selection, data collection and analysis employed in this study. It also addresses ethical considerations and outlines the steps taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research.

Chapter 4: Findings – presents and discusses the results of the study. It is structured around the main themes identified during the data analysis, providing a detailed account of the participants' experiences. This chapter highlights the challenges, coping strategies and support mechanisms that were effective or lacking during their training, supported by direct quotes from the participants to illustrate their lived experiences.

Chapter 5: Discussion – connects the findings with the literature, providing a comprehensive review of the research insights. This chapter interprets the results in the context of existing theories and studies, discussing the implications for social work education and practice. It also addresses the limitations of the study and suggests areas for future research.

Chapter 6: Implications for practice – synthesises the key findings and insights from the study, offering conclusions and practical recommendations for improving support for social work students with dyslexia. This chapter reflects on the broader significance of the research, emphasising the importance of inclusivity and the potential for this study to inform policy and practice changes in social work education. It also provides a call to action for educators, policymakers and practitioners to take forward the recommendations to create a more supportive and equitable educational environment.

Chapter 7: Conclusion – summarises all the key aspects of this research study, revisits the main findings, mapping them to the research questions and reiterates the study's contribution to the field. It includes the researcher's reflections on the learning journey completed so far.

1.6 Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter has comprehensively introduced the research study, providing a context and a rationale for embarking on it, an outline of its approaches,

perspectives and methodologies and an indication of its significance to the body of research.

This thesis, designed within an interpretivist paradigm, qualitatively researches the lived experiences of 15 social work students with dyslexia during practice placements. A phenomenological approach is used to explore participants' perceptions, the impact of dyslexia on their placement learning, and the changes they feel would enhance their placement experiences. Its constructivist stance is characterised by the integration of the social model of disability, as articulated by Oliver (1993) and other scholars, as well as a recognition of the concept of neurodiversity, all of which are crucial in addressing the social and environmental barriers encountered by social work students in their placement settings.

The relevance of this work lies in its potential to inform and transform social work education and practice and help towards an enhanced culture of inclusivity and improved effectiveness of placements during training, contributing to the development of more competent and confident social work professionals. Its core message is to empower social work students of all abilities and highlight the imperative to adopt a comprehensive, supportive and inclusive approach that addresses both social and environmental barriers, leading to the development of better support systems and accommodations that could enhance learning experiences and professional growth. It is hoped that through collaborative efforts and informed practice, the way can be paved for a more equitable and supportive landscape in social work education.

In the next chapter, past research is reviewed that underpins the challenges and support mechanisms discussed in this study. By examining previous studies, Chapter 2 aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the context, further informing the development of strategies to support social work students with dyslexia during their practice placements.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review explores the challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia during practice placements, focusing on the implications for their professional development and the strategies required to support their success. By synthesising existing research, this chapter provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the lived experiences of these students and identifies critical gaps in the literature (Oliver, 1990; Share, 2021; Withers, 2020).

The review begins by examining the historical context and evolving definitions of dyslexia, tracing its recognition from a primarily cognitive condition to a more nuanced understanding that considers societal and environmental factors. This perspective is informed by the social model of disability, which highlights the role of societal barriers in creating disadvantage (Oliver, 1990; Withers, 2020). Scholars such as Oliver (2013) and Share (2021) argue for a shift from deficit-focused views of dyslexia to recognising the strengths and contributions of neurodiverse individuals. This contextual understanding is essential for framing the challenges and opportunities faced by social work students with dyslexia.

A balanced exploration of existing studies highlights the barriers encountered by these students during their placements. Social and environmental obstacles, including inadequate support systems and limited awareness among educators, significantly hinder their learning experiences (Knight *et al.*, 2023; Finch, 2022; Hollinrake *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the literature discusses the broader implications of dyslexia on professional development, emphasising the importance of tailored interventions and inclusive practices to promote equitable learning opportunities (Roulston *et al.*, 2021; Rose, 2009).

This review also examines the strengths associated with dyslexia, such as creativity, problem-solving skills and empathy, which can enhance social work practice (Snowling, Hulme and Nation, 2020; Qureshi *et al.*, 2023). However, these strengths are often underutilised due to a lack of awareness and accommodations in educational and placement settings (Gibbs and Elliott, 2020; Riddle, 2019). This imbalance underscores the need for strategies that not only mitigate challenges but also maximise the unique contributions of students with dyslexia.

The chapter further evaluates the role of mediation in fostering positive learning environments. Research demonstrates that mediation can resolve conflicts and reduce barriers, enabling students to navigate their placements more effectively (Kirby, 2020; Nijakowska, 2008; Budeva, 2018). These findings support the development of proactive interventions that address both individual and systemic challenges.

Finally, the review considers the legal frameworks governing dyslexia support, including screening, diagnosis and accommodations, alongside its connections with other forms of neurodiversity. Legal mandates, such as those outlined in the Equality Act 2010, play a critical role in shaping institutional policies and practices to support students with dyslexia (Withers, 2020; Leather and Everatt, 2024).

In conclusion, this review synthesises scholarly perspectives on dyslexia within the context of social work placements. It provides a comprehensive and balanced foundation for understanding the experiences of students with dyslexia and highlights areas requiring further research and action to improve their educational and professional outcomes.

2.2 Literature search strategy

A literature search was conducted to contextualise the study, highlight significant findings and identify gaps in the literature related to social work students with dyslexia and their placement experiences. This process aimed to support the study's focus rather than serve as a systematic review.

The search began with Google Scholar, which provided an initial overview of key themes and concepts. Guided by Watson's (2020) recommendations for effective literature search techniques, the search terms were refined iteratively to uncover diverse perspectives. A targeted exploration of the University of East London's online library resources was also conducted, focusing on peer-reviewed articles and recent publications.

The 'snowballing' technique was used to review reference lists from selected articles, identifying additional sources that expanded the scope of the literature review. Searches were conducted on academic databases, including EBSCO, ProQuest and SCOPUS, to access a broad range of scholarly sources. While

this study is not a systematic review, the process included careful evaluation of article relevance and quality.

Recurring themes and trends from the literature were synthesised to inform the research framework. This streamlined approach ensured the inclusion of high-quality, relevant sources while maintaining focus on the study's primary objectives of exploring the experiences of social work students with dyslexia in practice placements.

2.3 Historical perspective and theories of dyslexia

It is important to contextualise current knowledge and practices related to dyslexia and track changes in the condition's diagnostic criteria (Kirby, 2020). This review informs present-day interventions, challenges stigmas and misconceptions and highlights pioneering work, policy and advocacy implications (Kirby, 2020; Gibbs and Elliott, 2020). This historical context provides a solid foundation for understanding the complexities of dyslexia and its intersection with the social model of disability in contemporary social work education and practice (Gant and Hewson, 2022).

Dyslexia has undergone a transformative journey in both its recognition and classification as a neurodevelopmental disorder (Kirby, 2020). The late 19th century marked a pivotal moment when ophthalmologist, Rudolf Berlin, coined the term 'dyslexia' to describe individuals struggling with reading. At this point, dyslexia was primarily linked to visual issues, as noted by Elliott and Grigorenko (2020). Moving into the early 20th century, a significant shift occurred as researchers transitioned from perceiving dyslexia as a visual disorder to recognising its foundation in language-based challenges (Ramus, 2017). Ground-breaking research by Orton and Gillingham in the 1920s laid the groundwork for understanding the phonological processing difficulties that underlie dyslexia (Smith, 2020, citing Orton and Gillingham, 1920s).

The mid-20th century witnessed a growing acknowledgement of dyslexia as a distinct learning disability. During this era, the term 'specific reading disability' gained prominence (Kirby, 2020). As research methods advanced, dyslexia gained further recognition, which led to debates about the most appropriate educational interventions and highlighted the need for more sophisticated research tools to understand the aetiology (causes and origins) of dyslexia

(Kirby, 2020). In the 1970s and 1980s, dyslexia achieved legal recognition as a disability in the United States (US), with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 and in the United Kingdom (UK), with the Equality Act 2010. These legislative measures mandate that educational institutions provide special education services and accommodations to support dyslexic students (Goswami, 2014; Ramus, 2017).

Throughout this historical journey, research and debates about dyslexia have remained prominent, with an enduring focus on theories of developmental dyslexia. Researchers such as Goswami (2014) and Ramus (2017) have shed light on the theories surrounding the condition's developmental and genetic predispositions. These debates have found their place in medical academic journals, underscoring the multifaceted nature of dyslexia (Goswami, 2014; Ramus, 2017). However, defining dyslexia has not been without its challenges. The works of Danelli *et al.* (2017) and Goswami (2014) on theories of developmental dyslexia highlight the complexities of arriving at a consensus definition. Stein (2018) argues that these challenges arise from historical neglect of the scientific definition of dyslexia and a blurred understanding of the distinction between its symptoms and causes.

The contention surrounding the definition and causes of dyslexia is further amplified by the insights of Simon and Elliott (2020), who emphasise the importance of differentiating between symptoms and causes.

The literature highlights that debates, criticism and methodological gaps have characterised the historical perspective on dyslexia research. These debates often centre around the definition, diagnosis and intervention strategies for dyslexia, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the condition. As researchers like Simon and Elliott (2020) and Kirby (2020) have noted, the evolving understanding of dyslexia underscores the need for ongoing research to address these complexities. By addressing these gaps and refining research methodologies, scholars aim to develop more effective support systems for individuals with dyslexia.

Research into dyslexia spans multiple perspectives, with studies exploring cognitive, neurological and genetic aspects of the condition. For example, the 'double-deficit hypothesis' developed by Wolf and Bowers (1999) emphasises deficits in phonological processing and naming speed in dyslexia. Goswami

(2014) focuses on dyslexia's neurological aspects, noting distinct brain activation patterns, especially in regions linked to phonological processing. Prevett (2013) explores the 'cerebellar deficit hypothesis' proposed by Nicolson and Fawcett (1990), who suggested that cerebellar dysfunction may play a role in dyslexia. The 'cerebellar deficit hypothesis' proposed by Nicolson and Fawcett (1990) explores the idea that dyslexia may not solely arise from deficits in phonological processing, as traditionally believed, but could also involve dysfunctions in the cerebellum. The cerebellum, a brain structure primarily associated with motor control and coordination, also plays a critical role in a range of cognitive processes, including the automation of skills such as reading and writing.

Nicolson and Fawcett (1990) argued that individuals with dyslexia might experience difficulties with procedural learning – tasks that rely on automaticity and fluency. According to their hypothesis, impairments in the cerebellum could disrupt the ability to develop automatic processes, such as the rapid decoding of words and the coordination of fine motor skills required for handwriting. This theory suggests that the challenges faced by dyslexic individuals extend beyond language processing to include broader issues of motor and cognitive function.

Further research into the cerebellar deficit hypothesis has examined its implications for interventions, suggesting that strategies to improve motor coordination, timing and balance might also positively influence literacy skills. However, this hypothesis remains a topic of debate, with some researchers emphasising the primary role of phonological processing deficits while others advocate for a more integrative approach that considers the cerebellum's potential contribution. Danelli *et al.* (2017) also explore dyslexia's genetic underpinnings, finding significant heritability estimates. Collectively, these studies enhance the understanding of dyslexia, highlighting phonological processing, brain differences and genetic influences. Ongoing debates underscore the need for consensus and nuanced approaches to diagnosis and intervention, recognising dyslexia's complexity (Goswami, 2014; Ramus, 2017; Simon and Elliott, 2020; Stein, 2018).

Understanding phonological processing illuminates the challenges social work students with dyslexia face during placements, affecting, as it does, written communication, reading comprehension and time management (Brown and

Davis, 2018). Neurological studies offer insights into brain differences associated with dyslexia, particularly in regions linked to language processing, while genetic research underscores its hereditary nature, emphasising the role played by genetic predispositions. Ongoing debates highlight the need for tailored approaches to diagnosis and intervention (Kirby, 2020). Understanding these factors is crucial for addressing the challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia during placements, informing the development of supportive strategies and interventions.

This study acknowledges the widely accepted phonological deficit theory, which emphasises difficulties in linking sounds to letters and subsequent reading challenges (Share, 2021). However, it is important to recognise that this theory, while significant, may oversimplify the complexities of dyslexia. Dyslexia also impacts writing and organisational skills, which are crucial for social work students during their placements. Therefore, this research explores not only phonological processing difficulties but also the broader and more complex manifestations of dyslexia in practical settings.

Frith's causal modelling framework (1999) brings together these different theories, providing a comprehensive approach to understanding dyslexia by integrating cognitive, biological and behavioural levels of analysis. This framework helps to contextualise the multifaceted nature of dyslexia and supports the development of interventions that address the condition's diverse aspects.

Thus, understanding the historical context of dyslexia provides valuable insights into the progress made and the challenges that persist. From early recognition and research to significant legislative milestones and ongoing advancements, the journey of dyslexia awareness and support reflects a dynamic and evolving field. By continuing to address the gaps in research and practice, educators and policymakers can better support dyslexic individuals, leveraging their strengths and mitigating their challenges.

2.4 Models and concepts of disability

Three models of disability were investigated during the literature review phase of this research: the medical model, the biopsychosocial model and the social model, as well as the concept of neurodiversity, and each have profound

implications for how society designs programmes, services and laws to address the needs of individuals with disabilities (Levitt, 2017; Shakespeare and Watson, 2001).

2.4.1 The medical model

The medical model of disability traditionally perceives disability as a medical condition or impairment that is inherent within an individual (Levitt, 2017; Shakespeare and Watson, 2001). This perspective emphasises diagnosing, treating and rehabilitating the individual to 'fix' or 'cure' their disability, viewing it as a problem necessitating medical intervention (Levitt, 2017; Shakespeare and Watson, 2001). Critics argue that this approach pathologizes disability by focusing on the individual's limitations and medical needs, potentially leading to labelling and unequal treatment (Norwich and Eaton, 2014).

2.4.2 The social model

The social model of disability shifts the focus entirely to environmental barriers that hinder the full participation of disabled individuals (Oliver, 1990; Barnes, 2012) and in accordance with this model, legislative acts, like the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, mandate the implementation of reasonable adjustments to accommodate disabled individuals (Oliver, 1990; Barnes, 2012). This perspective underscores the role of societal structures in creating barriers for disabled individuals, advocating societal change rather than individual 'fixes'.

The social model of disability posits that disability is not an inherent trait but a result of the interaction between people with impairments and an inaccessible, unaccommodating society. It stands in stark contrast to the traditional medical model, which attributes disability to inherent problems within the individual, focusing on impairments or medical conditions. The social model of disability, instead, shifts the spotlight towards society and the environment in which the person is situated (Oliver, 1990).

'Impairment' refers to the physical, sensory or cognitive limitations a person may have, while 'disability' is seen as the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. By focusing on these barriers, the study aims to highlight areas where changes can be made to improve inclusivity and accessibility (Thomas, 2004).

Its core principles include identifying and dismantling physical, attitudinal and systemic barriers that restrict individuals' participation in society; emphasising the rights of individuals with disabilities to participate fully in all aspects of life; and recognising that society as a whole bears responsibility for creating inclusive environments. By adopting this model, the study aims to shift the focus from individual deficits to societal barriers, advocating their removal to promote inclusivity and equality (Oliver, 1993; Barnes and Mercer, 2010; Riddle, 2020; Tsatsou, 2020; Ziegler, 2020).

The social model of disability has profound implications for policy and practice. It advocates change in the law, in policies and in practices to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. For example, it supports the implementation of universal design principles in architecture and the provision of reasonable accommodations in workplaces and educational institutions (Barnes and Mercer, 2003). In education, the social model calls for inclusive curricula and teaching methods that accommodate diverse learning needs. It encourages educators to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach and instead create flexible learning environments that support all students (Thomas, 2004). In the workplace, it promotes practices such as flexible working hours, assistive technologies and inclusive hiring practices to ensure that individuals with disabilities receive full and fair consideration and can perform their jobs effectively and comfortably.

In the context of social work practice education, students with dyslexia encounter a range of unique challenges during their practice placements. These include difficulties with reading, writing, time management and organisational tasks, which are essential skills in social work practice (Kirby, 2020). However, the social model of disability, which serves as a theoretical framework for this study, shifts the focus from these individual challenges to the ways in which the educational and practice environments can either exacerbate or alleviate these difficulties (Oliver, 1993). For instance, if a practice placement lacks adequate support systems, such as assistive technologies, flexible learning strategies or understanding supervisors, the environment itself becomes disabling. The social model advocates the removal of such barriers to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This perspective aligns with the need to illuminate the experiences of social work students with dyslexia, aiming to

inform support systems and enhance inclusivity within social work education (Qureshi *et al.*, 2023).

By focusing on societal barriers, this study seeks to identify specific factors within social work practice education that can be modified to better support students with dyslexia. For example, training practice educators (PEs) to understand dyslexia and implementing reasonable adjustments can significantly improve the placement experiences for these students. This approach not only supports the academic and professional development of students with dyslexia but also promotes a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Furthermore, the social model aligns with principles of empowerment and advocacy. It encourages viewing people with disabilities as active agents, capable of advocating for their own rights and needs, rather than as passive recipients of care (Shakespeare, 2013b). This perspective supports the study's aim to promote self-advocacy and social justice.

Thus, this study provides a more holistic understanding of disability. It considers not just the physical or cognitive aspects but also the social, cultural and environmental factors that impact the lives of people with disabilities (Oliver, 1993).

2.4.2.1 Critical disability theory

Critical disability theory (CDT), as an extension of the social model of disability, provides a compelling framework for understanding the challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia on placement. CDT posits that disability arises from societal barriers, systemic discrimination and a lack of appropriate accommodations, rather than individual impairments (Hahn, 1986; Oliver, 1990). This lens is particularly pertinent when considering the difficulties dyslexic students encounter in placement settings, where societal and institutional structures often fail to address their specific needs.

Placements for social work students typically involve high-pressure environments, requiring skills in written communication, time management and critical decision-making. For students with dyslexia, these tasks can be particularly challenging due to difficulties in processing speed, written expression and organisation. CDT reframes these challenges, arguing that they stem not from the students' abilities but from a system that is rigid and does not adequately adapt to diverse ways of working and learning. For instance,

placement expectations often include extensive written documentation and case recordings, tasks that may not be inclusive of alternative methods, such as oral reporting or the use of assistive technology.

Supervisors and PEs also play a key role in shaping the placement experience. However, a lack of awareness or training about dyslexia can lead to misunderstanding, implicit biases or a failure to provide necessary accommodations. This aligns with CDT's critique of ableism, which highlights how traditional expectations and practices in workplaces marginalise individuals with disabilities. Dyslexic students may face stigmatisation, with their requests for support or adjustments being viewed as burdensome or indicative of inadequacy. Such attitudes further compound the challenges and create an environment of exclusion.

CDT also emphasises the need to view these challenges through the lens of systemic injustice, advocating for structural changes to create more inclusive placements. For example, CDT calls for flexible approaches to assessment and reporting, training for supervisors to better support students with dyslexia and the integration of assistive technologies to reduce barriers. These adjustments not only improve outcomes for dyslexic students but also promote a culture of inclusivity and respect for diverse abilities.

By applying CDT to the experiences of dyslexic social work students on placement, it becomes clear that their challenges are not merely personal or situational but deeply rooted in societal and institutional systems. Addressing these issues requires transformative changes that prioritise equity, accessibility and the dismantling of ableist practices. This perspective shifts the focus from 'adapting students to existing structures' towards 'adapting structures to meet the needs of all students', fostering an environment where every individual can thrive and succeed.

2.4.3 The biopsychosocial model

The biopsychosocial model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding health and illness by considering the interplay of biological, psychological and social factors. Introduced by Engel (1977), this model addressed the limitations of the traditional biomedical model, which focused primarily on the biological underpinnings of disease. Engel argued that health and illness are best understood as products of dynamic interactions between a

person's physiological state, psychological processes and the social environment. This holistic perspective has since influenced various fields, including medicine, psychology and social work (Borrell-Carrió, Suchman and Epstein, 2004).

Both the biopsychosocial and social models have significantly influenced their respective fields. The biopsychosocial model has been instrumental in promoting holistic patient care, particularly in medicine and psychology, by integrating biological, psychological and social determinants of health (Engel, 1977; Borrell-Carrió, Suchman and Epstein, 2004). Meanwhile, the social model has driven societal and policy changes aimed at enhancing accessibility and inclusion for disabled individuals (Oliver, 1990; Goodley, 2014).

2.4.4 Neurodiversity

In addition to the social and biopsychosocial models, the concept of neurodiversity is highly relevant and provides a complementary perspective. 'Neurodiversity' – coined by sociologist, Judy Singer, in the late 1990s – posits that neurological differences such as dyslexia, autism, ADHD and others are natural variations of the human genome, not deficits or disorders to be cured (Singer, 1999). This concept emphasises the strengths and unique abilities of neurodiverse individuals and advocates acceptance and inclusion of all neurotypes.

The core principles of neurodiversity include viewing neurological differences as part of human diversity, similar to variations in race, gender and sexual orientation; a strengths-based approach, focusing on the strengths and abilities of neurodiverse individuals rather than solely on their challenges; and inclusive environments, creating environments that accommodate diverse neurological needs and reduce sensory, social and communication barriers.

The neurodiversity concept is a particularly suitable lens for this study because it recognises that social work students with dyslexia may possess strengths and talents that are often overlooked. For example, many individuals with dyslexia have strong problem-solving skills, creativity and oral communication abilities (Eide and Eide, 2011). These strengths can be particularly valuable in social work practice, where innovative thinking and effective communication are essential.

By integrating the ideas of neurodiversity, this study aims to highlight the positive contributions that dyslexic students can make to social work practice. This concept suggests that everyone has a part to play and that all individuals have different strengths to offer. It aligns with the need to move away from viewing dyslexia solely as a challenge and instead recognise the potential benefits that dyslexic students bring to their placements.

Recognition of neurodiversity has significant implications for both educational and workplace settings. In education, it promotes individualised learning plans and teaching methods that cater to the strengths and needs of neurodiverse students. This includes providing sensory-friendly classrooms, alternative communication methods and flexibility in assessments and deadlines (Armstrong, 2010). In the workplace, neurodiversity theory promotes inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodations. Employers are encouraged to recognise and value the unique skills and perspectives of neurodiverse individuals. Accommodations might include quiet workspaces, flexible work schedules and clear, direct communication (Armstrong, 2010).

Moreover, Gant and Hewson (2022) and den Houting (2019) discuss the importance of neurodiversity in the workplace, highlighting how placement agencies can benefit from the diverse skills and perspectives of dyslexic employees. By adopting a neurodiversity framework, educational institutions and workplaces can create more inclusive environments that leverage the strengths of dyslexic individuals. This approach aligns with both the social and biopsychosocial models, as it addresses societal, biological and psychological factors in a holistic manner.

2.4.5 Criticisms of these models and concepts

Despite their synergies, there are challenges and criticisms associated with these models and concepts. Critics argue that the social model of disability may oversimplify the complex experiences of individuals with disabilities by focusing primarily on societal barriers (Shakespeare, 2013a). Others suggest that the theory of neurodiversity may overlook the significant challenges and support needs of individuals with more severe impairments (den Houting, 2019). However, these criticisms also highlight opportunities for growth and integration. By combining the strengths of both models, advocates can develop more

comprehensive approaches that address both societal barriers and individual needs.

2.5 Challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia

Phonological processing deficits and rapid automated naming (RAN) deficits are two core areas of difficulty experienced by individuals with dyslexia (Norton and Wolf, 2018), directly impacting social work students' academic and professional experiences. These deficits, along with the neurological basis of dyslexia, provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges dyslexic students can face while on placement.

2.5.1 Phonological processing deficits in dyslexia

Research highlights that phonological processing deficits, the difficulty in recognising and manipulating sounds in language, are a hallmark of dyslexia (Simon and Elliott, 2020; Kirby, 2020; Shaywitz and Shaywitz, 2005). For social work students, this can manifest as challenges in tasks requiring accurate and efficient written communication, such as case notes or reports. Difficulty with spelling, decoding and fluency can further hinder their ability to meet time-sensitive placement demands, often leading to increased anxiety and reduced confidence.

Brady, Braze and Fowler (2020), however, have shown that targeted phonological interventions can lead to increased activation in brain regions associated with reading and language processing, suggesting that early and intensive intervention can alter the neurological pathways involved in reading.

In practical terms, phonological interventions can be integrated into various educational settings. Programmes such as Lindamood phoneme sequencing (LiPS) (Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes, 2009) and the Orton-Gillingham approach (Stevens, Walker and Vaughn, 2021) have been developed to address phonological deficits through multi-sensory techniques. These programmes emphasise the systematic teaching of phonemic awareness, decoding skills and the relationship between sounds and letters, which are critical for developing reading fluency and comprehension.

Phonological processing deficits impact an individual's ability to decode words and link sounds to letters. Understanding this helps in designing specific

interventions, such as phonics-based reading programmes that emphasise the relationship between sounds and letters. These programmes can significantly improve reading skills in dyslexic students by addressing their core difficulties (Share, 2021).

2.5.2 Rapid automated naming deficits as predictors of dyslexia

RAN deficits refer to difficulties in quickly naming familiar items, such as letters, numbers or colours, which reflects slower processing speed (Araújo *et al.*, 2021; Stampoltzis *et al.*, 2020). For dyslexic social work students, this can translate into delays in verbal responses, hesitation in real-time client interactions and slower assimilation of new information during training. Placement environments that prioritise speed and multitasking may exacerbate these difficulties, making it harder for dyslexic students to keep pace with their peers.

RAN deficits serve as valuable predictors of dyslexia and are closely associated with underlying phonological processing difficulties. Araújo *et al.* (2021) emphasise the significance of RAN in assessing dyslexia, noting the strong correlation between RAN deficits and reading difficulties. These deficits reflect challenges in rapidly accessing and processing phonological information, which contribute to difficulties in fluent reading and word recognition. Research consistently demonstrates slower RAN abilities in dyslexic individuals, especially when naming letters or numbers (Araújo *et al.*, 2021; Stampoltzis *et al.*, 2020).

Lervåg and Hulme (2019) found that RAN deficits not only predict reading difficulties but also uniquely affect reading development, independently of phonological awareness. This suggests that RAN encompasses more than just phonological processing and involves broader cognitive mechanisms, such as visual–verbal integration and processing speed.

Similarly, Wolf and Denckla (2018) highlight the double-deficit hypothesis, which posits that dyslexic individuals may have deficits in both phonological processing and RAN. This combination exacerbates reading difficulties, as the individual struggles with both decoding words and retrieving the phonological information quickly enough to facilitate fluent reading. Their research underscores the need for comprehensive assessment and intervention strategies that address both deficits to improve reading outcomes effectively.

Furthermore, research by Norton and Wolf (2018) demonstrates the neural underpinnings of RAN deficits. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), they found that dyslexic individuals exhibit reduced activation in brain regions associated with rapid naming tasks, such as the left inferior frontal gyrus and the left temporoparietal region. These findings support the notion that RAN deficits are linked to specific neural pathways, highlighting the importance of targeted interventions that can stimulate these areas.

Interventions aimed at improving RAN abilities can be integrated into educational strategies to support dyslexic learners. For example, Fuchs *et al.* (2020) developed an intervention programme that combines phonological awareness training with RAN exercises. This programme demonstrated significant improvements in both phonological processing and naming speed, leading to better reading fluency and comprehension. The success of such interventions underscores the need for multi-faceted approaches that address various aspects of dyslexia.

Additionally, Georgiou, Parrila and Kirby (2019) suggest incorporating timed naming exercises into regular classroom activities to enhance the speed and efficiency of word retrieval. These exercises can include activities like timed letter and number naming, as well as rapid naming of colours and objects. By practising these tasks regularly, dyslexic students can develop quicker retrieval skills, which are essential for fluent reading and academic success.

Understanding RAN deficits and their impact on reading and information processing can inform the development of support strategies that help dyslexic students manage their placement tasks more effectively. For instance, accommodations such as extended time for reading and writing tasks, as well as the use of assistive technologies like text-to-speech software, can mitigate the impact of RAN deficits on academic performance (Norton and Wolf, 2018).

Furthermore, recognising the broader cognitive mechanisms involved in RAN can guide the creation of interventions that address visual–verbal integration, processing speed, rapid information retrieval and effective communication (Norton and Wolf, 2018) all important skills in the tool kit of a social worker.

In practical terms, RAN deficits may hinder the ability of social work students with dyslexia to quickly retrieve and use information in dynamic placement settings and they would, therefore benefit from specific interventions during their

placements. For example, given the role of RAN in information processing speed, students can be provided with assistive tools like digital organisers and speech-to-text applications to help them keep up with the fast-paced demands of social work environments (AbilityNet, n.d.). These tools streamline information processing and reduce the cognitive load associated with traditional note taking and documentation, making them highly effective in placement settings.

Additionally, training programmes that focus on improving RAN abilities through repeated, timed practice of rapid naming tasks can be integrated into their preparatory coursework (Reading Rockets, n.d.). This can help improve their fluency in accessing and processing information, which is crucial in high-pressure social work settings where quick decision-making and effective communication are essential.

Extended time allowances and access to written materials in multiple formats, such as audio and digital text, can also be vital accommodations (International Dyslexia Association, n.d.). These strategies provide dyslexic students with the flexibility to engage with learning materials in ways that align with their strengths, reducing the strain of extensive documentation and rapid information retrieval often required in social work placements. By incorporating these interventions, educators and placement supervisors can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for dyslexic students.

2.5.3 Neurological basis of dyslexia

The neurological basis of dyslexia provides further insight into the structural and functional brain differences that underlie these deficits (Yan *et al.*, 2021; Pugh *et al.*, 2001; Shaywitz and Shaywitz, 2005). For example, reduced activation in the left hemisphere language networks is linked to difficulties in phonological and rapid naming tasks. This neurological evidence underscores the importance of recognising dyslexia as a neurodivergent condition rather than a lack of effort or ability.

The neurological basis of dyslexia has been extensively studied, with Yan *et al.* (2021), Pugh *et al.* (2001) and Shaywitz and Shaywitz (2002) demonstrating distinct brain activation patterns in individuals with dyslexia through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). These studies highlight reduced activation in regions associated with phonological processing, a core area of difficulty in

dyslexia. Additionally, diffusion tensor imaging studies have revealed structural differences in white matter pathways within the dyslexic brain, particularly in areas critical for language processing.

These neurological findings underscore the importance of assistive technologies, such as text-to-speech software, which can bypass the neural inefficiencies related to reading. By offering alternative methods of accessing written information, such technologies enable dyslexic students to overcome barriers posed by their neurological differences, thereby enhancing their learning experiences and academic performance. As Goswami (2014) suggests, such tools are pivotal in creating inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students with dyslexia.

2.6 Screening and diagnosis

In the UK, universities have established procedures to identify and support students with dyslexia (Andresen and Monsrud, 2022). Many UK universities offer dyslexia assessments, which can occur during the application process or after enrolment. These assessments typically involve screening tests and evaluations of reading, writing, spelling and other cognitive skills (Andresen and Monsrud, 2022). These assessments aim to identify students with dyslexia and determine the level of support they require to succeed academically. This proactive approach aligns with UK legislation, including the Equality Act 2010, which mandates equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in educational settings.

2.7 Legal framework and reasonable adjustments

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 formally recognises dyslexia as a disability due to its potential impact on reading ability and daily life, allowing social work students with dyslexia to request reasonable adjustments for support. Social Work England (SWE) mandates compliance with this and other legislation, such as the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, ensuring that social work education and placements are inclusive and accessible (Gant and Hewson, 2022).

In addition to their diagnostic procedures, universities are encouraged by UK legislation to provide reasonable adjustments to accommodate students with dyslexia and other disabilities (Andresen and Monsrud, 2022). These adjustments include modifications to teaching methods, assessment formats

and access to learning resources. Examples include extra exam time, assistive technologies like text-to-speech software and access to specialist tutors (Andresen and Monsrud, 2022). By implementing reasonable adjustments, universities ensure compliance with legislation such as the Equality Act (2010), which aims to create inclusive learning environments for all students. Moreover, reasonable adjustments play a crucial role in ensuring that students with dyslexia have equal opportunities to succeed academically and reach their full potential.

This approach aligns with both the social and the biopsychosocial models of disability (Engel, 1977) and by implementing reasonable adjustments, universities uphold the principles of both these models, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their dyslexia.

2.8 Specific problems with placement learning

Despite the Equality Act 2010 mandating reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities, research shows that these are not always effectively implemented during placements (Cameron, 2021). This disconnect between policy and practice often leaves social work students with dyslexia unsupported, putting them at risk of failing to meet placement expectations.

Cooper (2018) concurs that while universities often do offer comprehensive support for dyslexic students in academic settings, this support does not always extend effectively to placement environments. Placement supervisors have been shown to lack awareness or understanding of dyslexia and the specific needs of dyslexic students. Cooper (2018) reported that 60 per cent of dyslexic students felt that the accommodations provided during their placements were inadequate, and many reported that their needs were not fully understood or met by placement supervisors.

Hunt and Mathew (2018) highlighted several areas where placement learning may not meet the standards achieved by universities. First, there is often a lack of training for placement supervisors on how to implement reasonable adjustments effectively. Without adequate training, supervisors may not recognise the need for adjustments or may struggle to apply them in practical settings. This lack of understanding can lead to insufficient support, increasing the stress and difficulty dyslexic students face in meeting placement

requirements. Second, the dynamic and varied nature of placement environments can make it challenging to implement standardised adjustments. Unlike classroom settings, placements involve real-world situations where the demands can be unpredictable and complex. This variability requires flexible and adaptive approaches to support, which may not always be available or feasible in all placement contexts. As a result, students may find themselves without the necessary accommodations to succeed. Third, the literature also points to issues of disclosure and stigma as significant barriers. Many dyslexic students are hesitant to disclose their condition due to fears of being perceived as less capable or facing discrimination. Henderson (2015a) found that 25 per cent of dyslexic students in higher education were diagnosed after starting their degree programme, and many students reported not disclosing their dyslexia due to stigma or fear of discrimination. Late diagnosis and non-disclosure can mean that students do not receive timely and appropriate accommodations. Fear of discrimination or judgment can discourage students from seeking the support they need, leading to increased stress and difficulty in managing their placement tasks. For many, the decision to disclose is influenced by past negative experiences where disclosure did not result in meaningful accommodations or led to tokenistic gestures that failed to address their specific needs. This creates a perception that disclosure may lead to further scrutiny or bias, making students feel vulnerable rather than supported. Leather and Everatt (2024) emphasise that this reluctance is rooted in systemic issues, such as inadequate staff training, a lack of clear policies on reasonable adjustments and inconsistent implementation of support strategies. These factors reinforce the need for institutions to foster a genuinely inclusive culture that not only encourages disclosure but ensures that support systems are both accessible and effective.

To address this, the literature underscores the importance of fostering an inclusive and supportive environment specifically tailored to placement settings. Mortimore and Crozier (2006) argue that students are more likely to disclose their dyslexia when they perceive a culture of understanding within professional environments. This is particularly relevant in social work placements, where fear of stigma and judgment is heightened by the high-pressure nature of the work (Riddick, 2010). Olsen and Hanssen (2024) emphasise that comprehensive training for placement supervisors is critical to this effort, equipping them with

the knowledge and skills necessary to provide meaningful and practical accommodations in the context of social work practice.

Streamlining the process of obtaining accommodations is also essential. Hughes (2018) and Hafford-Letchfield and Engelbrecht (2019) highlight that bureaucratic hurdles and delays discourage students from accessing necessary support. These barriers are particularly detrimental in the dynamic and demanding environment of social work placements, where immediate and adaptable support is often required. Hughes (2018) advocates for student-centred approaches that proactively address these challenges, ensuring that dyslexic students can seek and receive accommodations without fear of reprisal or inconvenience.

Creating a culture of openness and understanding within placement settings is another critical theme in the literature. Cameron (2021) argues that reducing the stigma associated with dyslexia is key to encouraging disclosure and enabling students to access the support they need. In social work placements, inclusive policies and practices that prioritise students' wellbeing and professional development are essential for fostering a supportive environment (Hughes, 2018).

For social work students, placements are integral to their professional development, providing opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. However, the high-pressure nature of these environments, coupled with limited or poorly implemented support, can significantly hinder their ability to perform effectively. Without the necessary accommodations – such as additional time for written tasks, alternative formats for reflective assignments, or access to assistive technologies – students with dyslexia may struggle to keep pace with their peers, leading to feelings of inadequacy and heightened stress (Henderson, 2015b; Mortimore and Crozier, 2006).

Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that bridges the gap between policy aspirations and on-the-ground realities. Comprehensive training for placement supervisors is essential to ensure they understand the legal obligations, as well as the practical benefits, of providing reasonable adjustments. Additionally, institutions must streamline the process of securing accommodations, reducing bureaucratic hurdles and ensuring that adjustments are implemented promptly and effectively. Proactive communication between

universities, placement providers and students is also critical to fostering an inclusive culture where students feel empowered to disclose their needs without fear of bias or reprisal (Hughes, 2018; Cameron, 2021).

Ultimately, aligning policy with practice not only supports the success of social work students with dyslexia but also enriches the profession as a whole.

2.9 Mediating learning for students with dyslexia

Research suggests that students with dyslexia benefit significantly from mediation, especially if they feel marginalised or intimidated due to their condition (Budeva, 2018).

Anxiety is a common challenge for social work students during placements and this is exacerbated for those with dyslexia. Rontou (2021) and Budeva (2018) advocate proactive mediation as a tool to identify and address issues in practice placement learning. Mediation creates a non-judgmental environment where students can openly discuss their dyslexia-related struggles. Moreover, mediation can reduce the need for formal concern meetings and placement breakdowns, allowing issues to be promptly addressed at predetermined checkpoints. Rontou (2021) recognises mediation as essential for creating supportive learning environments, especially for individuals with additional needs like dyslexia. Budeva's research (2018) also underscores mediation's role in ensuring reasonable accommodations. Mediation helps social work students to optimise their learning potential during practice placements and ensure they receive the necessary accommodations (Equality Act 2010).

Mediation is seen as a crucial tool for managing conflicts (Woodward-Smith, 2017; Rontou, 2021) but its adaptability allows all involved parties to tailor the process to their own specific needs, contributing to a fair, safe and constructive resolution to any issue. In the context of this study, mediation empowers learners with critical thinking, problem-solving and autonomy (Rokahr, 2021).

While extensive research has evaluated mediation and scaffolding for dyslexic students in traditional classroom learning, there is a notable gap in exploring these strategies in social work practice placements. This study addresses this gap and thereby contributes to social work practice education. By adopting frameworks from the social model of disability, such as recognising dyslexia as a social construct shaped by societal attitudes and structures, this research

aims to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of dyslexic social work students during their placements and how mediation can support their learning and development.

Previous studies have noted challenges in modifying course materials for dyslexic students due to time constraints (Rontou, 2021). However, employing interventions such as auditory repetition, visual representation and kinaesthetic enactment can benefit dyslexic students (Hollinrake *et al.*, 2021). In practice placements, acknowledging and embracing dyslexia is crucial. Social work students with dyslexia should be directed towards resources and materials that help them understand their experiences and the impact of dyslexia (Griggs, 2021).

Extensive research has evaluated various scaffolding strategies for supporting dyslexic students in the classroom, highlighting several effective interventions. Scaffolding, which involves providing temporary support to help students achieve learning goals, is particularly beneficial for dyslexic students who often struggle with reading and writing tasks. One effective scaffolding strategy is the use of graphic organisers, which help students organise information visually. According to Meyer, Lee and Thompson (2014), graphic organisers can aid dyslexic students in understanding and retaining information by breaking down complex texts into manageable parts. This visual representation helps in structuring their thoughts and improving their comprehension. Peer-assisted learning is another successful scaffolding technique. Fuchs, Fuchs and Vaughn (2017) found that pairing dyslexic students with peers for collaborative learning activities can enhance reading skills and increase engagement. Peer-assisted learning provides social support and models effective reading strategies, making it easier for dyslexic students to grasp challenging content. Technology-based interventions have also shown promise. A study by Ziegler *et al.* (2016) highlights the effectiveness of text-to-speech software, which allows dyslexic students to listen to written text. This technology helps bridge the gap between decoding difficulties and comprehension, enabling students to access curriculum content more effectively. Differentiated instruction is another recognised scaffolding approach. Tomlinson (2014) emphasises the importance of tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners, including those with dyslexia. This involves modifying teaching methods, materials and

assessments to accommodate different learning styles and abilities. For instance, providing alternative assignments or extended time for tasks can significantly reduce the pressure on dyslexic students and allow them to demonstrate their understanding in ways that play to their strengths. Finally, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics has been found to be particularly beneficial. A meta-analysis by Ehri *et al.* (2016) concluded that systematic phonics instruction is highly effective in improving the reading skills of dyslexic students. This approach involves teaching the relationship between letters and sounds in a structured and sequential manner, which helps dyslexic students develop the foundational skills necessary for reading.

These scaffolding strategies have been shown to work effectively in classroom settings, but there is a need for further research to explore their application in practice placements. Understanding how these strategies can be adapted to placement environments is crucial for providing continuous support to dyslexic students beyond the classroom.

Addressing the gap in research methodologies and the practical application of scaffolding strategies in placements is highly relevant to this study, which investigates the challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia during their placements. By integrating some of these proven scaffolding techniques into placement support, this research aims to develop comprehensive interventions that address both academic and practical challenges faced by dyslexic students.

In conclusion, mediated learning, or scaffolding strategies, have been shown to effectively support dyslexic students in academic settings yet may be far less evident in placement learning. However, these strategies could provide valuable insights into developing support mechanisms for dyslexic students during their placements, ensuring they receive the necessary accommodations to succeed in professional settings.

2.10 Gaps in the literature

While considerable research has been conducted on dyslexia, particularly with regard to its cognitive, neurological and educational implications, there remains a notable gap in the literature specifically addressing the experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their practice placements. The complex and

demanding nature of social work practice, which integrates theoretical knowledge with practical skills in real-world settings, presents unique challenges for students with dyslexia. However, despite the importance of practice placements in social work education, limited attention has been given to understanding how dyslexia affects students' ability to meet the professional expectations and demands of these placements. While advances in dyslexia research have provided new insights into the neurological and cognitive underpinnings of the condition, the practical application of these findings to social work education and training remains underexplored. There is a lack of clarity regarding the adequacy of current diagnostic tools for identifying dyslexia in higher education settings, and few studies have examined how these tools can be improved to better support students in fields like social work, where communication and organisational skills are essential.

This section seeks to identify and explore the key gaps in the existing literature, highlighting areas where further research is needed to better understand the challenges faced by dyslexic students in social work placements. By examining these gaps, this section also aims to draw attention to the need for more inclusive and effective approaches to supporting dyslexic students in higher education and professional training, particularly in social work contexts.

Moreover, the existing literature reveals a significant gap in research specifically exploring the experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their practice placements. While dyslexia has been extensively studied as a condition characterised by language processing difficulties and genetic factors (Vellutino *et al.*, 2004; Snowling, 2020; Goswami, 2014), there is a notable lack of research on how these challenges manifest in the practical and professional demands of social work practice. This gap is particularly concerning given the multifaceted nature of social work, which requires a diverse set of cognitive, emotional and organisational skills – skills that may be more challenging for students with dyslexia to navigate, yet this area remains largely unexplored in the literature.

An important issue that compounds this gap is the reliability of dyslexia diagnostic tools, which remains a contentious area of research. Many current diagnostic assessments are heavily language-dependent, and studies have shown significant variability in their accuracy and consistency across different

populations (Danelli *et al.*, 2017). This variability is particularly problematic for adult learners and individuals from diverse linguistic or cultural backgrounds, as dyslexia can present differently across these groups. In the context of social work, where effective communication is a core skill, the failure to diagnose dyslexia accurately and in a timely manner can delay the provision of necessary support, leaving students without the accommodations they need to succeed both academically and in practice. This highlights the need for more inclusive diagnostic tools that can account for these differences and provide a fuller understanding of how dyslexia may affect professional practice in social work.

Moreover, the diagnostic process often relies on outdated frameworks that do not align with the most recent neurobiological research on dyslexia (Ramus, 2014). While advances in neuroimaging techniques, such as fMRI and electroencephalogram (EEG), have improved the precision of dyslexia diagnosis (Frith, 2021), these methods are not widely used in educational settings. Barriers such as cost, accessibility and the need for specialised expertise limit their application, leaving many students without the benefit of the latest research. This underscores the need for a more up-to-date approach to dyslexia diagnosis in higher education and professional training settings.

The lack of timely and accurate dyslexia diagnoses has significant implications for social work education. Without early identification and appropriate support, students with dyslexia may struggle to meet the rigorous academic and professional standards required in social work training. This can negatively impact their self-esteem, academic performance and their ability to succeed in the profession. The gap in research may also reflect broader issues of inclusion and accessibility within higher education. Current diagnostic tools do not always recognise the diverse ways dyslexia can present, particularly in non-traditional students or those with complex learning profiles. As such, there is an urgent need for educational institutions, including those offering social work programmes, to adopt a more inclusive approach to dyslexia assessment and support, ensuring that all students are provided with the tailored support they need to thrive.

In addition, while various theoretical models, such as the cerebellar deficit hypothesis (Prevett, 2013; Nicolson and Fawcett, 2019), offer insights into the potential neurological underpinnings of dyslexia, their practical implications for

social work placements remain largely unexplored. Similarly, there is limited guidance on how disability models can inform the development of support frameworks for dyslexic students in practice settings. The medical model, which focuses on individual interventions, contrasts with the social model, which critiques systemic barriers but lacks clear guidance on how to operationalise its principles within the context of social work education (Mathews and Saunders, 2016; Duncan, 2018; Hunt and Mathews, 2018). This lack of clarity further complicates efforts to create inclusive and supportive environments for students with dyslexia during placements.

Moreover, existing research fails to provide specific, evidence-based strategies for creating inclusive environments in social work practice placements. While there is some acknowledgement that dyslexia can contribute to placement difficulties and even failures (Mathews and Saunders, 2016; Duncan, 2018), there is a notable absence of actionable recommendations for addressing these challenges. This gap highlights the need for targeted research to better understand the barriers faced by dyslexic students and to inform the development of effective support mechanisms.

In summary, while the literature touches on various aspects of dyslexia and disability models, it falls short in examining the specific challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia during practice placements. The lack of practical, evidence-based strategies and clear guidance for addressing these challenges underscores the pressing need for further research in this area. This research is essential not only to improving the academic and professional experiences of dyslexic students but also to ensuring that the social work profession can fully benefit from the talents and perspectives of a diverse workforce.

2.11 Summary of Chapter 2

This literature review provides a comprehensive description of dyslexia, focusing on the challenges faced by social work students during practice placements. It contextualises dyslexia within the social model of disability, emphasising societal structures and attitudes as primary contributors to disability. This approach underscores the importance of creating inclusive and supportive environments for dyslexic social work students.

The historical perspective of dyslexia is examined, tracing its recognition and classification as a neurodevelopmental disorder, which is crucial for understanding the progress made and the challenges that persist in supporting individuals with dyslexia.

Key theoretical perspectives on dyslexia are explored, including phonological processing deficits, RAN deficits and the neurological basis of the disorder. These insights inform the development of targeted interventions and support strategies for dyslexic students. The review also addresses the impact of dyslexia on students' professional development and success in social work courses, identifying specific challenges and strategies for overcoming them.

The legal framework surrounding dyslexia, particularly the Equality Act 2010 in the UK, is discussed, highlighting the need for reasonable adjustments in educational settings. However, the practical implementation of these adjustments in placement settings often faces inconsistencies and barriers, such as lack of training for placement supervisors, variability in placement environments and issues of disclosure and stigma.

Screening and diagnosis procedures for dyslexia in UK universities are reviewed, emphasising the importance of early identification and reasonable adjustments. The biopsychosocial model is proposed as a comprehensive framework for understanding and supporting dyslexic students, integrating biological, psychological and social factors.

The review also explores the role of mediated learning in making adjustments for dyslexic learners and trainee social workers.

Building on the insights from the literature review, the next chapter outlines the research design and methods used to explore the lived experiences of participant social work students with dyslexia during their practice placements. By examining the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies highlighted in this review, the methodology chapter provides a structured approach to investigating the challenges and support mechanisms identified, ensuring a comprehensive and rigorous exploration of the research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study explores the challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia on their practice placements, contextualising them within the framework of the social model of disability (Oliver, 2006; Share, 2021). The aim is to illuminate the specific challenges that social work students with dyslexia encounter and, with transformation in mind, propose practical solutions for addressing those challenges that can lead to meaningful changes in social work education and placement processes. This aligns with the objectives of a professional doctorate, which emphasises the application of research findings to professional practice.

This chapter describes how the study's findings were obtained and analysed. It explores the details of the research design, beginning with an examination of the paradigm and philosophies underlying the research approach. It considers the ethical issues involved and discusses the methodology in terms of research validity.

This study focuses on understanding participants' perspectives on the challenges they faced, the support they received and how they made sense of their placement experiences as social work students with dyslexia. It prioritises a deep exploration of firsthand experiences over a broad collection of data, (Bryman, 1989; McIntyre, 2005). The aim is not merely to gather data but to weave individual stories into a cohesive narrative, providing a comprehensive view of the unique challenges encountered by social work students with dyslexia. By capturing the richness, depth and nuance of each story, as emphasised by Denzin and Lincoln (2003), this study seeks to authentically explore and understand these experiences in a multi-dimensional and meaningful way.

3.2 Philosophical underpinnings

It is essential to recognise and acknowledge the paradigms of thought that shape the philosophical foundations of any study, influencing what we believe about the nature of knowledge and reality and therefore, how we approach our

inquiries and interpret findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). This section examines the options available and choices made for this study.

3.2.1 A brief description of three key research paradigms

The three acknowledged paradigms that influence research are positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism. Reflecting upon which of these is influencing and guiding the researcher's mindset during the design stage helps to create a coherent, meaningful and effective research process.

3.2.1.1 Positivism

Positivism is rooted in the belief that reality is objective, external and measurable through scientific methods. Positivists employ quantitative approaches to uncover generalisable laws and patterns, prioritising objectivity and replicability (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This paradigm is often associated with natural sciences, where researchers seek to establish causality and predictability through controlled experiments and statistical analysis. For example, a positivist approach to studying dyslexia might focus on measurable cognitive differences between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students, aiming to produce universal conclusions. While such an approach yields valuable insights, it does not capture the nuanced and subjective experiences of the participants of this study, which are the central focus of this research.

3.2.1.2 Interpretivism

In contrast to positivism, interpretivism posits that reality is socially constructed and shaped by human interactions and meanings (Bryman, 2016). This paradigm emphasises the importance of understanding individuals' subjective experiences and the context in which they occur. Interpretivists use qualitative methods such as interviews, observations and thematic analysis to explore the richness of human experiences. For this study, an interpretivist paradigm allows for a deep exploration into the lived experiences of dyslexic social work students during their practice placements, capturing their unique challenges and triumphs. By employing phenomenological methods, I have been able to interpret and analyse participants' narratives to uncover themes that illuminate realities that a positivist approach might overlook.

3.2.1.3 Pragmatism

Pragmatism, as a paradigm, rejects strict allegiance to either positivism or interpretivism, instead taking a practical, problem-solving approach to research. Pragmatists argue that the choice of methods should be guided by the research question rather than philosophical purity (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). This paradigm often integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to address research problems comprehensively. For instance, a pragmatist study on dyslexic students might combine statistical data on placement outcomes with qualitative interviews to explore the factors influencing those outcomes. While pragmatism provides flexibility, its focus on practical solutions makes it less suited to the purely experiential and interpretive focus of this research.

3.2.2 Paradigmatic context of this study

The interpretivist paradigm that lies beneath this study's methodology comfortably embraces a phenomenological approach exploring the experiences of dyslexic social work students. This approach aligned with my aim to capture the unique and context-dependent realities of the participants, whose experiences are shaped by their interactions within social, educational and professional environments. The concept of interpretivism justifies and vindicates the amplification of the voices of the students, enabling their stories to illuminate how dyslexia influenced their practice placements. Through interpretivism, I focused on the meanings participants ascribed to their experiences, ensuring my research was firmly grounded in their lived realities. This approach ensured the authenticity of participants' experiences and contributed to a nuanced understanding of the challenges and resilience exhibited by dyslexic social work students.

Rooting my research within an interpretivist framework allowed me to prioritise the subjective realities of the participants, particularly in the context of their practice placements. Interpretivism acknowledges that reality is socially constructed, shaped by cultural, historical and institutional factors (Bryman, 2016). This perspective enabled me to explore how participants navigated their unique challenges and made sense of their experiences, revealing the interplay between individual journeys and broader systemic and social contexts.

The interpretivist paradigm is especially suited to studying complex, individualised experiences. Unlike approaches that seek objective, universal

truths, interpretivism embraces the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and participants (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). I positioned myself as an active participant in the research process, recognising that my positionality – shaped by both professional and personal experiences – influenced the questions I asked, the data I interpreted and the themes I identified. This reflexive stance aligns with the core values of social work, which emphasise empathy, human dignity and contextual understanding (Pinnock and Evans, 2021).

Moreover, adopting an interpretivist approach reflected my commitment to amplifying the voices of marginalised groups. Dyslexic social work students often encounter systemic barriers and a lack of understanding of their needs in the practice environments. By situating my research within this paradigm, I sought to foreground their perspectives and ensure their lived experiences inform policies and practices in meaningful ways. This focus on diverse realities is vital for fostering inclusion and equity within social work education.

Through interpretivism, my research contributes to a richer understanding of the unique experiences of dyslexic social work students, providing insights into their resilience and the systemic changes required to better support them in achieving their potential on practice placement learning.

3.2.3 Ontology and epistemology

Each paradigm is characterised by its unique ontological and epistemological perspectives. Ontology addresses the nature of reality – what exists and how it is perceived, while epistemology considers the nature of knowledge and how we understand the world.

Interpretivism's ontology recognises reality as subjective, fluid and shaped by social contexts and human interactions. This supports a constructivist stance, viewing reality as co-constructed through interactions, cultural influences and individual experiences (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). This perspective rejects the positivist idea of a fixed, measurable reality, instead acknowledging the dynamic nature of human understanding, particularly within the context of social work placements, which often profoundly shape students' understanding of their roles, challenges and coping strategies, especially for those managing dyslexia.

The realities these students construct are multiple and context-dependent, influenced by their interpretations of feedback and behaviours from others. For instance, a supportive supervisor who provides reasonable adjustments can foster a reality of competence and value, while dismissive attitudes may lead to feelings of inadequacy. Similarly, placement environments can either empower students through accommodations such as assistive technology or create frustration when such support is absent.

Systemic challenges also play a significant role in shaping these realities. Institutional policies on reasonable adjustments and societal stigma surrounding dyslexia contribute to experiences of inclusion or marginalisation. By recognising the multifaceted and fluid nature of these constructed realities, this study highlights the importance of fostering inclusive placement environments that actively address systemic barriers and biases.

Through a constructivist and interpretivist lens, my research focuses on understanding these interconnected challenges and how they shape the lived realities of dyslexic social work students. The use of qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), aligns with this ontological stance. These approaches allowed participants to narrate their experiences and ensured that the research captured the richness and complexity of their realities while maintaining coherence with the study's philosophical foundations.

Epistemologically, this study's approach emphasises collaboration and mutual meaning-making. An interpretivist epistemology assumes that knowledge may be seen to be co-created through dialogue and shared exploration of individual realities. As a researcher and practitioner, I positioned myself as an active participant, working alongside students to uncover how they navigate placement complexities (Charmaz, 2006). This allowed me to explore the diverse adaptations students with dyslexia employ as they balance academic demands with fieldwork challenges.

This approach allowed me to examine how participants' experiences were influenced by interactions with social and educational systems. Semi-structured interviews provided a framework for capturing detailed narratives, enabling participants to share their stories in their own words. This method ensured that

the analysis remained grounded in participants' voices, uncovering how dyslexia shaped their academic and placement experiences.

3.2.4 Constructivism

In this study, I embraced the notion of constructivism, recognising that individuals construct their understanding of the world through their perceptions, interpretations and interactions with their environment (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Constructivism, in alignment with an interpretivist ontology, challenges the notion of a single, objective reality, instead embracing and acknowledging the existence of multiple realities. These realities, shaped by personal experiences, cultural contexts and social interactions, are seen to underscore the uniqueness and validity of each individual's perspective. I found this philosophy particularly meaningful in my work, where I encountered diverse interpretations of similar situations, reflecting the fluid and context-dependent nature of these meanings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Within the context of this research, constructivism provided a lens to explore how dyslexia was perceived and constructed in the environment of social work placements. My aim was to move beyond a deficit-focused view of dyslexia, instead examining how societal, institutional and relational factors shaped the experiences of social work students with dyslexia. By valuing their subjective meanings, I sought to uncover the complex interplay between individual challenges and external barriers, understanding dyslexia not as a fixed condition but as a dynamic construct influenced by the environment (Macdonald, 2009; 2010). I offer a view of dyslexia not solely as a neurodevelopmental condition but as a social construct shaped by discriminatory practices, exclusionary policies and inaccessible environments (Barnes and Mercer, 2010).

Before embarking on this professional doctorate, as a practice educator (PE) working with social work students on placements, I witnessed these constructs playing out in placement settings. Attitudinal biases, communication norms and organisational policies often created barriers that limited the success of students with dyslexia. In particular, I observed how these socially constructed barriers and forms of discrimination impacted the learning experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their placements. Supervisors or colleagues who lacked understanding or provided limited support reinforced exclusionary

attitudes. Traditional communication methods, often reliant on written or verbal formats, disadvantaged students who depended on alternative ways of processing information. Additionally, policies that failed to address diverse learning needs further exacerbated these challenges, leaving students marginalised in their placement environments.

By adopting a constructivist approach, I placed significant value on the lived experiences of my participants, viewing them as co-constructors of knowledge. Through qualitative methods, such as interviews and thematic analysis, I aimed to capture the richness of their narratives, highlighting the multiple realities that shaped their experiences. I was committed to ensuring that the voices of social work students with dyslexia were central to the research with the aim of contributing to a deeper understanding of how societal and institutional factors influenced their placement experiences. By bringing their perspectives to light, I hoped to lay the groundwork for developing more inclusive practices in social work education and training, fostering environments where all students could thrive and succeed.

3.2.5 Researcher positionality

Acknowledging and reflexively considering my positionality as a researcher was crucial, as it significantly influenced the decisions and interpretations underpinning this study. Through a process of self-reflection, I critically examined the perspectives, beliefs and biases that shaped my engagement with the research topic, methodology and findings. Being transparent about my positionality was essential to the credibility and integrity of this study.

I brought to this research a distinct perspective informed by my extensive background as a registered social worker and certified PE. My professional experience supporting social work students with diverse abilities, including dyslexia, heightened my awareness of the barriers they face and aligned closely with the aims of this study: to raise awareness and improve support mechanisms for these students (Armstrong and Squires, 2014; Roulston *et al.*, 2021).

Reflecting on my background, life experiences and identity allowed me to critically analyse how they might have influenced my approach to this research (Kuter and Özer, 2020; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017). My academic grounding in special needs education and community studies was interwoven

with values of service and equity instilled during my upbringing in an African household. My professional journey began in London after relocating from Nigeria, where I worked as a support manager in a residential home for vulnerable adults with learning disabilities. This formative period profoundly shaped my career trajectory, eventually leading to my registration as a social worker and certification as a PE.

Teaching and mentorship were central to my professional development and fuelled my passion for understanding and supporting the unique challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia. My experiences with language and literacy barriers gave me a deep appreciation of the feelings of marginalisation that these students often encountered. This understanding aligned with research that underscores the importance of tailored support to enhance the self-esteem and confidence of students with dyslexia (Armstrong and Squires, 2014; Roulston *et al.*, 2021).

As a PE, I witnessed, first hand, the literacy challenges that students with dyslexia faced during practice placements, particularly in critical reflection and scholarly writing. My personal connection to this issue, as a parent of two daughters with dyslexia, further intensified my commitment to this research. Dyslexia significantly influenced how students navigated their learning and managed placement tasks (Gant and Hewson, 2022). My professional insight underscored the critical role of supervision as an integral component of social work education (Roulston *et al.*, 2021). This dual perspective – both personal and professional – uniquely positioned me to explore and address these challenges.

I have always believed in and advocated inclusive practice, informed by my upbringing in Nigeria's upper-middle class. While this background afforded me privilege and power, it also instilled a deep commitment to equity. Throughout my career, I have supported and promoted fully inclusive education, especially for second-language English speakers and students with learning disabilities (Ortiz *et al.*, 2020). This commitment to inclusivity has been a driving force behind the development of a new practice model that reflects my personal philosophy.

3.2.6 Inclusivity

This study focuses on the challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia, particularly in critical reflection and scholarly writing – areas that are often fraught with difficulty for these students. My goal was to emphasise the importance of equitable opportunities in professional social work practice, ensuring that all students, regardless of their learning differences, are provided with the resources and support needed to thrive. By addressing these challenges, I aim to contribute to a more inclusive and effective model of social work education (Armstrong and Squires, 2014).

In this study, I approached inclusivity not as an abstract concept but as a practical and actionable framework within social work placements, particularly for students with dyslexia. Grounded in an interpretivist worldview, I wanted to explore how inclusive practices might foster supportive and accessible environments tailored to the diverse needs of these students. Drawing on Hafford-Letchfield and Englebrecht's (2019) framework on inclusion, I examined ways to remove environmental barriers and promote active participation for all social work students on placement. This aligned with my overarching aim of contributing to a more inclusive and effective model of social work education (Armstrong and Squires, 2014).

My approach was also rooted in humanistic values, which emphasise empathy, dignity and respect for individuals' subjective realities (Tendam, 2010). Inspired by Tendam's argument that lived experiences are vital for understanding systemic challenges and fostering inclusivity, I prioritised these values to ensure that the voices of students with dyslexia were central to the research. By grounding my work in humanism, I approached participants' perspectives with authenticity, honouring their agency while exploring their challenges.

Although interpretivism was my primary guiding paradigm, I also incorporated post-positivist principles to move beyond descriptive analysis and generate actionable insights. Post-positivism, which acknowledges the provisional and contextual nature of knowledge, offered a valuable lens for refining and applying the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This complementary approach enhanced the study's practical relevance, ensuring that the insights could inform both practice and policy. My aim was to link individual lived experiences to broader

systemic reforms, with a view to promoting more equitable and inclusive environments in social work education.

By integrating interpretive, constructivist, humanistic, post-positivist ideas, I developed a cohesive framework for understanding and addressing the barriers faced by social work students with dyslexia. This multi-dimensional approach amplified the voices of a marginalised group, ensuring that their perspectives informed meaningful change. This study aimed to contribute to more inclusive practices within social work education and foster environments where all students, regardless of their learning needs, can thrive.

3.2.7 Transformational approach

This study integrates a transformational approach to align with the goals of a professional doctorate, focusing on contributing to social change and fostering improvements in professional practice (Mertens, 2005). Throughout the research, the emphasis remained on connecting each stage of the study to the overarching goal of generating actionable insights for practice. Each section was designed to build upon the understanding of the barriers experienced by social work students with dyslexia, culminating in strategies that promote more inclusive and supportive practice placement learning environments. This progression reflects the commitment to a research process that is not only reflective but also transformative, offering tangible contributions to improving practice and shaping policies within social work education.

3.2.8 How the theory informed the practice

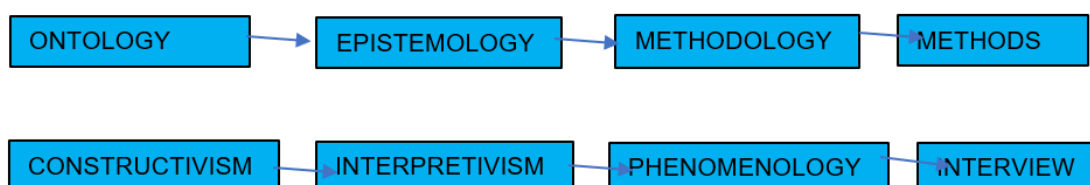


Figure 1: Diagram representing the alignment between my theoretical stance and research approach

Source: Adapted from Gray (2004) and O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2015)

Aligning my theoretical stance with the research approach was essential, as Smith *et al.* (2009) emphasise the importance of coherence between theoretical frameworks and methodological choices. Grounded within an interpretivist

paradigm, my study focused on exploring subjective experiences and meanings within their natural context.

I employed qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, which captured the rich, contextualised insights needed to understand the nuanced experiences of social work students with dyslexia. This approach ensured the research was participant-centred and reflective of their perspectives.

The phenomenological and constructivist methodologies adopted were firmly rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, prioritising subjective meanings and interpretations. This alignment enabled me to explore how social work students with dyslexia navigated their placements, maintaining coherence between theoretical and methodological elements.

Reflexive practices, such as journaling and self-reflection, enhanced the study's rigour and credibility, allowing me to critically evaluate my positionality and its influence on the research process. These efforts ensured robust and trustworthy findings, offering valuable insights for improving the placement experiences of students with dyslexia.

Creswell (2009) stresses the importance of methodological rigour, including clear research questions, systematic data collection and thorough analysis. I adhered to these principles by carefully aligning my research questions with my objectives and employing transparent, systematic methods to capture the lived realities of students with dyslexia.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) highlight the iterative nature of qualitative research, where data collection and analysis occur concurrently, allowing the refinement of emerging themes. This iterative process was central to my study, enabling me to adapt methods as new insights emerged and deeply explore the experiences of social work students with dyslexia.

Reflexivity and transparency, as emphasised by Martiny, Høffding and Roepstorff (2021), were integral to my approach. I maintained a reflexive journal and engaged in regular self-reflection to critically examine my assumptions and positionality. This was particularly important given my roles as a practice educator and parent of daughters with dyslexia. These practices also helped to ensure the study's integrity and credibility.

By combining iterative qualitative methods, methodological rigour and reflexivity, I ensured a strong alignment between my theoretical stance and research approach. This alignment strengthened the validity and reliability of the study, providing a robust framework for exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by social work students with dyslexia in their placements.

3.3 Research methodologies considered

In conducting this research, I selected a methodology that aligned with the study's objectives and facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of social work students with dyslexia. My primary aim was to capture participants' diverse experiences and identify the challenges they faced in their placements, with a particular emphasis on developing practical strategies to establish effective support systems.

I chose a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009) as it was best suited to exploring the lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia. Qualitative research prioritises depth and context, enabling a detailed understanding of participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them.

While quantitative research excels in measuring variables and identifying generalisable trends, it was not suitable for the goals of this study, which required a rich, contextual exploration of subjective realities. Quantitative methods could not have captured the depth of participants' personal experiences or the systemic influences shaping their placement journeys.

However, qualitative research has its limitations, including challenges with generalisability and potential researcher bias. Findings from qualitative studies are often context-specific, and their applicability to other settings may be limited. Additionally, the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis can be influenced by the researcher's positionality and assumptions. To address these limitations, I employed reflexivity throughout the research process, maintaining a reflexive journal to critically examine my biases and ensure the findings were firmly grounded in participants' perspectives.

As part of the research process, I considered a narrative approach to data gathering and analysis, known for its focus on individual experiences (Ntinda, 2019). However, while this offered the potential for detailed and personal accounts, I concluded that it was not suitable for the study's broader aims. The

research required an exploration of collective themes and patterns across multiple participants, rather than an in-depth focus on a small number of individual stories. Acknowledging the narrative approach's limitations in addressing these needs, I decided against using it.

I also evaluated grounded theory, which emphasises theory generation from data analysis rather than preconceived hypotheses (Strauss, 1967). While grounded theory aligns with certain exploratory research questions, it did not fit the objectives of my study, as I was not aiming to develop a new theory but to investigate specific factors influencing the placement experiences of students with dyslexia. Additionally, the context-specific nature of grounded theory risked limiting the applicability of the findings to broader educational and social work settings.

Ethnography, another potential approach, was also considered (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). Ethnographic research involves prolonged immersion in a social setting to interpret cultural patterns and lived experiences. However, the focus of this study was not on uncovering cultural norms within social work placements but on understanding the individual and subjective experiences of dyslexic students within these environments. Ethnography's time-intensive nature and the need for long-term engagement with participants were also impractical within the study's constraints. Furthermore, the scope of this research did not require the holistic analysis of cultural systems typically achieved through ethnography.

I also considered and ruled out observational methods, as these could have influenced participants' responses during interviews, potentially compromising the reliability of the data. My insider position as a social worker and practice educator further heightened the risk of interpretive bias during observations. Ensuring the confidentiality of participants and avoiding undue influence on their behaviour were critical considerations in rejecting this approach (Creswell, 2009).

Case study methodology was another potential option, as it allows for in-depth analysis of specific contexts (Yin, 2018). However, this approach was not suitable for this study, which involved multiple participants from diverse placement settings. Additionally, case studies typically involve a combination of data collection strategies, such as interviews and focus groups, which were

beyond the scope of this research design. For these reasons, I ruled out the case study approach in favour of a phenomenological methodology.

Instead, I determined that phenomenology and thematic analysis were the most appropriate tools for this study. These approaches allowed me to deeply explore participants' personal narratives and the meanings they ascribed to their placement experiences, providing insights into the challenges faced by dyslexic students without the need for broader cultural interpretation. This focus on the subjective lived experiences of participants directly addressed the research aims.

I chose a phenomenological approach because it was best suited to exploring the nuanced and multifaceted experiences of social work students with dyslexia in their placements. This methodology aligned closely with the study's aims to uncover barriers and challenges while contributing to a deeper understanding of how to develop more inclusive and effective models of social work education. By focusing on participants' lived experiences, I ensured the study remained grounded in their perspectives, fostering insights that could inform meaningful changes in practice and policy.

3.4 Hermeneutic phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology became my guiding methodology to explore the lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their placements, with the phenomenon in this case, being dyslexia.

Phenomenology, with its focus on the structure of experience, provided a framework to explore deeply into participants' subjective realities, and hermeneutics aided in uncovering the meanings they attributed to their experiences while revealing the challenges they encountered within their placement settings. This approach aligned with the study's objective to understand the essence of these experiences while contributing to more inclusive and effective models of social work education.

Phenomenology, as a qualitative methodology, emphasises the importance of exploring individual perceptions, emotions and interpretations within their natural context (Creswell and Poth, 2018). By focusing on lived experiences, it allowed me to understand how social work students with dyslexia perceived and navigated the barriers they faced, while also considering the broader social and

systemic factors influencing their placements. This focus on the interplay between individual experiences and structural influences was critical in capturing the complexity of their realities.

I found the constructivist approach to research particularly complementary to phenomenology, as it emphasised the co-construction of knowledge between myself and the participants. This collaborative process not only prioritised the participants' voices but also required me to engage reflexively throughout the study, acknowledging the influence of my positionality and assumptions (Smith and Osborn, 2015; Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology's emphasis on the structures of experience, as explored by Husserl (1931) and Heidegger (1962), resonated strongly with this study. Husserl's concept of 'returning to the things themselves' underscored the importance of focusing on participants' immediate experiences, while Heidegger's concept of 'dasein' (being-in-the-world) highlighted the interconnectedness of individuals and their environments. These philosophical underpinnings guided my analysis, enabling a nuanced understanding of how placement environments shaped the lived experiences of dyslexic students.

The phenomenological approach used in this study was also particularly suited to exploring the experiences of dyslexic students within legal and social frameworks. While not explicitly addressing the Equality Act 2010, the methodology enabled an examination of how systemic structures, such as placement policies and practices, influenced students' experiences and outcomes. This aligns with Collins' (2010) call for research that not only deepens understanding but also challenges oppressive structures.

By adopting phenomenology, I was able to centre participants' lived experiences, capturing the richness and complexity of their realities. This methodology ensured that the study remained firmly grounded in participants' perspectives, providing actionable insights to address the systemic barriers faced by dyslexic social work students. The findings will contribute to the drive for more inclusive and supportive educational practices, fostering environments where all students can thrive.

Hermeneutic phenomenology combines phenomenology with hermeneutics, which focuses on the interpretation of meaning. This mix of approaches provided a more nuanced framework for the study. This approach emphasises

subjective interpretation, focusing on how individuals perceive, articulate and make sense of their experiences (Harrison and Kinsella, 2022). By examining deeply the participants' narratives, I sought to uncover the meanings they attributed to their placement experiences and the broader contextual factors that shaped them.

One crucial aspect of phenomenological research is the concept of the 'double hermeneutic', where the researcher interprets the participants' interpretations of their own experiences (Smith, 2018). This iterative process allows for a deeper understanding of how social work students with dyslexia make sense of their placement experiences, adding a layer of reflexivity to the research.

Central to this methodology is the concept of the hermeneutic circle, which represents the iterative process of moving between understanding the broader context and examining individual experiences. For this study, I engaged with the hermeneutic circle by continuously switching back and forth between participants' detailed narratives and the emerging themes from their collective experiences. This iterative process allowed me to remain grounded in the participants' realities while uncovering meaningful patterns and insights.

Another key concept in hermeneutic phenomenology is the recognition of fore-structures and fore-conceptions, pre-existing understandings that influence how experiences are perceived and interpreted (Heidegger, 1962; Harrison and Kinsella, 2022). As a researcher, I acknowledged the potential impact of my own fore-conceptions, shaped by my professional and personal experiences, on the research process. To address this, I maintained a reflexive journal, where I recorded and critically examined my assumptions and biases throughout the study. This practice was instrumental in ensuring that my interpretations stayed as close as possible to the meanings participants intended to convey.

The dialogical nature of hermeneutic phenomenology was particularly relevant to this study. By engaging participants in conversations and providing them with the space to express their experiences in their own words, I aimed to create an authentic and collaborative research process. This conversational approach helped to uncover the nuanced and multifaceted meanings participants attributed to their lived experiences, offering deeper insights into the challenges they faced during placements.

Through this methodology, I explored not only the individual journeys of social work students with dyslexia but also the broader systemic and contextual factors influencing their placement experiences. By employing the hermeneutic circle and critically reflecting on my own fore-conceptions, I conducted a thorough and reflective analysis that remained true to the participants' narratives while illuminating the broader themes and patterns within their collective experiences. This approach enriched my understanding of the interplay between individual and structural factors, contributing to actionable strategies for creating more inclusive social work education environments.

3.4.1 Enhancing the suitability of phenomenology

While phenomenology focuses on individual lived experiences, its integration with the social model of disability enhanced its suitability for this study. The social model emphasises societal structures and attitudes as disabling factors rather than framing disability as an individual deficit (Oliver, 1990). By combining this perspective with phenomenology, I explored not only participants' personal challenges but also the broader systemic barriers shaping their placement experiences.

This dual focus allowed me to adapt phenomenology to reveal how systemic factors – such as institutional practices, insufficient accommodations and societal attitudes – intersected with individual experiences. Through in-depth interviews, participants shared narratives that bridged personal and structural dimensions. This approach aligned with the study's goal of identifying actionable strategies to foster inclusivity and equity in social work education.

This integration provided a comprehensive perspective, capturing both personal struggles and systemic barriers. The findings can contribute to the development of tailored support mechanisms and inform practices that promote inclusivity within social work education.

By employing a dual focus as well as addressing the limitations, this study provides a robust framework for understanding and addressing the experiences of dyslexic social work students in placement environments.

3.4.2 Addressing the limitations

Phenomenology, while offering deep insights into lived experiences, has limitations. One inherent challenge is its reliance on subjective interpretation,

which may be influenced by the researcher's biases, theoretical lens and/or positionality. To address this, I used a reflexive journal to critically examine my assumptions and ensure analysis remained grounded in participants' perspectives (Lain, 2006; O'Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015).

Another limitation is the context-specific nature of phenomenological findings, which may limit their generalisability to other populations or settings. In this study, I acknowledged that the findings reflect the unique context of social work placements and the specific dynamics faced by dyslexic students. While this context-specific focus allowed for a nuanced understanding, it also meant that the insights may not fully apply to all educational or professional settings.

3.5 Development of the research questions

The development of the research questions for this study was informed by a pilot study designed to refine their clarity, relevance and alignment with the established research aims. Two students with dyslexia participated in the pilot, offering feedback that was instrumental in ensuring the questions were meaningful and addressed the key areas of interest for participants.

The pilot study concentrated on the supervision experiences of social work students during their practice placements. It provided critical insights into the unique challenges faced by students with dyslexia in these contexts, laying the foundation for the research and guiding its overall direction. The findings underscored the importance of understanding and addressing the specific needs of students with dyslexia within the framework of practice placements.

To collect data during the pilot, I conducted semi-structured interviews with two social work students diagnosed with dyslexia and dyscalculia, following methodological guidelines for phenomenological research (Smith and Brown, 2021). Both participants had prior experience with supervision during placements, which enriched the depth and quality of their insights. A small, purposive and homogenous sample was intentionally selected to allow for a focused and comprehensive exploration of their supervision experiences. This approach yielded valuable qualitative data that provided a nuanced understanding of the challenges they encountered.

The outcomes of the pilot study highlighted several critical areas for exploration in the main study. These included the need to examine inclusive supervision

practices for students with disabilities, particularly dyslexia, and the limited acknowledgment of how dyslexia impacts practice placement learning. The pilot illuminated the struggles these students faced and identified gaps in supervision practices that often failed to address their specific needs.

These findings informed actionable recommendations for enhancing the roles of both onsite and offsite PEs in supporting students during placements. They also directly influenced the research focus and helped refine the research questions to better address the barriers encountered by students with dyslexia in their practice placement learning experiences.

3.6 Strategies for ensuring the quality, rigour and validity of the research and its findings

To ensure the integrity and rigour of my study, I implemented measures to enhance the credibility, trustworthiness and validity of the findings. By focusing on social work students with dyslexia as a homogeneous participant sample, I ensured consistency and relevance in the data, allowing for an in-depth exploration of shared experiences within this group.

During interviews, I used open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their authentic voices, avoiding leading questions that could introduce bias. Including direct quotes in the analysis preserved the authenticity of participants' narratives, offering rich insights into their lived experiences. Thematic analysis techniques enabled me to engage deeply with the data and throughout the process, I maintained a reflexive journal to document my assumptions and interpretations, with a view to minimising the influence of my own biases.

I ensured internal validity through prolonged engagement with the data, immersing myself in participants' narratives to authentically represent their lived experiences. Detailed descriptions of the research context, participants and findings provided 'thick' descriptions, enabling others to determine the applicability of the findings to different settings or populations. An audit trail and detailed documentation of the research process ensured the study's reliability, allowing scrutiny and verification of every step, from data collection to analysis. Reflexivity was central to ensuring that findings reflected participants' experiences rather than my own biases. Through maintaining a reflexive journal

and engaging in peer debriefing, I critically examined my positionality and ensured the analysis remained participant centred.

By integrating these principles, I ensured the study's findings were robust, trustworthy and aligned with my belief in constructivism. This rigorous approach provided a reliable framework for exploring the placement experiences of social work students with dyslexia, offering credible insights to foster inclusivity and equity in social work education.

To maintain the quality and validity of this study, I integrated three key concepts: reflexivity, bracketing (Husserl, 1931) and the recognition of the interplay between context and experience (Heidegger's *dasein*, 1962). Regular self-reflection, documented in a reflexive journal, enabled me to identify and address biases or assumptions that might influence the research process, from formulating questions to analysing data (Finlay, 2002).

Approaching the research with openness and curiosity allowed me to explore the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives without imposing my own interpretations. This commitment to reflexivity ensured that the co-construction of knowledge with participants was authentic and grounded in their lived realities. By acknowledging the inseparability of participants' perceptions from their contexts and experiences, I was able to produce findings that not only reflect individual narratives but also illuminate broader systemic influences affecting social work students with dyslexia.

3.6.1 Reflexivity

Reflexivity was a critical component of this research, ensuring transparency and rigour throughout the entire process. To maintain reflexivity, I employed various strategies such as reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, self-reflection and ongoing critical engagement with my positionality. These practices helped me minimise potential biases and ensured that the study remained grounded in the participants' lived experiences.

I maintained a reflexive journal to document my thoughts, feelings and potential biases throughout the research process. This practice allowed me to continuously assess how my personal experiences, beliefs and assumptions might influence the study. Regular entries in the journal helped me identify moments where my perspectives could potentially colour the interpretation of

the data. For example, when reflecting on participants' narratives, I questioned whether my professional experience as a PE was shaping how I understood their challenges. In another example, I recognised that my familiarity with the challenges faced by dyslexic students might lead me to empathise too strongly with certain themes. Writing about these moments helped me maintain balance and ensure that the participants' voices remained at the forefront of my analysis.

This ongoing self-awareness was crucial in maintaining the integrity of the research and ensuring that the analysis authentically represented the participants' voices.

Engaging with peers was another vital reflexivity strategy. I frequently discussed the research process and findings with colleagues to uncover potential biases and gain alternative perspectives. These discussions provided diverse viewpoints that challenged my assumptions and encouraged deeper reflection on the data. For instance, peer debriefing often highlighted areas where I might have overly focused on specific themes due to my professional background. These critical conversations served as a check against singular interpretations, ensuring that my subjective perspective did not unduly influence the findings.

While member checking, where participants verify the accuracy of data interpretations, is a recognised method to enhance validity, it was not feasible to incorporate due to the time constraints of this study. The limited timeframe did not allow for the iterative process of sharing findings with participants and incorporating their feedback. However, I remained committed to accurately representing participants' voices through careful and reflexive analysis of the data they provided. By focusing on capturing their narratives authentically, I worked to ensure that their lived experiences were faithfully represented.

Throughout the research, I continuously reflected on how my background, experiences and identity might impact the research process. This included questioning how my own educational journey and experiences as a PE influenced my understanding of participants' challenges. I also interrogated whether my interpretations of the data were consistent with participants' intended meanings. These reflections helped me remain conscious of my positionality and its potential influence, with a view to fostering a more balanced and nuanced interpretation of the data.

During the data analysis stage, I explored my perceptual experiences, questioning how my prior knowledge and professional background might shape the interpretation of themes. To further ensure reflexivity, I actively questioned, analysed and evaluated myself at every stage of the research. During the methodological construction phase, I critically examined how my assumptions and beliefs might shape the research design, particularly in the selection of the phenomenological approach and thematic analysis methods. While collecting data, I observed my emotions, thoughts and role boundaries within the researcher–participant relationship. I was particularly mindful of power dynamics, ensuring that participants felt empowered to share their experiences freely without the influence of my professional role as a PE. For example, I noticed moments when my familiarity with supervision processes could unconsciously lead me to anticipate participants' responses. Recognising this, I consciously stepped back, allowing their voices to guide the conversation.

During the data analysis stage, I engaged in a process of critically examining my own thought processes. This involved analysing how my prior knowledge, professional background and personal experiences influenced the way I approached and understood the data. By consistently questioning my assumptions and interpretations, I was able to identify potential biases and ensure that my analysis remained grounded in the participants' lived realities rather than being shaped by preconceived notions. This iterative process helped maintain the study's credibility and rigour.

Reflexivity was not just a methodological requirement but a continuous and dynamic process that enriched the research and upheld its philosophical underpinnings. This commitment to reflexivity enhanced the integrity of the study and ensured that it remained true to its aim of capturing the lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia.

Regular peer debriefing sessions further supported this reflexive process. I engaged with colleagues to discuss emerging findings and explore alternative perspectives. These discussions often challenged my assumptions and provided fresh insights, enriching the analysis and helping me critically assess the influence of my positionality. Supervision sessions also created a structured space for reflection, enabling me to explore how my personal and professional experiences intersected with the research process. These sessions were

particularly valuable in helping me navigate the interplay between my lived experiences and the need for objectivity in the analysis.

The iterative nature of data analysis further reinforced my commitment to reflexivity. I revisited the data multiple times, deliberately seeking alternative interpretations and questioning how my preconceptions might have shaped my initial readings. This approach ensured that the final analysis remained grounded in participants' voices while acknowledging the influence of my own experiences. By adopting reflexivity as a core practice, I ensured the study maintained rigour and authenticity while aligning with Heidegger's view of *dasein*, which acknowledges the inseparability of researcher and context.

3.6.2 Bracketing (epoché)

Bracketing, or epoché, as described by Husserl (1931), is a foundational concept in phenomenological research that involves setting aside preconceptions to uncover the essence of a phenomenon as perceived by participants. The goal of bracketing is to enhance the validity and rigour of qualitative inquiry by grounding the analysis firmly in participants' perspectives, free from the researcher's biases or assumptions (Tufford and Newman, 2010). While I initially adhered to the principles of bracketing to gain a clear understanding of the participants' experiences and viewpoints, as advocated by Hamill and Sinclair (2010), I found that fully setting aside my preconceptions posed challenges given my personal connection to dyslexia.

During the research process, I came to realise that completely suspending my assumptions was neither entirely feasible nor fully aligned with the principles of social work practice, which emphasise reflexivity and positionality. Instead of striving for an unrealistic detachment, I embraced Heidegger's (1962) concept of *dasein* – being-in-the-world – which acknowledges that individuals, including researchers, are inseparable from their contexts and lived experiences. This perspective resonated with me as I reflected on how my positionality as a researcher, a parent to two daughters with dyslexia and a professional working with students with dyslexia inevitably influenced my inquiry.

Recognising the limitations of complete bracketing, as mentioned above, I adopted reflexivity as a central strategy throughout the research process. Reflexivity, as supported by Finlay (2002) and Hamill and Sinclair (2010), transforms bracketing from the suspension of personal experiences into a

dynamic process of self-awareness and critical reflection. I approached reflexivity as an ongoing practice, consistently examining how my preconceptions and positionality shaped the research process and interpretations of the data.

3.6.3 Dasein

Heidegger's concept of dasein, or being-in-the-world, challenges the notion of complete bracketing by emphasising that individuals cannot detach themselves from their contexts and experiences. Understanding is inherently shaped by existence, background and preconceptions (Heidegger, 1962). In this study, I embraced dasein by recognising and critically reflecting on how my positionality and experiences influenced the research process.

Rather than attempting to eliminate these influences, I used reflexivity to examine and articulate their role in shaping my interpretations. For example, my professional experience working with dyslexic social work students allowed me to identify systemic barriers they often face during placements, such as a lack of inclusive supervision practices. At the same time, my personal connection as a parent of children with dyslexia sensitised me to the emotional and cognitive challenges associated with navigating educational systems. These experiences were not obstacles but instead became tools for deepening my understanding of participants' narratives.

This reflexive approach ensured transparency and credibility in the research process. It allowed me to engage deeply with participants' experiences while remaining mindful of how my own context shaped the research. By integrating reflexivity and dasein, I navigated the complex interplay between personal experience and academic inquiry, ensuring that participants' voices were authentically represented in the findings. This approach maintained the rigour of my phenomenological inquiry while acknowledging the inseparable connection between my own positionality as the researcher and the research context.

Englander (2016) also emphasises the importance of setting aside the researcher's preconceptions and biases to approach the data with a fresh perspective, supporting the continuous process of reflection I practised throughout the research to minimise the potential impacts of my own bias on the data interpretation. According to Englander (2016), the goal of phenomenological research is to describe, rather than explain or analyse,

experiences. This principle guided the data collection and analysis phases, where the focus was on providing rich, detailed descriptions of the participants' placement experiences. Englander advocates the prioritisation of participants' perspectives and voices, and semi-structured interviews used in the data collection for this research allowed participants to share their stories in their own words, ensuring their voices were central to the research findings (Englander, 2016).

Englander's work, primarily, focuses on psychology and psychiatry, yet the principles of phenomenological research are universally applicable to any field that aims to understand human experiences in depth. The challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia are deeply personal and subjective, making phenomenology an ideal approach for capturing the richness and complexity of their placement experiences, and the use of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to provide valuable insights into their challenges, coping strategies and suggestions for improvement. The adoption of a phenomenological approach supports this study's aim of informing and improving support systems within social work education contributing to a more inclusive and equitable environment for all students.

3.7 Recruitment strategy and process

I initiated the participant recruitment process by contacting placement coordinators at several London universities offering social work courses. I sent an email that included a research flyer and the ethical approval documentation (Appendices E and F). The flyer detailed the study's objectives, eligibility criteria and my contact information, providing prospective participants with a clear understanding of the research and instructions on how to get involved. My goal was to secure the coordinators' assistance in disseminating information about the study to potential participants within their institutions. Extending the invitation to multiple universities helped ensure a diverse and representative sample of students with various academic backgrounds.

The study required participants to be social work students with a confirmed diagnosis of dyslexia. Initially, 17 individuals expressed an interest in participating. However, two later withdrew due to challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Fifteen participants were successfully recruited: 14 females and one male, all from three universities in London. To maintain confidentiality,

the names of the universities are anonymised as University A, University B and University C.

3.7.1 Participant characteristics

The cohort of 15 participants represented a diverse range of demographic and academic backgrounds, with all participants having a confirmed diagnosis of dyslexia. This shared characteristic was central to the study's focus, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their experiences and challenges during social work practice placements. The sample consisted of 14 female participants and one male and included students pursuing both bachelor's and master's degrees. This academic diversity enriched the dataset by capturing insights from students at different levels of their educational journey.

Participants were selected from various stages of their social work programmes to explore how their experiences evolved over time. Recruiting from multiple universities ensured the representation of differing institutional contexts and support systems that could influence their placement experiences. All participants were also recipients of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), adding another layer of commonality to the cohort.

To identify suitable participants, I employed Robinson's (2014) purposive sampling method, which focuses on selecting participants based on specific characteristics aligned with the research objectives. This approach enabled me to gather a diverse and representative sample of social work students with dyslexia while maintaining relevance to the study's aims.

3.7.2 Ethical considerations

I adhered strictly to ethical guidelines throughout this research, as mandated by the University of East London. Comprehensive participant information sheets and consent forms (Appendices B and C) were developed to ensure transparency and demonstrate respect for participants. These documents clearly explained the study's purpose, participant expectations, rights and contact details for any queries. By providing this detailed information, I ensured that participants were fully informed about the nature of the study fostering transparency and ethical conduct.

Confidentiality and anonymity were prioritised to protect participants' privacy and encourage honest participation. I assigned each participant a unique

identifier (e.g., ID-1 to ID-15) to maintain anonymity in the thesis and data analysis. This commitment to confidentiality ensured that participants could share their experiences without fear of adverse consequences. Additionally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, a principle that underscored respect for their autonomy.

The University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (URES) approved this research, confirming its alignment with ethical standards. I remained dedicated to upholding these standards throughout the study, recognising the importance of conducting research that contributes positively to both academic knowledge and societal well-being (Langdridge, 2007).

To further ensure informed consent, I followed Wiertz and Boldt's (2023) guidelines by providing participants with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits and confidentiality measures. Participants were given sufficient time to review the consent forms (Appendix C) and ask questions before signing, ensuring their voluntary and informed participation, as advocated by Klykken (2021).

Due to Covid-19 social distancing regulations, all interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams between May 2021 and July 2022. Participants received consent forms, information sheets and debriefing forms (Appendices B, C and D) in advance, with the intention of giving them access to a full explanation of the study's framework and its compliance with ethical guidelines. This remote approach accommodated pandemic-related restrictions while maintaining the integrity and accessibility of the research process.

3.8 Data collection

This study focused on exploring the experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their placements. To achieve this, I adopted qualitative research methods underpinned by the work of Lincoln *et al.* (2013), as emphasised by Brinkmann and Kvale (2005). Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method, allowing for the elicitation of personal narratives while providing the flexibility to adapt questions based on participants' responses. The use of open-ended questions was instrumental in exploring various aspects of the students' experiences, including their motivations,

support systems and challenges. I ensured that active listening was central to my approach, facilitating impartial and meaningful conversations.

Adopting a phenomenological approach, I aimed to explore the participants' subjective experiences within their unique contexts. Following Lauterbach's (2018) guidance, I conducted semi-structured interviews to gather rich, detailed data (see Appendix G). These interviews allowed the participants to articulate their experiences in their own words, aligning with the principles of phenomenological research.

Interviews were selected for their effectiveness in gathering personalised insights (Gray, 2004). As outlined by Cohen *et al.* (2007) and cited in Qu and Dumay (2011), interviews can be unstructured, semi-structured or focused. I chose semi-structured interviews to explore participants' personal views, emotions and experiences. This conversational format offered a flexible yet focused approach, enabling me to ask follow-up questions and probe for deeper insights where necessary. Establishing rapport with participants was essential to creating a comfortable atmosphere, encouraging them to share candidly (Cousin, 2009; Adams, 2018; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

The interviews, with 15 students, each lasted approximately 60 minutes and were structured into three sections. First, an introduction to the study, then a discussion focusing on their placement experiences and finally, a concluding segment to reflect on additional insights. To encourage detailed responses, I used probing techniques, including prompts and non-verbal cues, as recommended by Doody and Noonan (2013) and Bolderston (2012). During the interviews, I incorporated deliberate pauses to ensure clarity and mutual understanding, as guided by Myers and Newman (2007). This approach allowed me to foster an open dialogue, creating a safe space for participants to share their experiences authentically.

Direct quotations from participants were integral to this qualitative inquiry. These quotations provided a rich source of raw data (Patton, 2002), allowing me to authentically represent the participants' voices and add depth to the analysis.

3.9 Data analysis

3.9.1 Reflexive thematic analysis

To analyse the data, I employed reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). This method was chosen for its flexibility and ability to provide a detailed and nuanced account of the data. RTA enabled me to identify and explore patterns or themes within the qualitative data, aligning with the interpretative paradigm of this study. This method was particularly well-suited for exploring the multifaceted experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their placements.

Using RTA allowed me to systematically identify, analyse and report patterns within the data. The flexibility of this method was particularly advantageous, as it does not require strict adherence to a specific theoretical framework. This adaptability enabled me to deeply interrogate participants' narratives, focusing on the meanings and implications of their experiences. The clear, structured process provided by RTA ensured a thorough and comprehensive exploration of the data, making it an ideal choice for managing the large dataset of personal narratives collected in this study.

I followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase process to conduct the analysis: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report.

This structured approach enhanced the credibility and robustness of the findings. During the familiarisation phase, I engaged deeply with the data by repeatedly reading and re-reading interview transcripts. This immersion allowed me to identify initial codes that captured significant elements of participants' narratives. From there, I systematically developed themes that reflected broader patterns across the dataset.

The iterative nature of RTA allowed me to revisit the data multiple times, refining codes, themes and interpretations to ensure that the final analysis was both comprehensive and reflective of participants' lived experiences. This iterative approach supported a dynamic understanding of the data, enabling deeper insights to emerge as the analysis progressed.

Staying close to the participants' words and experiences was a priority. I generated initial codes using participants' own language, ensuring that their

voices were authentically represented in the analysis. Themes were then developed based on these narratives, maintaining the authenticity and integrity of the participants' perspectives.

By using RTA, I was able to capture the nuanced and layered experiences of social work students with dyslexia. This participant-centred approach ensured that the analysis was not only rigorous but also aligned with the study's philosophical commitment to co-constructing knowledge with participants. Ultimately, RTA provided a robust and flexible framework for analysing the data, allowing me to generate meaningful insights and recommendations for improving inclusivity and support in social work education.

3.9.1.1 Stage 1: Familiarisation with the data

The data collection process generated a wealth of qualitative material, with the 15 participant interviews being audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. I reviewed each transcript alongside the corresponding audio recording to verify the correctness of the transcription, noting non-verbal cues, pauses and tonal nuances that added depth to participants' responses. This meticulous process helped ensure the data authentically reflected the participants' experiences and perspectives.

During this stage, I immersed myself in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts and repeatedly listening to the audio recordings. This intensive engagement allowed me to become deeply familiar with the content, helping me identify initial ideas and patterns. I began noting potential areas of focus and themes that could be explored further during the coding and analysis stages. By dedicating time to this thorough review, I laid a solid foundation for the subsequent stages of thematic analysis.

3.9.1.2 Stage 2: Generating initial codes

In this phase, I systematically worked through each transcript to identify significant features of the data that related to the research questions. I applied descriptive labels or codes to segments of text that captured meaningful insights into the participants' experiences. To maintain authenticity, I kept these codes as close as possible to the participants' own words, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in their narratives.

This process involved highlighting phrases and sections of text that described key aspects of their placement experiences, such as 'challenges with

supervision', 'the impact of dyslexia on their learning' and their 'strategies for overcoming barriers'. By meticulously coding each transcript, I ensured that no relevant data was overlooked, creating a comprehensive dataset for the next stage of analysis.

3.9.1.3 Stage 3: Searching for themes

After completing the coding process, I examined the codes to identify broader patterns and relationships within the data. This phase involved collating similar codes into potential themes and grouping together data that reflected coherent and meaningful patterns. For example, codes related to 'support systems', 'advocacy' and 'university involvement' began to cluster into broader themes about the institutional support and advocacy needs of students with dyslexia.

This process required careful organisation of the data, as I aimed to ensure that the themes represented the participants' shared experiences while also capturing unique perspectives. By grouping and categorising these codes, I developed an initial thematic framework that would guide the subsequent analysis stages.

3.9.1.4 Stage 4: Reviewing themes

In this stage, I reviewed the themes to ensure they accurately reflected the coded data and the dataset as a whole. This iterative process involved two levels of review: first, I checked the coherence of the themes against the coded extracts to confirm they were consistent and meaningful and second, I considered each theme's alignment with the broader dataset to ensure it comprehensively represented the participants' experiences.

Where inconsistencies arose, I revisited the relevant codes and adjusted the themes to better capture the nuances of the data. This phase allowed me to refine the thematic framework, ensuring it was both robust and representative of the participants' lived realities.

3.9.1.5 Stage 5: Defining and naming themes

With the themes reviewed and refined, I moved to defining the specifics of each theme. This process involved articulating what each theme represented, identifying its core essence and determining its relationship to other themes and the research questions. I sought to ensure that each theme captured a distinct aspect of the participants' experiences while collectively contributing to the overall narrative of the study.

Clear, concise names were assigned to each theme, reflecting their content and significance. For example, themes such as 'navigating systemic barriers' and 'leveraging support systems' emerged, highlighting key aspects of the participants' placement experiences. These definitions and names provided clarity and focus for the final analysis and reporting phases.

3.9.1.6 Stage 6: Producing the report

The final phase involved conducting an in-depth analysis and writing up the findings. I selected vivid, compelling examples from the data to illustrate each theme, ensuring that participants' voices were central to the narrative. I related the analysis back to the research questions and contextualised the findings within the existing literature, providing a clear and coherent presentation of the results.

The aim was to present the findings in a way that was insightful, accessible and grounded in the participants' lived experiences. By following Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach, I uncovered rich and nuanced insights into the experiences of social work students with dyslexia on placement. These findings illuminated the challenges they face, the support systems they rely on and the strategies they employ, contributing to the robustness and credibility of the study.

3.9.2 Leveraging NVivo for transparent and systematic data analysis

To enhance the transparency and systematic nature of the analysis, I used NVivo software (manufactured by QSR International, Melbourne, Australia). NVivo facilitated the coding process, allowing me to organise and categorise the data systematically. By using this tool, I mitigated potential biases, as the software supported the identification of categories directly from the data rather than imposing preconceptions.

The iterative use of NVivo ensured that themes emerged organically from participants' responses, aligning with the principles of Braun and Clarke's (2006) RTA. This technology-aided, iterative and immersive approach complemented the interpretive framework of the study, enabling a more transparent and credible analysis process.

Incorporating NVivo into the analysis helped me manage the complexity of the dataset, particularly in identifying recurring patterns and relationships within the data. By leveraging this tool, I enhanced the rigour of the analysis, ensuring that the findings were robust and grounded in participants' lived experiences.

The ongoing scholarly discourse surrounding manual versus computer-assisted data processing in qualitative interview analysis has been notable within the social science research community. Researchers such as Rich and Patashnick (2011), Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011), Charmaz et al. (2010), and Séror and Weinberg (2021) present various perspectives on this debate. While some scholars advocate for a more interpretive approach (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2011), focusing on understanding the meanings embedded in participants' stories, others (Charmaz *et al.*, 2010) argue for the use of coding and pattern recognition techniques to uncover underlying structures within interview transcripts. This debate underscores the importance of considering different methodological approaches and selecting the most appropriate method based on the research questions and epistemological stance (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2011). NVivo aligns with the 'messiness' of qualitative interpretative analysis by providing a structured yet flexible tool that supports the systematic coding and categorization of rich, qualitative data. This ensures that the interpretive process, while inherently subjective, remains transparent and grounded in the data, contributing to the credibility and reliability of the research findings.

3.9.3 Coding

Inductive coding was employed to uncover themes and patterns within the data, following Braun and Clarke's framework and using NVivo software to manage and analyse the data systematically. This approach involved open, axial and selective coding, ensuring a thorough examination of the data and that no relevant themes were overlooked.

During the coding process, themes related to experiences, support, advocacy, university involvement and organisational needs emerged prominently. Participants frequently emphasised the importance of on-site support, accessible communication methods and the need for greater awareness of dyslexia among stakeholders. Specific attention was given to identifying how these factors intersected to influence the overall placement experience.

To maintain authenticity, participant quotes were integrated into the analysis to illustrate and substantiate the emergent themes. This ensured that their voices were at the forefront of the findings, providing a vivid and accurate representation of their lived experiences.

The coding process involved iterative rounds of revisiting and refining themes to ensure consistency and depth. This allowed for the emergence of sub-themes and more nuanced insights, enhancing the overall quality of the analysis.

This systematic and reflexive approach to coding provided the foundation for developing a conceptual model that captures the challenges and support systems relevant to social work students with dyslexia. By adopting a rigorous, transparent and iterative process, the study ensured that the findings were both trustworthy and reflective of the participants' realities, offering practical insights for improving inclusivity in social work education.

3.10 Security of the data

In managing the data for this study, I implemented several measures to safeguard the confidentiality of participants and ensure the security of their information. To protect their identities, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. This ensured that their names, locations and university affiliations remained undisclosed unless explicit consent was provided, in line with ethical recommendations (Smith *et al.*, 2018). This pseudonym system not only preserved confidentiality but also facilitated consistent referencing throughout the analysis.

Signed consent forms were securely uploaded to a password-protected drive, providing a digital safeguard against unauthorised access (Jones, Peters and White, 2019). Additionally, transcribed audio data was stored exclusively on my encrypted personal computer, adding another layer of protection. The encryption ensured that the data could not be accessed without the necessary credentials, aligning with best practice in data security.

To further maximise privacy, I stored the original consent forms in a locked cabinet within my home. Upon completion of the data analysis, these forms were securely destroyed, as recommended by Smith *et al.* (2018). This step was crucial for maintaining participants' trust and ensuring compliance with ethical standards.

For data analysis, I employed a numerical coding scheme to categorise and examine each participant's responses meticulously. This systematic approach facilitated accurate analysis while maintaining confidentiality (Johnson, 2020). Any handwritten notes taken during the research process were securely stored and will be destroyed after the dissertation defence or after a span of five years, in accordance with university data management guidelines (Brown and Ravallion, 2022).

Similarly, consent forms will be retained for a maximum of five years before being securely disposed of. These retention practices ensure that all personal data is handled responsibly, reflecting my commitment to upholding participants' privacy while adhering to institutional policies.

By implementing these comprehensive security measures, I ensured the confidentiality and integrity of the data collected for this study. These practices not only safeguarded participants' information but also reinforced the credibility and ethical rigour of the research.

3.11 Summary of Chapter 3

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodology of the study, grounding it through qualitative, phenomenological and constructivist lenses. I have provided a comprehensive explanation of the recruitment strategy, detailing the steps I took to ensure a diverse and representative sample of social work students with dyslexia, thereby offering a rich dataset for analysis.

The data collection process is described in detail, with semi-structured interviews being the primary method employed. I have explained how the interviews were designed to elicit personal narratives and how open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their experiences in depth. My approach emphasised active listening, rapport-building and flexibility, which allowed participants to express themselves openly and authentically. The use of verbatim transcription and the inclusion of direct quotes further ensured that participants' voices were accurately represented.

I have also detailed the data analysis process, focusing on how I applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) RTA, a method that facilitated a structured yet flexible approach to identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within the data. I emphasise the iterative and reflective nature of RTA that allowed me to

engage deeply with the data while maintaining critical awareness of my own positionality as the researcher. I have laid out the six critical phases of RTA – familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report – which were systematically followed to ensure rigour and credibility in the analysis.

This chapter also discussed how technology, specifically NVivo software, supported the data analysis process. NVivo enabled me to organise and scrutinise the data systematically, facilitating an unbiased comparison of codes and the identification of word frequencies. This approach complemented the principles of RTA, ensuring transparency and enhancing the methodological rigour of the study.

Ethical considerations are addressed in detail, highlighting the steps I took to protect participants' confidentiality, ensure informed consent and maintain the security of the data. These measures, including anonymisation, encrypted data storage and adherence to institutional guidelines, underscored my commitment to upholding the highest ethical standards. Reflexivity was a recurring theme throughout the chapter as I critically reflected on my positionality, biases and the influence of my experiences on the research process. Maintaining a reflexive journal, engaging in peer debriefing and adopting Heidegger's concept of *dasein* allowed me to navigate the complex interplay between personal and academic inquiry.

The chapter brings together the methodological and analytical foundations of the study, illustrating how these elements worked cohesively to uncover the lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia. By maintaining a focus on participants' voices and contextual nuances, I ensured that the analysis was authentic and reflective of their realities.

Building on the methodological foundation established in this chapter, the next chapter will present the findings of the study, exploring the themes and patterns that emerged from the data. These findings will cast a light on the challenges, support systems and strategies employed by social work students with dyslexia during their placements, providing a deeper understanding of their experiences.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores data collected, through interviews with 15 participating social work students, on the impact of dyslexia during their student placements. The data reveals a mixture of positive and negative experiences, highlighting the complex nature of dyslexia in professional settings. The study's core findings are presented through a thematic lens to capture the multifaceted experiences of the participants.

As a result of the analysis of the data taken from the interviews, five key themes emerged, providing valuable insights into the participants' placement experiences, being: 1) Experiences as a social work student with dyslexia, 2) Experience of being diagnosed with dyslexia, 3) The positive and negative experiences of being dyslexic, 4) The impact of dyslexia on daily experiences and 5) Measures to enhance placement learning experiences.

4.2 Participant demographics

The study comprised 15 participants who were currently enrolled in social work programmes at Universities A, B and C, spanning both bachelor's and master's levels of study. These participants exhibited a range of diverse characteristics, including variations in gender, university affiliation, degree programmes and dyslexia diagnoses. Detailed participant profiles are shown in Appendix J, where each participant is uniquely identified by a code from ID-01 to ID-15. The selection of participants was purposeful, ensuring that they possessed a confirmed diagnosis of dyslexia and were recipients of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

4.3. Emerging themes

Analysis of the findings identified five main themes based on the experiences shared by the participants. These themes amplify the participants' voices, helping to enhance understanding of the meanings attached to their experiences, with a view to shaping policies related to placement interventions. The themes represent the experiences of the participants with dyslexia on placement and underpin the creation of the mediator model, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

Table 1: Themes related to dyslexia experiences during placement

Research Questions (RQs)	Themes	Sub-themes
Starting question: What are the experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their practice placement?	1. Being a social work student with dyslexia	1. Sense of contribution 2. Challenging tasks 3. Pressure 4. Provision of resources 5. Support from colleagues 6. Special consideration from the organisation 7. Placement learning opportunities 8. Institutional support
	2. Being diagnosed with dyslexia	1. Emotions at diagnosis 2. Fear and anxiety in disclosing 3. Strategies to conceal dyslexia 4. Motivations for disclosing dyslexia
RQ 1: What is the perception of social work students with dyslexia experiences on placement?	3. Positive and negative perceptions of students with dyslexia on placement	1. Positive perceptions 2. Negative perceptions 3. Gender and cultural considerations
RQ 2: In what ways does dyslexia impact the daily placement experience?	4. The impact of dyslexia on daily placement tasks	1. Slow performance 2. Stress from attempting to meet expectations 3. Learning difficulties 4. Varied impressions 5. Social isolation
RQ 3: What changes do social work students want to see to enhance their placement experiences?	5. Measures to enhance placement learning experiences	1. Dedicated placement office 2. Provide necessary resources 3. Foster a conducive culture. 4. Training for social work professionals

4.3.1 Theme 1: Being a social work student with dyslexia

Participants were highly motivated to make a difference in the lives of others and felt a sense of fulfilment at being able to contribute to the betterment of

society. However, their period in training also brought with it a number of challenges. Their experiences as social work students in their practice placements are outlined below.

4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Sense of contribution

The findings highlight the motivations driving students with dyslexia towards careers in social work. Central to their aspirations was a profound desire to contribute positively to society and to assist those in need, with many citing personal experiences as pivotal in their decision-making. Participants expressed a unified goal of making a meaningful difference in the lives of vulnerable individuals and communities. For example,

...I wanted to become a social worker because of the experience that I've gone through... So, I thought if I become a social worker, maybe I can also add and do something and create a change (ID-06).

Another echoed this sentiment, stating,

...it's all about advocating for people, it's all about pushing for people who don't have a voice, I like that, I absolutely love it (ID-08).

Additionally, ID-04's reflection on their varied experiences in care settings underscores the breadth of impact possible within social work,

...Erm, so, I've done some domiciliary work, care homework, children's homes, bit of a spectrum. And I think from that I just thought that there was more that I could do, if that makes sense? (ID-04).

These quotes encapsulate the participants' shared sense of purpose and dedication to advocacy, highlighting their commitment to social justice and empowerment. The diversity of their motivations, from advocating for marginalised voices to engaging in varied social work settings, illustrates the profession's multifaceted nature and its capacity to address a wide array of social issues.

Furthermore, participants also conveyed a sense of hope and optimism about their placements, with comments like "It means that there's light at the end of the tunnel" (ID-11) and "Hopeful" (ID-12), indicating the personal fulfilment derived from their work. This optimism is tied to their advocacy efforts, with statements like "advocate for change" (ID-11) and "I can advocate for people"

(ID-07), showing a strong inclination towards supporting vulnerable groups, particularly children.

The aspiration to effect systemic change is another recurring theme, as participants articulated a desire to address broader societal issues through their work, “to create change” (ID-04) and “studying social work will allow me to work for a local authority” (ID-13). This reflects an understanding of social work not just as a profession but as a means to contribute to societal progress and wellbeing. These motivations align with the foundational principles of social work.

4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Challenging tasks

Being a student on placement with dyslexia can be challenging if there is a lack of understanding and support from staff and practice educators (PEs). Many people do not comprehend the condition or the need for accommodation. Students with dyslexia often face difficulty meeting deadlines. They rely on software to assist them, but if they do not use it for a while, they struggle to relearn it. It is important for educators to recognise that dyslexia is a lifelong disability and they need to provide appropriate support.

Dyslexia can create problems with placement tasks such as writing reports and other paperwork, meaning that the time spent on these tasks can encroach on that of more direct work with clients. ID-08 faced difficulties in completing placement tasks, especially when it came to writing reports,

...I think it's because I'm dyslexic I'm finding it more challenging. If this is the role, it's very challenging for me. I can't write my words, so how am I doing it? And I'm thinking how am I doing this role that requires writing? And it's impossible (ID-08).

ID-08 expressed her frustration with her current role as a social work student. She said that focusing on writing about people instead of helping them is not fulfilling. She said she should be more involved with the service users and their problems rather than spending “90 per cent of her time on writing” (ID-08). She believed that the focus on writing does not provide the same level of understanding as seeing the person directly and that they might miss something important.

Furthermore, ID-08 also struggled to write. She was contemplating whether she should continue with her current role as a social work student on placement or look for a different position.

Four study participants felt their placement was challenging,

...I think that's very challenging, [...] it's the little things that should be so simple it seems challenging (ID-08),

with lots of pressure,

...so, there's a lot of pressure to know this stuff because it's a requirement, you know? And as much as I want to know law (I've got a law module this year), my biggest worry, it makes me really worried, like, I'm putting it off to the last assignment to do (ID-11),

and,

...really nerve-wracking. As a dyslexic student, you don't know what to expect when you go on to the placement (ID-02).

Retaining information was a challenge in itself. This might result in repeated attempts, causing frustration and affecting work performance, which they “have repeated many times” (ID-06) and having to “repeatedly explain to me” (ID-06). For example, the prevalence of memory recall issues among participants led to the need for multiple relearning sessions, as ID-07 noted, “I normally asked repeated questions because I am a bit slow in processing words”. Participants even required notes or lists to keep track of things due to their poor memory, as ID-07 noted, “I asked repeated questions because my dyslexia and specific learning disability is still impacting on my ability to process words, to concentrate most of the time”.

Participants indicated that remote work could lead to feelings of loneliness, communication barriers and difficulties with technology usage, as noted by ID-06, “The challenge is working from home, being dyslexic, attending trainings online” and “working from home” (ID-09). For those with dyslexia, these issues are amplified as they already face communication, collaboration and technology usage difficulties.

I have difficulty with my working memory, making it challenging to process both phonetic and visual information equally. Additionally, my

writing speed is slow, and I struggle with spelling and pronouncing larger medical words. These issues also affect my reading speed and efficiency, making it difficult to process words quickly. Overall, these challenges significantly impact my performance (ID-07).

While colleagues and supervisors can offer support, remote work can make this less accessible, leading, potentially, to psycho-emotional stress and anxiety.

High work demands can lead to stress, especially when there is a gap between job demands and available resources, "...not having the resources" (ID-02) and "resources weren't enough" (ID-03). For individuals with dyslexia, limited resources due to their condition, such as poor memory, software programme difficulties, spelling and grammar issues and time management hurdles can worsen this problem because, as one participant noted, "there's no offer of, 'do you need any software to help you read aloud?'" (ID-13). Several participants reported that their dyslexia affected their day-to-day work activities, "because you're using a laptop which does not have software to help you out with your mistakes" (ID-06).

4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Pressure

Participants discussed the significant pressure they felt during placements, notably, in tasks like typing up case notes and retaining crucial information. ID-09 highlighted the challenge of note taking, a task complicated by dyslexia's impact on attention, memory and information processing. They emphasised the importance of engagement and active participation in learning, stating,

...I think [for] people with dyslexia, it is easy to lose attention, like, I need someone who's going to ask me questions, make sure that I am constantly engaged in what they are doing (ID-09).

This need for constant engagement underscores their preference for learning through practice.

Further anxiety around producing written work comes from the fear of making spelling and grammar errors and the pressure to understand complex information.

The stress of deadlines further exacerbated these challenges, with participants ID-10 and ID-11 mentioning the daunting nature of time constraints and the struggle to keep pace with peers.

Additionally, the elevated level of anxiety created by entering a placement without knowing what to expect is a common concern, emphasising the broader issue of anxiety and uncertainty for dyslexic students in unfamiliar settings.

4.3.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Provision of resources

The participants discussed different provisions of special resources for social work students with specific needs.

A participant mentioned that they appreciated receiving a laptop with additional support. “I’ve already got a laptop that has additional support on it, I actually didn’t need anything else” (ID-14), and three participants noted the provision of extra time to finish tasks, with comments such as, “I would spend more time reading just so I understand and it’s just important because it’s a part of the role” (ID-11). Three participants noted the provision of software, with comments like, “there should have been deadlines to make sure that software has been put in” (ID-09). Another three study participants noted the provision of special equipment, “I have all the good facilities to support me, NHS just supplied specialised equipment for me” (ID-07), and two participants reported the provision of written guidelines, “I guess... highlight how my dyslexia might affect me on placement. Then again, I was very honest... is like this guide has been made” (ID-04).

4.3.1.5 Sub-theme 5: Support from colleagues

Three participants reported the positive role played by more experienced colleagues, as ID-05 commented, “It positively impacts on the service user because there are so many challenges”. Nine participants noted the support they had received from colleagues, “there was much more support and understanding because my supervisor was a social worker” (ID-02). One participant mentioned peer support from a fellow dyslexic,

...able to identify with another student who was dyslexic. That enabled me to feel a bit more confident about... and, you know, my learning disability, and this enabled me to, kind of, reach out (ID-13).

Having a supportive manager was mentioned by four participants including,

...because my manager is very supportive, although I’ve told him, the only thing is, I don’t think that he has registered it (ID-08).

For others, the sympathy of colleagues was important,

... struggled to complete my reflections, and people would say “maybe you should take a break?” But I said “no”, but I had to complete the work because I needed more time, and not having a break (ID-01).

4.3.1.6 Sub-theme 6: Special consideration from the organisation

Participants reported the removal of obstacles from their placement by the provision of special accommodations and support. ID-12 preferred a female supervisor for cultural and religious reasons, feeling more comfortable around women and believing them to be more caring and nurturing. The importance of considering religion and gender issues when providing support was emphasised, particularly in relation to dyslexia. It was suggested that dyslexia should be openly discussed and that the placement and PE be accountable for ensuring a smooth experience for dyslexic students. Concerns about dyslexia affecting placement experiences were raised, but some participants felt supported by their practice and personal tutor when discussing their concerns. They mentioned the importance of the organisation’s commitment to creating a supportive environment where individuals feel comfortable discussing their dyslexia and any challenges they may face (ID-13 and ID-14). ID-15 was given time to settle in, which helped them adjust to their new environment.

Two participants mentioned receiving special accommodation from the organisation to work openly, “We can work together to understand what you need and what helps you, and then that will help you” (ID-04). However, one participant felt that PEs had a responsibility to place dyslexic students, with comments such as:

I really think it’s important for that discussion to carry on and to be held and the placement to be held accountable for it as well is, and I think it’s joint accountability. It’s... it’s my responsibility...it’s the PE’s responsibilities, the placement’s responsibility to ensure that you know the placement runs smoothly and that I don’t experience struggles on placement just because I’m dyslexic (ID-13).

Seven participants reported a supportive organisational system,

...really build strong relationships and feel confident and not embarrassed to talk about my dyslexia and things that I find hard, and so that was very supportive (ID-03).

4.3.1.7 Sub-theme 7: Placement learning opportunities

This sub-theme was about providing learning opportunities during placement.

This was achieved through hands-on activities, “the positives...I would say, the ‘hands-on’ and actually doing it” (ID-10). ID-07 was supported in their learning through,

...recording my presentations... and using ‘Grammarly Premium’ has improved my verbal skills. Professional reviews ensure accuracy. ‘DSA Glint’ platform helps me refresh my memory on software. These tools have positively impacted my work (ID-07).

Teaching new skills was also seen as important, “...learn the new skills for my placement” (ID-11). Six participants mentioned training,

...Everyone is unique in their own ways and if the providers can go on training... Dyslexia training and how it affects students on placement or with any books because when you go online, there’s not much (ID-02).

The findings show that by integrating hands-on learning experiences, building confidence, providing access to tools and offering tailored training and support, educational institutions and placement providers can empower dyslexic students to succeed in social work practice placement learning.

4.3.1.8 Sub-theme 8: Institutional support

Participants received financial support from the NHS, which proved invaluable in various ways. Specifically, ID-07 shared that,

The NHS spent a lot of money; they spent up to at least £6000 on me alone. They provided me with specialised equipment like a laptop, which had a myriad of software installed. These included global auto-correct software, which automatically corrected my typing, grammar professional individual, ‘Spellex’, ‘Dictation Gold’ for detection and processing of speech and ‘TextHelp’ for reading and writing support. Additionally, there was ‘Aspere’ and online language support plans (ID-07).

This participant’s experience showcases the various forms of institutional support available and these accommodations played a crucial role in some participants’ ability to navigate their academic and placement tasks effectively. As a result, participants in the study felt supported and gained confidence in discussing their dyslexia. This newfound confidence enabled a positive

adjustment to a new placement environment, where participants had the opportunity to learn and engage in social work activities with confidence.

4.3.1.9 Summary of Theme 1

The participants in this study possessed a keen sense of purpose and a desire to advocate for vulnerable populations and often felt supported in their pursuit of this. However, they did encounter challenges related to their dyslexia, including difficulties with writing, communication barriers and technology-related issues.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Being diagnosed with dyslexia

The participants' responses to their diagnoses can be grouped under four sub-themes: emotions at diagnosis, fear and anxiety in disclosing dyslexia, strategies to conceal dyslexia and motivation for disclosing dyslexia.

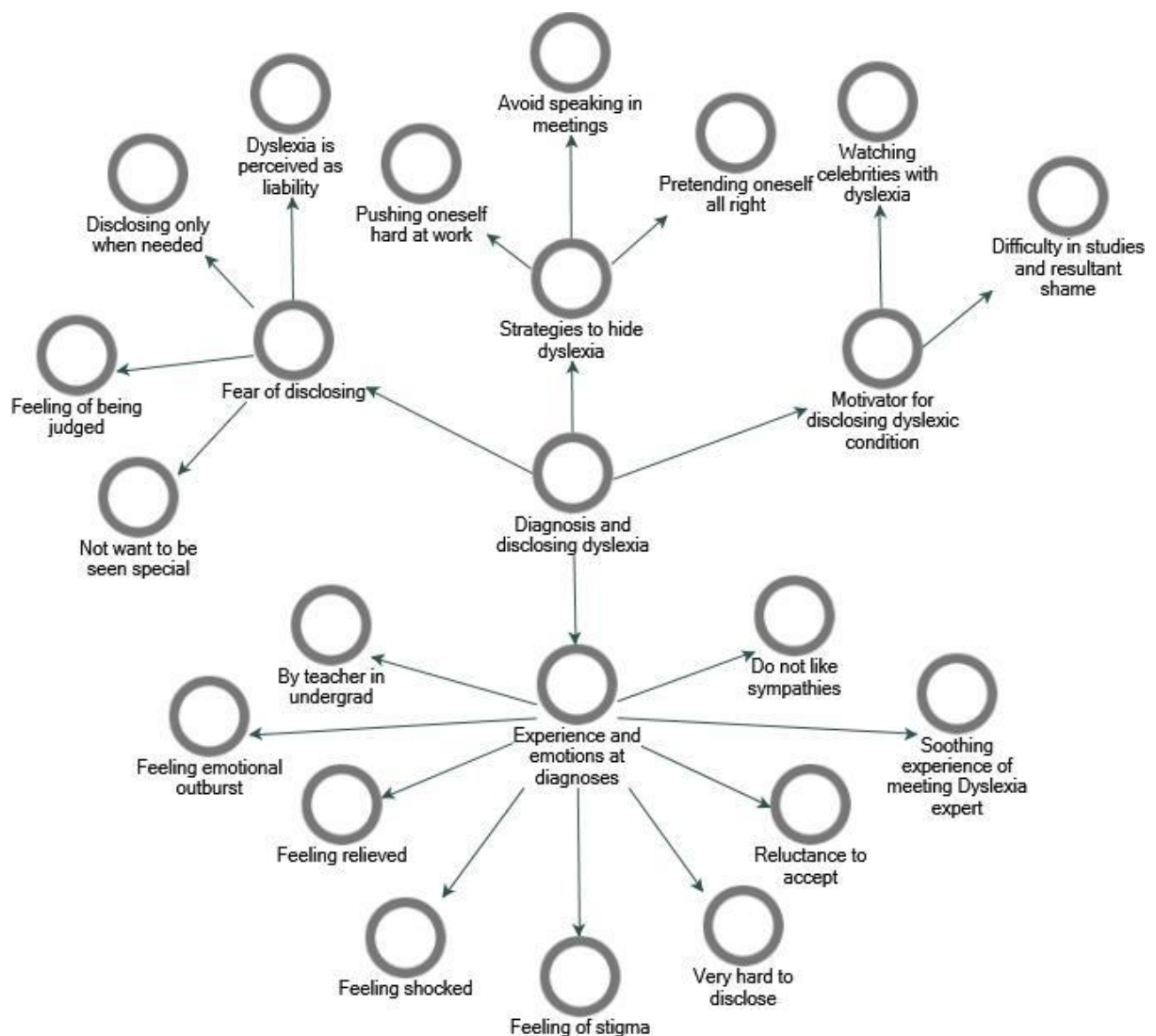


Figure 2: Mind map for diagnosis and disclosing dyslexia.

4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Emotions at diagnosis

Participants shared candid insights into their emotional responses upon receiving a diagnosis of dyslexia. Their reflections on this transformative moment shed light on their complex and multifaceted responses during this pivotal time in their practice placement learning. To illustrate these sentiments, participants' own words paint a vivid picture of their experiences.

ID-01 and ID-12 reported that they did not like sympathy, for example,

...but I don't want to say it's affecting me because I don't want the stigma. I don't want you to look at me, feel sorry for me. That kind of thinking (ID-01).

ID-07 and ID-14 felt ashamed of their diagnosis of dyslexia, "...initially I feel ashamed, I feel ashamed because erm... originally I feel it was a disability" (ID-07) and, "...it holds a lot of shame to it" (ID-14).

Six participants experienced emotional outbursts, "So, I think all this, kind of, affected my confidence and emotional wellbeing, as well, at that time" (ID-02).

ID-11 reported, "...feel a bit lost. Uhm, I feel like I'm not understanding things, uhm, and I'm just trying to keep up. That's how I felt, yeah".

Four participants expressed feelings of stigma, which "...doesn't tell you how the stigma, you know, in my head, like" (ID-01).

Four participants felt relieved with their diagnosis: "I mean, I was relieved. OK, yeah, it was, I mean, it was fine. Good to know what I've been going through all my life, like, I think it's been a hindrance, so it was definitely a relief" (ID-06).

Another four participants felt sad,

After I did my assessment with the lady, she told me I'm dyslexic; I felt a little bit sad because it's like I've been trying, and now it's just another thing to add to the list of things that I've just been going on (ID-15).

Two study participants felt shocked,

I was a victory by then. I was not strong as a bit teary, and I was, like, "oh no! This cannot be! (ID-05).

Three participants were frustrated with their diagnosis of dyslexia:

It's frustrating because you're in an environment where you're not screaming, or I have dyslexia (ID-12).

Two participants felt nervous, and several expressed reluctance to accept their diagnosis, as evidenced by comments such as “very reluctant” from ID-01 and “for my 70-day placement, I was a bit more reluctant to say something” from ID-09.

...so, I found that a little bit hard because it's like I'm... I wanna do the work, and I don't want that to be a reason why I don't get a good mark on my portfolio (ID-15).

Participants also revealed that such a diagnosis can make one feel helpless, as ID-03 noted,

Oh God, everything! Attention, memory, spelling, writing, understanding, like, the kind of... the whole aspects of dyslexia. I just was so unsupported, helpless, that there was just no way of coping (ID-03).

Outpourings of emotions included feeling anxious for not matching up to their professional colleagues, fear of stigma or unfair treatment by others, fear of being labelled as part of a ‘special’ or disabled group and dyslexia being viewed as shameful and labelled. ID-02 said,

All of this affected my confidence and emotional wellbeing at that time. Who wouldn't be nervous? I'm anxious (ID-02).

In addition, there was anger, depression and/or a drop in self-esteem and self-image in response to the dyslexia diagnosis.

Misconceptions about dyslexia were prevalent during placements, which resulted in participants’ frustration. One participant stated,

I have so many things in my head, but to organise it becomes a problem, and I become so frustrated (ID-01).

Others experienced “fear of being perceived dumb” (ID-15), “anxiety and fear – all these emotions” (ID-13), “stressed” (ID-03) and “stigmatised” (ID-01). ID-09 felt “worry and apprehension about, you know, having dyslexia and saying it and now how people respond to it”. For other participants, the thought of presenting in front of a group made them very nervous, as noted by ID-05,

...I was supposed to give a presentation that I was extremely anxious about, but unfortunately, I fell ill and couldn't go through with it. The

anticipation of presenting my work in front of a group had made me very nervous (ID-11).

Others were nervous about such issues as, “starting placement” (ID-05), “was gonna be judged” (ID-13) and asking for “extra support” (ID-13). ID-15 felt nervous they were going to “be called stupid” when “doing academic work”.

Some participants struggled to comprehend the provided information. One expressed confusion, even denial,

I just felt like saying ‘no’! Maybe this person doesn’t like me? Why are they sending me this? What is it?’ ...but I love studying. I’m a bit slow and can’t read well but I’m eager to learn. Can’t they see that? (ID-01).

The participants’ accounts reflect the misconceptions about dyslexia that they met, such as it being associated with laziness, lack of intelligence or being a temporary issue that can be ‘cured’. These misconceptions contributed to the stigma and emotional distress experienced by the participants. Their accounts highlight the varied and complex, often negative, emotional responses to the diagnosis, underscoring the need for greater awareness and understanding of dyslexia in educational and professional settings.

ID-02 described an incident during their first placement where they encountered difficulties completing paperwork. Despite seeking assistance from a more experienced colleague, they were met with dismissive remarks about the length of their time in the placement,

“you’ve been here for a long time”, which is only three months, then she said, “Oh you should know it by now, you should get on with it” (ID-02).

Despite having a formal dyslexia diagnosis and receiving support, some participants faced scepticism from their PEs, who implied that dyslexia should have been ‘resolved’ by now, “your dyslexia should have finished by now, you know you’ve had a lot of hours, your dyslexia should be gone” (ID-02). This experience highlights the misunderstanding and stigma that a dyslexia diagnosis can generate, as well as the ongoing challenges of proving the validity of their disability to others,

...she had refused to reassess me because she felt like dyslexia is something that you can rub it off or just tick boxes like you’ve finished

with it, so that was really difficult having to prove to people that [dyslexia] is a life term disability, not just something you 'get over' (ID-02).

One participant mentioned that certain cultures and genders stigmatise dyslexia, saying, “Oh, the stigma around it is worse because he’s Bengali also, you know, Bengali men” (ID-12). This comment highlights the stigma associated with disclosing dyslexia during some practice placement learning. Moreover, ID-12 further noted that being South Asian made the situation more awkward, as dyslexia is often stigmatised within this community and viewed as a disability. She might be judged for her dyslexia, especially considering the cultural expectations placed upon men in certain communities, such as in the Bengali community.

However, not all emotions associated with a dyslexia diagnosis were negative. Indeed, several participants revealed that they felt relieved after their diagnosis of dyslexia, as one participant noted:

It just made me feel a bit relieved and then, yeah, that there was a bit of reason behind, maybe, why I’m struggling a little bit. (ID-11).

For those who felt relieved, the diagnosis positively impacted their learning experience, allowing them to identify and correct mistakes. They believed that with support, they could overcome their struggles.

Participants also found it helpful to seek a diagnosis from a specialist who could help them develop coping strategies. Many found that disclosing their dyslexia to their teachers for support was beneficial. Seeking assistance from experts was important. ID-11 reported feeling relief after finding out about their dyslexia and being able to receive the appropriate help. ID-12 was also relieved, and ID-08 said that it was a comfort to finally understand what they had been experiencing throughout their life.

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Fear and anxiety at disclosing dyslexia

This study’s findings suggest that stigma surrounding dyslexia during practice placements leads to hesitation and anxiety in disclosing dyslexia. ID-13 said,

...I was very apprehensive to disclose, I was dyslexic because I fear being judged for have been looked down upon (ID-13).

Four participants reported disclosing only when needed. ID-01 declared,

...only place I disclose will be, maybe, an application, and I think you know my PE, my tutor, my class, my university tutor has helped as well (ID-01).

ID-01 had come to perceive dyslexia as a liability,

...For some placement agencies, they think being dyslexic is a liability. That discourages me to come forward (ID-01).

ID-15 expressed a fear of being perceived as dumb,

...a lot of people who don't have dyslexia, they tend to call people with dyslexia 'stupid' and that was the blurred line that I just didn't like (ID-15).

ID-12 reported,

...learning difficulties are stigmatised, making it challenging for those affected. In my Bengali culture, dyslexia is taboo and viewed negatively. Despite my family's support, the stigma can be disheartening (ID-12).

Yet even within ID-12's family, the support only went so far.

Even being a part of a South Asian family, even if I was to bring up – you know – I'm dyslexic, there would be loads of questions, so I didn't really voice it. But obviously, later on, now coming into my third year of placement, my manager started picking up on a few things and asked me, you know, and I started questioning myself a little bit more (ID-12).

This highlights how cultural stigma and familial expectations in South Asian communities, where there is often a strong emphasis on academic achievement and maintaining family honour, can create additional barriers to disclosing dyslexia. In such cultures, learning difficulties can be seen as a taboo subject, with the expectation to conform to perceived norms and avoid discussing personal challenges, creating significant internal and external pressure on individuals not to disclose their condition. This cultural backdrop creates a complex environment where the stigma associated with dyslexia is compounded by familial expectations and the desire to uphold family reputation. This can result in individuals feeling isolated and unsupported.

ID-07 pointed out that, "Some students [...] are ashamed of disclosing it". They went on to explain the knock-on effects of not disclosing, "If a student refuses to disclose this disability it puts the placement provider in a tight corner" (ID-07).

Feelings of shame can significantly impact the relationship between the student and their placement provider. When students do not disclose their dyslexia, it can lead to misunderstandings about their performance and behaviour.

Placement providers may interpret struggles with tasks or communication issues as a lack of effort or competence rather than recognising them as symptoms of an undisclosed learning difficulty. This can create a stressful environment for both the student and the provider, as the provider is unaware of the student's needs and the student feels unsupported and misunderstood.

Additionally, six participants felt feelings of being judged,

...I was not having the confidence to tell my employers that I was dyslexic because I think they will judge me, or may think, I am putting it on (ID-01).

ID-13 reported feeling anxious, "...need help reducing pressure on students to disclose dyslexia. Disclosing can cause anxiety, but support can make it easier". Three participants did not want to be seen as 'special', "I don't want to be seen that kind of different" (ID-01). Another was sensitive to criticism, "I didn't even want... yeah I didn't want to, I think it's because I felt at the time like I was really being critiqued" (ID-10).

Participants preferred to disclose their condition only when necessary, "You only disclose it to those who need to know, if that makes sense?" (ID-11). The participant showed reluctance to share that they had dyslexia for fear of negative consequences. Additionally, the participants in the study expressed that they viewed dyslexia as a disadvantage due to how people around them perceive it. Many were hesitant to reveal their dyslexia because they feared that society might view it as a liability. ID-10 stated, "Some placement agencies see dyslexia as a liability, which discourages me from coming forward". These misconceptions can have a detrimental impact on the lives of those affected by dyslexia, making it harder for them to receive the necessary support and accommodations they require in placement settings "because of fear of judgment" (ID-13) and "fear of meeting targets" (ID-01).

Participants reported negative effects on placement experiences due to narrow perceptions and judgmental behaviour. A participant shared a personal experience when a male on-site supervisor lacked sympathy and empathy, which is crucial for a social worker. This caused anxiety and a breakdown in the

first few months of her placement. As noted by the participant, “it knocked a lot of confidence” (ID-12).

One participant with dyslexia did not want special treatment, just for their supervisor to be aware of their difficulties. They wondered if others had similar issues before. Despite enjoying their work, they found the situation challenging and considered leaving. This highlights the need for understanding and accommodation in the workplace for those with dyslexia. As one participant noted,

I don't want my struggle to have any negative impact, nor do I want to be treated differently or receive special treatment. I simply want my supervisor to be aware of my dyslexia difficulties and to know if it's acceptable. Am I the only one who has struggled with this placement before? I typically enjoy my work, but this particular situation is proving to be quite challenging and I even considered leaving, which is not something I usually do (ID-08).

Additionally, participants reported challenges communicating their dyslexia to PEs and colleagues during placement. ID-02 confessed, “I think all this, kind of, affected my confidence and emotional wellbeing as well, at that time”, and “nervous, anxious, I would say, kind of, worried or people to look at me like a laughingstock or see me as an amusement” (ID-02).

This fear of being labelled and discriminated against negatively impacted their wellbeing.

4.3.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Strategies to conceal dyslexia

This sub-theme emerged prominently in the study's findings, shedding light on the coping mechanisms employed by participants to hide their dyslexia in professional settings. Three primary strategies were identified: avoiding speaking in meetings, pretending to be fine and overcompensating with hard work.

Participants reported a reluctance to speak in meetings as a means of concealing their dyslexia. The fear of being judged or misunderstood due to difficulties in reading and speaking led individuals to withdraw from verbal interactions in professional settings. This avoidance tactic reflects the internalised stigma associated with dyslexia, where individuals anticipate

negative perceptions from others and opt to remain silent to avoid potential embarrassment or discrimination. “I tried to avoid it. If I have something to say, I won’t say it because I think people will not understand, and I just sit back” (ID-12). Thus, many individuals with dyslexia choose to stay silent about their condition in order to avoid negative consequences. The findings suggest that this behaviour is common in people with dyslexia, who often hide their condition by remaining quiet in meetings.

Many participants pretend to be ‘normal’ to hide their condition, fearing the negative consequences of disclosing their dyslexia. Some push themselves harder at work to conceal it. In the words of ID-14,

... and I was pushing myself so hard, even in terms of writing, I was struggling but pushing myself so hard to hide my dyslexia (ID-14).

This coping mechanism can be described as the tendency to overcompensate for perceived shortcomings by exerting excessive effort and diligence.

Participants described dedicating extra time and energy to tasks in an attempt to compensate for difficulties associated with dyslexia, such as slow reading or writing speed. However, this relentless pursuit of perfection often exacerbates feelings of anxiety and stress, contributing to a cycle of heightened pressure and self-doubt.

Some participants adopted a facade of normality, pretending to be unaffected by their dyslexia. By presenting themselves as competent and capable, they sought to mask their struggles with literacy and communication. This strategy highlights the pressure individuals with dyslexia may feel to conform to societal expectations of proficiency and competence, despite facing inherent challenges in academic and professional domains.

These observed strategies underscore the complex interplay between dyslexia, stigma and coping mechanisms, highlighting the need for greater awareness and support for individuals with dyslexia in educational and professional contexts.

4.3.2.4 Sub-theme 4: Motivations for disclosing dyslexia

By contrast with the sub-theme of hiding dyslexia, some participants voiced their reasons for wishing, actively, to disclose their dyslexia.

The primary motivations for revealing their dyslexia were to gain confidence, improve academic performance, reduce personal suffering and receive support. They were inspired by others who had embraced their dyslexia and found the strength to disclose through these examples.

Another key motivation for disclosing dyslexia is the desire to alleviate the emotional burden of hiding the condition. Participants confided that keeping their dyslexia a secret often led to significant stress and a feeling of isolation. By disclosing, they were able to access support systems that provided practical assistance and emotional relief. For instance, one participant highlighted that disclosing their dyslexia prevented them from “suffering in silence” (ID-07), allowing them to receive the support they needed to manage their condition effectively.

Several participants noted that disclosing their dyslexia led to tangible improvements in their academic performance. Once their condition was known, they were able to access resources and support that were previously unavailable to them. This included help from tutors, accommodations during placement, and other forms of academic assistance tailored to their specific needs. ID-07 described how disclosure boosted their confidence and academic performance, particularly in areas where they struggled due to their specific learning difficulties. This suggests that disclosure can transform a student’s educational experience by providing them with the tools and support needed to succeed.

Another significant motivation for disclosure was the inspiration participants drew from public figures and celebrities who have openly discussed their dyslexia. Seeing successful individuals who shared their condition helped participants feel less alone and more empowered to disclose their own dyslexia. ID-01 specifically mentioned that watching celebrities who talked about their dyslexia encouraged them to come forward with their condition. This highlights the powerful role that representation and visibility can play in reducing stigma and encouraging others to seek the support they need.

For some participants, disclosure was a way to access resources and support that helped them develop effective strategies for coping with their learning difficulties. ID-3 noted that while struggling to handle the workload was a common issue, disclosure allowed them to find positive takeaways and develop

better coping strategies such as time management skills, organisational strategies and the use of assistive technology, all of which are known to help individuals with dyslexia manage their symptoms more effectively.

Disclosure was also found to have a significant positive impact on participants' professional lives. By being open about their dyslexia, participants were able to foster more understanding and supportive relationships with colleagues and supervisors. This was crucial for creating a work environment where they could thrive despite their learning difficulties. One participant mentioned that changes in work dynamics posed challenges, but being open about their dyslexia helped them navigate these changes more effectively (ID-09). In this way, disclosure can enhance professional relationships and contribute to a more inclusive and supportive workplace.

For individuals with dyslexia, recognising when to seek help can be challenging. Disclosure can play a crucial role in overcoming this barrier by making it easier for them to ask for and receive the support they need. One participant acknowledged the difficulty of recognising when help is needed but also noted the availability of assistance once they disclosed their condition (ID-06).

4.3.2.5. Summary of Theme 2

Theme 2 provides a comprehensive review of the experiences of social work students on their dyslexia diagnosis.

Being diagnosed with dyslexia has an emotional effect and participants confided a gamut of responses ranging from shock, helplessness, shame, denial, anxiety and fear of social or professional rejection to relief. For these reasons, there can be considerable reluctance to disclose a diagnosis of dyslexia. Strategies to conceal it include stress-inducing attempts to over-achieve by way of mitigation, avoiding activities that might reveal it and simply pretending it does not exist. However, some participants discovered that it was easier, and sometimes actively beneficial, to reveal their condition and work together with their colleagues in doing everything possible to cancel out barriers to their success and harness their strengths to the advantage of all.

4.3.3 Theme 3: The positive and negative experiences of students with dyslexia on placement

This study explored participants' perceptions of their experiences during placement, identifying two distinct sub-themes within Theme 3: first, positive and second, negative experiences.

It is crucial to acknowledge both the positive aspects, which highlight successes and rewarding moments, as well as the negative aspects, which encompass challenges and difficulties faced by participants throughout their placement journey. This approach ensures a holistic examination of the participants' varied experiences and enables a nuanced interpretation of placement dynamics.

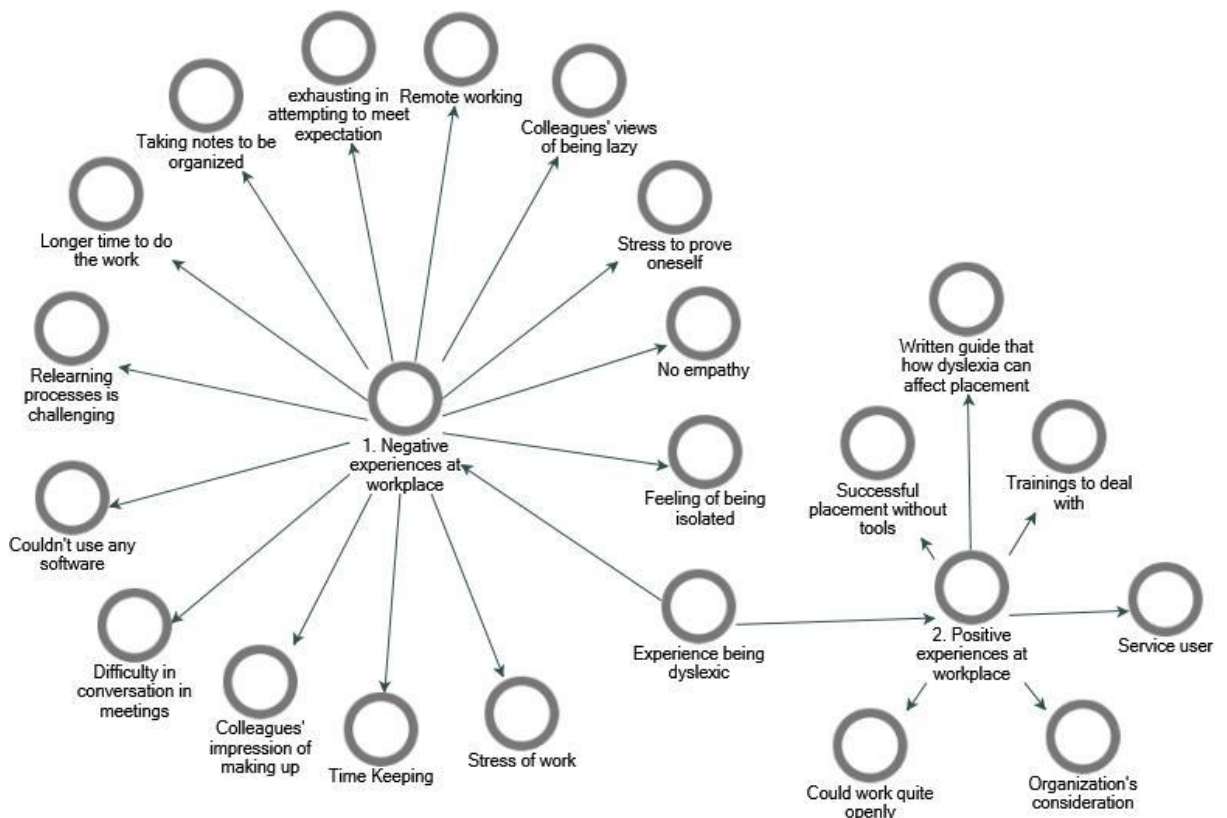


Figure 3: Mind map for experiences of being dyslexic (positive and negative experiences at placement)

4.3.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Positive perceptions

Peer support is crucial for individuals with dyslexia as it provides them with a sense of camaraderie and understanding, reducing feelings of isolation and fostering resilience. ID-03 highlighted their experience on placement,

...a positive experience was when I was able to connect with another student who had dyslexia. This allowed me to feel more confident about my learning disability, and it encouraged me to reach out (ID-03).

Participants also expressed appreciation for the supportive relationships they had with their supervisors during their placements. ID-08 acknowledged their supervisor's overall supportiveness, stating, "Luckily, my supervisor at work is very supportive and has been very helpful". Several participants noted proactive efforts by their supervisors in assisting them. They highlighted the importance of these supportive relationships, especially given the stress associated with their dyslexia diagnosis. The participants emphasised that such positive connections were crucial, particularly when they had heard stories of challenging placements that could exacerbate the anxiety already linked to their dyslexia diagnosis.

ID-14 remarked,

...I'm quite fortunate I get on with my PE, I get on with my manager, I get on with my supervisor. I've heard a lot of horror stories of people not getting on with their placement supervisors [...] and that's another level of anxiety on top of what could, potentially, be a quite stressful environment in the first place with your diagnosis (ID-14).

ID-13 shared,

...I felt quite nervous. I felt like I was gonna be judged. It turned out that my supervisor was very supportive of me and proactive in getting me support (ID-13).

ID-10 noted,

...I feel like my PE has been very supportive when I've written something out that I haven't gone back and spell-checked, and she's highlighted to me, like, "look, please spell-check, or read aloud, or do whatever, with your work, so that you're giving in a good standard of work" (ID-10).

The participants considered the role of PEs to be critical to their practice placement learning, attributing much of their success to the support provided by them. These participants held a favourable view of the learning opportunities facilitated by their PEs and stressed the value of the assistance they received. For example,

...In my second placement, my PE was quite motivating. She encouraged me to challenge myself and even directed me to some highly beneficial websites (ID-05).

Participants expressed deep appreciation for the supportive and empathetic nature of their PEs and supervisors, who often demonstrated a willingness to address their challenges and extend assistance, even offering to read materials on their behalf. As ID-04 articulated,

...I believe that the key strength of my placement experience lies in my PE. She has been unwaveringly supportive and understanding (ID-04).

Participants highlighted their gratitude for the accommodations made to ensure equal learning opportunities. This emphasises the significance of the support they received from their PEs and supervisors. The guidance and mentorship provided by these individuals were particularly valued, underscoring the positive impact of a nurturing learning environment on personal growth and development. As explained by ID-03,

...So, PEs and practice supervisors have always been very supportive and very understanding... (ID-03).

Throughout their placements, participants appreciated the willingness of their PEs to embrace change and provide support, especially concerning their dyslexia. The ability of these educators to alleviate their anxieties and guide them, step-by-step, through the placement process was viewed as invaluable. The fact that these placements were situated in primary schools was seen as advantageous, as it allowed participants to focus on child assessments while benefiting from the guidance of their PEs.

PEs played a pivotal role in assisting participants with dyslexia by offering guidance on portfolio development and delivering essential feedback. The creation of a supportive environment by PEs and supervisors was also highlighted as essential. This environment included practical activities, access to supportive tools, tailored training and a general culture of acceptance and encouragement. Such an environment enabled students to thrive by providing them with the resources and emotional support needed to overcome their difficulties.

4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Negative perceptions

A common issue encountered by participants in this study was their colleagues doubting the legitimacy of their dyslexia and assuming that they were, somehow, 'faking it' (ID-06). Participants reported that their placement providers, including some supervisors and colleagues, sometimes lacked awareness of dyslexia. Participants with dyslexia were labelled as 'lazy' (ID-01, ID-03, ID-12 and ID-13) or lacking motivation.

ID-09 stated, "People sometimes think I'm making it up and say, 'what do you mean? It's a simple thing!'". ID-03 suggested that "for PEs and placement providers to understand dyslexia" would be helpful and ID-01 acknowledged that "awareness is there, but in practice, you know there's not so much".

ID-05 also shared their experience of having their condition's legitimacy doubted and incomprehension of why seemingly simple tasks posed challenges.

Organisational expectations often present challenges for individuals with dyslexia due to a lack of understanding, as some participants noted. These misunderstandings make it challenging to meet expectations, and ID-03 expressed the need "for PEs and placement providers to have an understanding of dyslexia".

Participants struggled to get adequate support from their colleagues and deal with problems on-site. One participant expressed frustration at being considered lazy and others also experienced implications that they were not putting in enough effort,

...It's frustrating because you're in an environment where you're not screaming 'I have dyslexia'. It can be very frustrating because people think you're lazy and you don't care, but that's not, that's not the case" (ID-12).

Rude and bullying behaviour was reported by some participants related to their dyslexia during their placement,

... my first placement in a disability organisation lacked emotion, empathy and was very rude and direct. The behaviour was even bullish, as they called me out and did not take into account my dyslexia. This affected my confidence and made me hesitant to interact with

colleagues, fearing that I would be judged for my dyslexia. Overall, it was a negative experience (ID-02).

Some participants felt uncomfortable due to their on-site supervisor's lack of sympathy and empathy. This experience highlights the significance of empathy and understanding on placement, as noted by ID-12,

I've had multiple encounters with him, and every time, I leave feeling uneasy. As a student social worker, empathy and sympathy are essential in making someone feel at ease, but he lacked those qualities. This caused me to lose confidence in myself (ID-12).

4.3.3.3 Gender and cultural considerations in placement preferences

ID-12 mentioned that their cultural and religious background influenced their experience,

...As a Muslim, I prefer working with women due to my cultural and religious background. I find it easier to discuss sensitive topics with them, as they are a more nurturing nature. However, my current assistant lacks empathy and sympathy, making it uncomfortable to discuss certain subjects with him (ID-12).

This comment underscores the interplay between cultural, religious and personal preferences in the supervisory relationship. For some participants, particularly those from specific cultural and religious backgrounds, the gender of their supervisor can significantly impact their comfort level and openness in discussing sensitive issues. The participant highlighted that female supervisors are often perceived as more nurturing and empathetic, aligning better with their cultural expectations. However, the participant's was designated a male assistant who lacked the empathy and sympathy needed to create a comfortable and supportive environment for her. This lack of understanding and empathy not only made it challenging to discuss certain subjects but also led to feelings of discomfort and unease.

As the participants in this study emphasised the need for greater awareness about dyslexia among women in emerging age groups, it is important to contextualise these findings. ID-12 noted that her preference for a female supervisor was more aligned with her religious and cultural background than her dyslexia, saying,

As a Muslim, I prefer working with women due to my cultural and religious background. I find it easier to discuss sensitive topics with them, as they have a more nurturing nature. (ID-12).

This highlights that while gender and cultural preferences do play a role in participants' placement experiences, they are not exclusively linked to their dyslexia. The significance of these findings lies in the broader context of creating an inclusive and supportive environment that acknowledges and respects individual preferences and cultural backgrounds.

In many cultures, particularly within certain Muslim communities, interactions between men and women are governed by specific social norms and expectations. Female supervisors are often perceived as more understanding, nurturing and empathetic, making it easier for female students to discuss sensitive topics and seek support without fear of judgment or discomfort. This preference underscores the need for placement providers to consider cultural and religious sensitivities when assigning supervisors to ensure that students feel comfortable and supported.

Summary of Theme 3

The findings under Theme 3 underscore the importance of consistent and effective mentorship for all students, particularly those with dyslexia. While many participants reported positive interactions with supportive PEs and supervisors who well understood the challenges posed by dyslexia, the study also reveals a degree of variability in mentorship quality. Not all the participants received adequate accommodation or support and collectively included misconceptions, lack of empathy and even rudeness and bullying among their negative experiences of placements.

4.3.4 Theme 4: The impact of dyslexia on daily placement tasks

The period of data gathering for this study incorporated a unique historic event that had specific and significant impacts for the participants. During the Covid-19 pandemic, participants had to adjust to remote work arrangements.

ID-02 reported,

...Day to day practice, when you're going out doing care plans, support plans, and especially, the time with Covid now, not everybody is in the office where you can turn to your colleague and be, like, "can you help

me with this?” or “do you understand this?” or if you hear someone on the phone you, kind of, listen to see what kind of approach you can use so... people working from home.... your having to do assessments over the phone, you’re not able to see the person, even though it has to be holistic, you know, you’re still a dyslexic person, you, kind of, have to work extra hard to retain that information... what the person is saying... and also, I found most difficult with my dyslexia is the costing, that’s what I worry about the most, making sure that costing is correct because, obviously, when you’re using direct payments, personal budgets, you need to have the right level of need and costing (ID-02).

For individuals with dyslexia, the transition to online training sessions posed unique obstacles, including difficulties in balancing active participation and note-taking.

Working from home also presented challenges for dyslexic individuals. When issues arose, they lacked the immediate assistance available in an office environment where they could turn to colleagues for help.

The unique time of the pandemic aside, the day-to-day life of participants, as mentioned before, included both positive and negative experiences. ID-15 reported,

...my supervision was helpful, with my Personal Professional Development Plan (PPDP) and writing my critical reflections... going over my portfolio in my supervision sessions, ...they were helpful (ID-15).

ID-13 shared a transformative experience of reaching out for support through supervision, resulting in accommodations and adjustments that positively impacted their placement experience, saying,

...When I reached out for help during supervision, my supervisor made adjustments that completely changed my placement experience for the better. It was transformative” (ID-13).

ID-13 also emphasised the importance of ongoing review and accountability in ensuring that effective support measures were provided,

Without a review, dyslexic students may feel scared to ask for help. It’s important to consistently discuss dyslexia in meetings to ensure that the placement is accountable and dyslexic students don’t struggle. It’s a joint

responsibility between the individual, PE and the placement to address dyslexia and provide supervision support (ID-13).

ID-14 said, “I feel that. Yeah, and maybe more supervisions like one-to-one to make sure the support is in place for them”, echoing the sentiment of needing more one-to-one supervision to ensure adequate support for students with dyslexia.

There were also some issues with laptops during the participants’ placements as they were obliged to use company-provided devices instead of their own. This transition posed challenges when performing tasks like report writing and assembling work, as they were less familiar with these company devices. Some participants contemplated transferring information to their own personal laptops but were deterred by concerns about the confidentiality of company data. One participant expressed their dilemma thus,

...I ask myself, “should I transfer the info to my personal laptop?”. But then, you remember the confidentiality of company information” (ID-09).

Participants found tasks like speaking up in multidisciplinary meetings particularly difficult. ID-03 stated,

...I would say that dyslexia has considerably affected my confidence. So, I find things like speaking up in multidisciplinary meetings very difficult. Generally, it’s something I find hard, so I’d say it’s probably impacted that (ID-03).

4.3.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Slow performance

Dyslexia affects learning ability, including reading and writing skills, attention span, concentration level and ability to relearn. Participants reported challenges in performing tasks due to the “changing dynamic of work” (ID-09). The participant noted that they could not use any software,

...It was my own software like I would have. I’ve always, you know, I had my own things..., but they still would have to have bought something to run it and they refused. Yeah, they refused! (ID-03).

Many participants had difficulty conversing in meetings,

...In meetings I don't like to talk, I just feel... because, even though I know what to say, it might take longer time to process it, to say what I want to say. Even if I say... it might not be making sense" (ID-01).

They also needed extra time to complete work: "but I really struggle with time keeping, which is why I have to be busy" (ID-04). Reduced working memory was another challenge, "but I still have the impact because it affected my working memory, it affects my phonological processing" (ID-07).

Participants reported difficulties when participating in meetings, affecting their confidence,

...trying to speak, you know, during meetings, you know, because I'm always asking, "do you understand?" because the way it's in my brain. I don't think it's coming out that way from my mouth, so when you are with professionals, you feel very intimidated (ID-01).

They faced stigma and discrimination, particularly in fast-paced environments requiring quick decisions and professional language,

...I think the level of knowledge, mainly the stigma and discrimination against people who are dyslexic, they don't want to look – present to be – dumb or stupid because you're working with different professionals in a fast-paced environment where you need to make decisions quite rapidly and having to use professional judgement or professional words...being in a room full of higher professionals can be quite intimidating if you have dyslexia (ID-02).

4.3.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Stress from attempting to meet expectations

Participants expressed stress, frustration and feelings of inadequacy in meeting expectations during their placement tasks.

I have so many things in my head, but to organise it becomes a problem, and I become so frustrated (ID-01).

Feelings of you're not capable, it takes me time to write, writing is my problem, it takes longer to process information, it takes me longer to write (ID-01).

ID-07 noted psychological issues, "it affected my phonological awareness, visual processing". ID-12 felt shamed,

...I think being in the placement and people ... saying things like, "oh, that was silly", or "you should have read over that", or "you shouldn't have been making that mistake, you're a third-year student", but there's a lot of things that get to you" (ID-12).

Participants also reported stress related to reading,

...when I see reading, everything just jumps at me, and I said, "oh my goodness!" I tried to find the simplest way (ID-01),

and pressure to prove oneself,

...I don't want to fail, I don't want people to judge me, by being dyslexic, so and including university work. That was playing on my mind every single time, how am I going to write things? (ID-01).

4.3.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Learning difficulties

Participants reported significant challenges with reading, writing, concentration and relearning processes. One participant stated,

...It's hard, and I can learn it, and then suddenly, if I don't use it for a day or two, or a week, or do something differently, and I do it wrong... It's really hard to relearn it, so learning those processes can be challenging (ID-03).

Another noted slow learning and repetitive questioning,

...I asked repeated questions because my dyslexia and specific learning disability is still impacting on my ability to process words, to concentrate most of the time, my ability to process information is still low (ID-07).

4.3.4.4 Sub-theme 4: Varied impressions

Participants reported mixed reactions from their colleagues regarding their dyslexia. Some colleagues exhibited disbelief and accused participants of fabricating their struggles, which was demotivating and disheartening. ID-15 shared, "...which was a bit hard, it's like I was doing it, but it's just not at their pace, and I understand that, but it was hard, to hear".

This lack of understanding from some colleagues contrasted with more supportive interactions from others. The disbelief and scepticism from certain colleagues created additional stress for participants, impacting their confidence and overall experience during placements.

4.3.4.5 Sub-theme 5: Social isolation

Participants reported feeling lonely and isolated during their placements due to their disability. They felt misunderstood and disconnected from their peers and colleagues. ID-12 shared,

...At times, I felt very alone because, although you can easily say “I can relate”, you don’t have this, like, so you don’t know how it feels. You don’t. You’re not seeing things that I am seeing, so you don’t understand my struggle (ID-12).

ID-01 mentioned feeling isolated despite being surrounded by others, saying,

I think for me, I just feel like I’m in my own bubble. I’m isolated; I feel isolated even though people don’t isolate me (ID-01).

The feelings of isolation were exacerbated by the lack of understanding and empathy from some colleagues and supervisors during their placements. Participants often found it challenging to communicate their struggles and felt that their experiences were not fully acknowledged or understood. This disconnect contributed to a sense of being alone in their difficulties.

The impact of social and emotional isolation on social work students with dyslexia was particularly pronounced during the Covid-19 pandemic. The transition to remote work and learning environments compounded these feelings of isolation. The absence of face-to-face interactions and the reliance on virtual communication created barriers to forming meaningful connections and receiving immediate support. ID-03 highlighted the challenges of remote work, “Working from home, you miss that immediate help you can get in an office environment. It can make you feel more alone”.

Social and emotional isolation significantly impacted participants’ mental health and wellbeing during their placements. The continuous struggle to keep up with tasks and the lack of a supportive network led to increased stress, anxiety and feelings of depression. ID-09 noted, “The isolation just adds to the stress. You feel like you’re fighting this battle alone”. This sense of battling alone can lead to a cycle of negative emotions, where the lack of understanding and support exacerbates feelings of inadequacy and helplessness.

The stress from isolation and the pressure to perform without adequate support often resulted in physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue and difficulty

sleeping. Participants reported feeling constantly overwhelmed and exhausted, which further diminished their ability to cope with their dyslexia-related challenges. One participant described the emotional toll of isolation,

...It's not just about being alone physically. It's the emotional isolation that gets to you. Feeling like no one really understands what you're going through makes it hard to stay positive (ID-14).

This emotional isolation can erode self-esteem and confidence, making it even more challenging for individuals to seek help or advocate for themselves.

Struggling with feelings of isolation and stress, participants found it difficult to concentrate and stay motivated. The mental health impact of social isolation also affected participants' academic and professional performance during their placements. ID-07 shared,

When you're feeling isolated and stressed, it's hard to focus on work or studies. It just feels like too much (ID-07).

The overwhelming sense of isolation can lead to decreased productivity and a lack of engagement in both academic and professional activities.

ID-05 suggested,

Having a support group where we can share our experiences and tips would make a big difference. Knowing you're not alone can be really comforting (ID-05).

Participants also highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for social interaction and team-building activities, even in remote settings. Virtual coffee breaks, online social events and collaborative projects can help foster a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation.

4.3.4.6 Summary of Theme 4

Daily life for the participants in this study during their placements was impacted uniquely by the Covid-19 pandemic, which presented challenges beyond those already experienced by students with dyslexia. Working remotely, something that most people struggled to adjust to, particularly those in roles requiring high levels of contact with clients, presented particular challenges.

All the established characteristics of dyslexia – reading and writing problems, short attention span, low concentration levels and low ability to relearn –

created daily challenges, in terms of performance, leading to higher-than-usual stress levels. Participants reported a marked variation in the support they received and there was particular emphasis on the amount of isolation they experienced.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Measures to enhance placement learning experiences

The third research question examines participants' comments on measures to improve practice placement experiences for social work students with dyslexia. Participants suggested several reasonable adjustments under five sub-themes: create a dedicated placement office, provide all necessary resources, foster a supportive culture, provide training for social work professionals/PEs and ensure each student's preferred learning styles are known and understood.

4.3.5.1 Sub-theme 1: Create dedicated placement office

ID-07 noted that "the placement has created room to accommodate me" as a positive experience and ID-04 was pleased to report they had been provided with a "private room". ID-15 suggested, "more one-on-one sessions to see if I'm doing alright on my placement" which could only be facilitated by having a dedicated placement office.

4.3.5.2 Sub-theme 2: Provide all necessary resources

Several participants discussed the need for necessary resources, including accessible software. ID-03 mentioned that offering software that most students already have and incorporating it into their own systems is "really accessible and helpful for supporting students". ID-13 suggested software that helps with reading aloud, while ID-06 mentioned the need for software that allows adjustments. ID-04 noted the need to refresh their memory using software, while ID-7 cited global auto-correct software and ID-09, 'dragon' software. ID-10 suggested software that supports writing assignments and ID-15 noted that they had been entitled to certain software.

Participants emphasised the need for assistance in writing, such as "if there was report writing, giving more allowance or giving more notice" (ID-14) and awareness about resources before placement,

I think, before getting into placement, you know, you people should be more aware of the resources around them (ID-12).

and

...obviously, you've got things like 'Grammarly' that can help you with, you know, grammar and spelling and things like that (ID-14).

4.3.5.3 Sub-theme 3: Foster a supportive culture

Participants suggested that measures should be taken to foster a more inclusive culture during placements.

Feedback emphasised empowering individuals to assist those with dyslexia, suggesting that collaborative support can lead to positive placement experiences and overall wellbeing (ID-10). Suggestions for facilitating adjustment included repetition, note-taking and sensitising workplaces to support dyslexic individuals. Participants stressed the need for increased awareness and understanding of diverse learning styles and protecting the rights of students with dyslexia against discrimination.

ID-04 advocated “an additional layer of support for dyslexic students on placement”, and ID-01, “adjusting workload and time” as ways to create a supportive system during placement and better communication by the on-site supervisors, “that’s really important and communicating better with your on-site supervisors, that’s really important as well” (ID-12). For ID-11, “the reasonable adjustment was just to, kind of, carry out your duties [as] on-site supervisor”. ID-04 mentioned appreciating the flexibility offered at work: “the best part is [...] you can work the way you want to”.

Understanding the preferred learning styles of individuals was suggested by ID-01 as a reasonable adjustment, such as learning by practice: “I think, you know, just practicing. I have to do more practice”. They added that learning “visually” from instructors had been helpful.

Five participants suggested having a personalised care plan, for example,

...Having a plan in place. Personalised. A plan, tailored to me, how that's going to help me on placement, that really helps me (ID-02).

Four participants reported support with reflective theories: “we have activists, reflective theories” (ID-04) and understanding challenges in reading, “the challenge was [...] my comprehension in terms of what I was reading” (ID-13). Two participants reported visual learning was important, for example, “with my study I like visuals, so that’s another thing, I need to see it” (ID-01).

4.3.5.4. Sub-theme 4: Provide training for social work professionals

Key ideas included improving PEs' and placement providers' understanding of dyslexia – particularly its effects on reading and communication – through tailored training (ID-03, ID-01 and ID-13).

Participants expressed the need for training programmes that enhance understanding of dyslexia and equip supervisors and colleagues with strategies to provide appropriate support.

ID-14 considered, "There needs to be learning disability training, maybe there needs to be something like that that recognises" and also suggested that mental health training should be mandatory for placement providers, just like safeguarding training,

There is needed some form of training the same way there would be safeguarding training, mental health training as well as specific training for placement providers (ID-14).

ID-07 mentioned the significance of having the necessary skills to support dyslexic participants,

Any placement provider, too, must go on training, because if you don't have the skills, how will you be able to support the participants in the learning environment? So, it should be mandatory as part of the policy that all placement providers should have specific training in that field. But having all those three things in place, I think it will positively impact students' learning ability (ID-07).

Participants indicated that mental health training should be provided to support social work students with dyslexia on placement. This training can help ensure these students receive the necessary support and accommodations to succeed in their placements. Implementing training in mental health and additional needs awareness is seen as crucial for supporting social work students with dyslexia on placement.

ID-07 emphasised the importance of awareness and empathy,

...Supervisors and colleagues need to understand what dyslexia is and how it affects our work. Training can help them see our perspective and be more supportive (ID-07).

This sentiment underscores the need for targeted training that goes beyond basic awareness to foster a deeper understanding that leads to practical skills for supporting dyslexic individuals.

Participants suggest that training should include practical components, such as recognising signs of dyslexia, implementing effective communication strategies and providing reasonable accommodations. Also, that training programmes should address the emotional and psychological aspects of dyslexia, helping professionals to support students not only academically but also in managing stress and building confidence. ID-05 shared,

...Training should teach how to create an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and supported. It's not just about the academic side, but also about understanding the emotional struggles (ID-05).

4.3.5.5 Summary of Theme 5

In conclusion, comprehensive training for social work professionals was identified as crucial for fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for students with dyslexia. By equipping supervisors and colleagues with the knowledge and skills to understand and support dyslexic individuals, educational institutions can enhance the overall placement experience and contribute to the academic and professional success of all students. This holistic approach to training can help create a more empathetic and supportive environment, reducing feelings of isolation and stress among students with dyslexia.

4.4 Summary of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 begins with an outline of the demographics of the participants, demonstrating their diversity of backgrounds and routes into social work.

The findings of the research are reported through five main themes that emerged during analysis of the raw data. Those themes are mapped directly to the research questions and addressed in detail under further subheadings (or sub-themes). The findings provide a comprehensive account of the participants' experiences as social work students on placement and indicate both positive and negative factors associated with the particular challenges and additional pressures of dyslexia.

In the next chapter, the issues that arose through these emergent themes are discussed in detail and linked to existing literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This qualitative phenomenological research explores the lived experiences of 15 social work students with dyslexia during their placements. This chapter summarises and discusses the issues that have emerged through this research, contextualising their significance in supporting social work students with dyslexia during their placements. It also introduces the mediator model as a pivotal framework for understanding the dynamics surrounding support and advocacy for individuals with dyslexia during their practice placements with a view to offering a novel approach to addressing the issues identified.

5.2 Discussion on the emergent themes

Through semi-structured interviews with 15 social work students from three London universities, the findings uncover insights into the challenges faced by dyslexic students. These insights emphasise the need for support in addressing the difficulties posed by dyslexia and highlight the importance of reasonable adjustments to ensure equal learning opportunities (Oliver, 2006). This chapter, discusses the insights under the main themes that emerged through the analysis of the findings in Chapter 4.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Being a social work student with dyslexia

The experiences of social work students with dyslexia, as revealed in this study, reflect a complex interplay of challenges and strategies. Participants highlighted specific difficulties with reading and writing tasks, managing stress and meeting professional expectations during placements. These challenges often stemmed not only from individual struggles but also from systemic barriers that failed to support their needs. As Levitt (2017) noted, disability is not inherent to the individual; it arises from the interaction between the individual and an environment that does not accommodate them. Thus, the social model of disability provides a useful lens for understanding these challenges, emphasising the role of societal structures in creating barriers for neurodiverse individuals (Oliver, 1990; Dwyer, 2022). For example, participants described difficulties in completing written assignments and retaining complex information being compounded by a lack of resources and understanding. One participant

reflected, “I had to work twice as hard just to keep up. It wasn’t that I couldn’t do the work, but the system wasn’t designed for someone like me” (ID-01).

Indeed, the importance of reasonable adjustments was a recurring theme. Accommodations such as text-to-speech software, extended deadlines and reduced workload expectations were seen by participants as crucial in levelling the playing field. In support of this, Shaw *et al.* (2020a) emphasised that reasonable adjustments are essential for ensuring equitable participation among all students. Participants who received such support reported significant improvements in their ability to manage academic and professional demands. One student noted, “Once I had access to the right tools, like text-to-speech software, it was like a weight was lifted off my shoulders” (ID-07).

Training and early career stages in any profession are challenging and often stressful. Therefore, emotions can run high as part of the normal processes of becoming an effective professional. But for those with dyslexia, there may be the additional challenge of facing social stigma. Some participants confessed to managing this by concealing their condition for fear of being labelled as lazy or incompetent. One participant explained, “I didn’t want to tell anyone I was dyslexic because I didn’t want them to think I wasn’t capable” (ID-08).

Understanding these fears, Glazzard (2010) explained that stigma can intensify feelings of inadequacy, pointing out that the pressure to meet societal expectations often compels individuals to hide their genuine needs.

However, support from supervisors, peers and placement agencies played a pivotal role in mitigating these challenges. Participants valued empathetic supervisors who provided tailored guidance and accommodations. One student shared, “My supervisor was amazing. She didn’t make me feel different; she just gave me the tools I needed to succeed” (ID-05). This participant clearly benefited from an enlightened supervisor who did not create barriers, demonstrating that it is entirely possible to develop a genuinely inclusive learning environment that allows the harnessing of everyone’s strengths. Barnes’ (2012) declared that inclusive practices in professional training not only benefit the individual but enrich the entire learning environment.

Supervision emerged as a cornerstone of the placement experience for dyslexic social work students, with its quality, consistency and understanding playing a pivotal role in shaping outcomes. Effective supervision influenced participants’

ability to navigate challenges, build confidence and succeed in their placements. This aligns with literature emphasising the importance of supervision as a mechanism for fostering emotional resilience, skill development and professional growth (Beddoe, 2018; Roulston *et al.*, 2021).

Supportive supervision provided emotional reassurance, addressing participants' fears of judgment due to their dyslexia. Many participants noted how empathetic supervisors alleviated anxieties by creating an understanding and inclusive environment. For example, ID-13 shared, "When I reached out for help during supervision, my supervisor made adjustments that completely changed my placement experience for the better. It was transformative". Such emotional support is consistent with findings by Cameron (2021), who highlights that supervisors who foster empathy and build trust enhance students' confidence and engagement.

Supervisors who tailored their guidance to meet the specific needs of dyslexic students had a profound impact on their placement experiences. Providing reasonable adjustments, such as extended time for assignments or simplified tasks, helped alleviate stress and cognitive overload. For instance, ID-10 recounted, "My PE has been very supportive when I've written something out that I haven't gone back and spell-checked. She's highlighted to me, like, 'look, please spell-check, or read aloud, or do whatever, with your work, so that you're giving in a good standard of work'". Proactive feedback and practical solutions mirror the findings of Golightly and Field (2019), who underscore the importance of supervisors recognising and addressing the unique challenges of neurodiverse students.

Consistent and structured supervision sessions were critical for helping participants manage placement responsibilities. Regular one-to-one meetings facilitated open dialogue about dyslexia-related challenges and the development of coping strategies. As ID-14 observed, "Maybe more supervisions like one-to-one to make sure the support is in place for them". Literature by Shaw *et al.* (2020b) similarly highlights the value of structured supervision in providing a reliable platform for students to articulate their needs and receive ongoing support. Conversely, the lack of regular supervision left some participants feeling isolated, underscoring the importance of consistency.

Supervisors also contributed to students' professional development by encouraging skill-building and providing constructive feedback. ID-05 shared, "In my second placement, my practice educator (PE) was quite motivating. She encouraged me to challenge myself and even directed me to some highly beneficial websites". These mentorship behaviours align with Beddoe (2018), who emphasises that supervision is not just about addressing immediate challenges but also about equipping students with the tools and confidence needed for long-term professional success.

Supervisors who openly discussed dyslexia created a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere, reducing stigma and empowering students to advocate for their needs. ID-13 highlighted, "Without a review, dyslexic students may feel scared to ask for help. It's important to consistently discuss dyslexia in meetings to ensure that the placement is accountable and dyslexic students don't struggle". These findings align with Cameron (2021), who notes that normalising discussions about neurodiversity fosters a culture of inclusivity, making students feel valued and understood.

The findings underscore the importance of a holistic approach to supporting social work students with dyslexia. This includes implementing reasonable adjustments, fostering awareness and cultivating a culture of inclusivity. As one participant concluded, "It's not about fixing me; it's about fixing the system so that everyone has a fair chance" (ID-13). Thus, by addressing both individual needs and systemic barriers, educational institutions and placement agencies can create environments where students with dyslexia feel supported, valued and empowered to contribute meaningfully to the social work profession. This is supported by Shaw *et al.* (2020b) and Levitt (2017) who each asserted that institutions and placement agencies must align their practices with these principles to empower neurodiverse students to thrive academically and professionally.

Not all the participants in this study had positive experiences of supervision, which, equally, emphasises that systemic and institutional support (i.e., support from the placement agency) are critical factors in the post-diagnosis experience for students with dyslexia. It is established that access to accommodations such as assistive technology, extended deadlines and tailored learning strategies plays a key role in enabling students to meet the demands of their academic

and professional tasks, yet participants frequently encountered inconsistencies in the implementation of these measures, particularly during placements. One participant shared, “Some universities offer great support, but when I transitioned to placement, it was like starting over again – having to explain my needs and hope they understood” (ID-02).

These challenges mirror findings by Shaw *et al.* (2020a), who advocate for standardised, institution-wide approaches to supporting neurodiverse students across both academic and placement settings. Inconsistent support can exacerbate the challenges faced by dyslexic students, highlighting the need for clear policies and consistent practices that bridge the gap between university and placement environments.

This research, framed through the social model of disability, underscores how systemic and societal structures, rather than individual impairments, often create barriers for dyslexic students during placement. Participants' accounts revealed that late diagnoses – frequently encountered during higher education – intensified their academic challenges and exposed systemic deficiencies in early identification and support mechanisms. These findings align with Reid's (2011) argument that structural barriers, rather than personal limitations, are the primary sources of disadvantage for neurodiverse individuals.

The post-diagnosis experiences of social work students with dyslexia illustrate the dynamic interplay between emotional resilience, societal perceptions and systemic structures. While receiving a diagnosis often provides clarity and a foundation for seeking support, the subsequent journey is profoundly shaped by broader societal attitudes and the inclusivity of institutional practices. This mirrors findings by Cameron (2021), who emphasises the role of systemic and cultural factors in shaping the lived experiences of individuals with dyslexia.

By embedding the principles of the social model of disability into policy and practice, institutions can move beyond reactive measures toward proactive, systemic change that empowers students with dyslexia and other disabilities. This shift is critical to breaking down barriers, promoting inclusion and fostering the confidence and resilience needed for success in both academic and professional settings.

To dismantle these barriers, a holistic approach is essential. Educators and placement providers must prioritise early intervention, foster inclusive teaching

and supervision practices and actively challenge misconceptions about dyslexia. Such measures have the potential to create environments where dyslexic students are not only academically and professionally successful but also thrive as confident and capable individuals. This research contributes to the growing body of evidence highlighting the transformative impact of supportive and inclusive practices, emphasising the importance of equity in education and professional training (Shaw *et al.*, 2020a).

The post-diagnosis journey of social work students with dyslexia is shaped by a delicate balance of emotional, social and systemic factors. The findings highlight the importance of timely diagnosis, the role of disclosure in accessing support, the inconsistencies in institutional accommodations and the transformative power of empathetic and inclusive environments. Together, these insights point to the need for systemic reforms that bridge academic and placement settings, ensuring that neurodiverse students are empowered to thrive in their professional development.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Being diagnosed with dyslexia

Receiving a dyslexia diagnosis was a pivotal moment for participants, providing clarity about their struggles and a framework for understanding their strengths and limitations. While some participants described a sense of relief at finally identifying the source of their challenges, others experienced heightened anxiety about societal perceptions of dyslexia. One participant explained, “The diagnosis helped me understand myself better, but I worried about how others would see me” (ID-11). This duality reflects existing literature, which identifies diagnosis as both empowering and a potential source of vulnerability (Smith, 2020; Riddick, 2013). The diagnosis allowed participants to reframe their academic and professional challenges, offering both a tool for advocacy and a basis for accommodations.

This theme explores the deeply personal and transformative journey individuals undergo upon receiving a diagnosis of dyslexia. It captures the complex interplay of emotional, social and systemic factors that shape their experiences. Central to this theme is the stigma associated with dyslexia, which influences individuals' decisions around disclosure and self-perception.

The participants shared a range of emotional responses upon being diagnosed with dyslexia, reflecting a complex interplay of shock, relief, anxiety, shame and

confusion. A common sentiment was the desire to avoid being viewed with sympathy, as this reinforced the stigma associated with dyslexia. For instance, ID-01 expressed, “I don’t want to say it’s affecting me because I don’t want the stigma. I don’t want you to look at me, feel sorry for me. That kind of thinking”.

Many participants reported feelings of shame tied to their diagnosis, stemming from their perception of dyslexia as a disability. This was compounded by confusion, anxiety and emotional vulnerability. ID-02 described their experience as, “So I think all this kind of affected my confidence and emotional wellbeing as well at that time. Who’s being nervous? I’m anxious”.

Other participants reported feeling lost, as the diagnosis created uncertainty and raised questions about their future. As ID-11 shared, “I feel a bit lost. Uhm, I feel like I’m not understanding things, uhm and I’m just trying to keep up. That’s how I felt, yeah”.

Participants also noted feelings of apprehension, as described by ID-13 who said, “I felt quite nervous”.

Shock was also a common initial reaction. ID-05 noted, “I was not strong, I was a bit teary and I was like, ‘Oh no, this cannot be!’”. Similarly, ID-15 described feeling overwhelmed, saying, “After I did my assessment with the lady, she told me I’m dyslexic. I felt a little bit sad because it’s like I’ve been trying and now it’s just another thing to add on to the list of things that’ve just been going on”.

Yet amidst the emotional turmoil, several participants experienced a sense of relief after their diagnosis, as it provided clarity and validation of their struggles, helping to explain longstanding challenges in both academic and personal contexts. ID-06 shared, “I mean, I was relieved. OK, yeah it was...I mean, it was fine. Good to know what I’ve been going through all my life. I think it’s been a hindrance, so it was definitely a relief”. This feeling of relief aligns with Kirby and Gibbon (2018), who argues that receiving a diagnosis often serves as a turning point, enabling individuals to reframe their difficulties as part of a recognised condition rather than personal failings. Similarly, Glazzard (2010) highlights that a diagnosis can be empowering by allowing individuals to access appropriate support and accommodations, which can foster a more positive self-concept and reduce feelings of isolation. By attributing their challenges to dyslexia, participants found clarity and reassurance, reinforcing the importance of timely and accurate diagnoses.

For many, the diagnosis marked the beginning of a journey to redefine their identity and confront the societal perceptions tied to dyslexia.

The stigma associated with dyslexia emerged as a key theme. Participants expressed reluctance to openly acknowledge their diagnosis, as they feared being perceived as ‘different’ or ‘abnormal’. ID-01 reflected on this stigma, saying, “It doesn’t tell you how the stigma, you know, in my head is like”.

The decision to disclose dyslexia emerged as a deeply personal and emotionally charged process for participants. Many expressed apprehension about being judged or misunderstood, reflecting the tension between the fear of stigma and the necessity of disclosure to access support. One participant stated, “Disclosing my dyslexia was hard because I didn’t want to be seen as incapable, but once I did, it felt like a weight was lifted. I could finally get the help I needed” (ID-01). This duality aligns with findings by Rose *et al.* (2009) and Cameron (2021), who highlight that disclosure often involves navigating societal biases while seeking accommodations and understanding.

For some participants, the fear of prejudice discouraged them from disclosing their condition, while others embraced self-advocacy, using disclosure as a means to articulate their needs and gain support. This finding resonates with Enlow *et al.* (2019), who emphasise the transformative power of self-advocacy in fostering personal empowerment and securing necessary resources. These experiences underscore the importance of cultivating environments where students feel safe to disclose their needs without fear of judgment, enabling them to thrive both academically and professionally.

For some, the reluctance to accept the diagnosis was rooted in their determination to succeed without accommodations or allowances. ID-15 articulated this struggle, saying, “I wanna do the work and I don’t want that to be a reason why I don’t get a good mark on my portfolio”.

Feelings of shame and stigma are heavily influenced by societal misconceptions. ID-07 articulated this struggle, saying, “Initially, I feel ashamed, I feel ashamed because erm... originally, I feel it was a disability”.

These sentiments align with Cameron and Billington’s (2015) observations that societal narratives often depict dyslexia as a deficit, which contributes to feelings of inadequacy and social anxiety among those diagnosed. This framing

exacerbates the internalisation of stigma, where individuals absorb societal misconceptions, leading them to perceive their condition as a personal failing rather than a difference or strength.

Rose *et al.* (2009) further underscore how these pervasive misconceptions discourage individuals from disclosing their condition or seeking support. By avoiding disclosure, individuals may inadvertently perpetuate a cycle of exclusion and underachievement. The participants' reluctance to openly discuss their dyslexia reveals the significant emotional toll of living in environments where neurodiversity is misunderstood or stigmatised.

Additionally, the fear of being judged or labelled as less competent often inhibited participants from seeking accommodations, reinforcing a broader pattern of exclusion. The findings point to a pressing need to address societal, cultural and organisational barriers through initiatives such as neurodiversity training and awareness campaigns, as suggested by Levitt (2017). Creating supportive environments that normalise dyslexia and challenge deficit-based perspectives is essential to reducing these barriers.

For many participants, a dyslexia diagnosis brought feelings of sadness and frustration, as it was perceived as yet another challenge in their already demanding lives. ID-15 expressed this sentiment, saying, "After I did my assessment with the lady, she told me I'm dyslexic, I felt a little bit sad because it's like I've been trying, and now it's just another thing to add on to the list of things that've just been going on".

ID-12 mentioned, "It's frustrating because you're in an environment where you're not screaming 'I have dyslexia'".

This emotional burden is consistent with Kirkby's (2020) findings, which highlight how individuals with dyslexia often feel overwhelmed by the additional obstacles they face in navigating academic and professional expectations. These challenges, compounded by the effort required to adapt to environments that do not accommodate neurodiverse needs, frequently lead to a sense of exhaustion and frustration. For some participants, the sadness was linked to reflecting on years of unrecognised struggles. The diagnosis illuminated why they had faced such persistent difficulties but also underscored the lack of support they had previously received. This realisation can be both validating and deeply disheartening.

The findings underscore the importance of providing early diagnosis and intervention, which can help individuals access necessary resources and reduce the cumulative impact of unaddressed challenges. By implementing systemic changes, including accessible learning environments and tailored accommodations, institutions can help alleviate these feelings of sadness and frustration, enabling individuals with dyslexia to focus on their strengths and potential.

5.2.3 Theme 3: The positive and negative experiences of students with dyslexia on placement

This study provides an in-depth exploration of the dualities experienced by social work students with dyslexia during their placements, revealing a nuanced interplay between challenges and support mechanisms.

At the negative end of the spectrum, participants faced significant challenges stemming from misconceptions about their condition. Misunderstandings and scepticism often led to emotional distress, reduced confidence and hindered professional performance. For example, ID-12 articulated their frustration, “It’s frustrating because people think you’re lazy or don’t care, but that’s not the case”. Similarly, ID-09 recounted disbelief from colleagues, “People sometimes think I’m making it up and say, ‘What do you mean? It’s a simple thing!’”. These experiences highlight the detrimental impact of societal attitudes and workplace ignorance, as documented by Alexander-Passe (2015a) and Kirkby (2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic emerged as a significant contextual factor exacerbating existing challenges for dyslexic students. Remote work environments required participants to navigate digital platforms and manage communication without immediate access to support. ID-02 explained,

You’re having to do assessments over the phone, and you’re not able to see the person. Even though it has to be holistic, you know, you’re still a dyslexic person, and you have to work extra hard to retain that information (ID-02).

The findings reveal that while many participants benefited from supportive supervision during their placements, others experienced inconsistent or unsympathetic supervision, which significantly impacted their confidence and performance. Participants reported that supervisors who lacked awareness of

dyslexia or failed to prioritise the needs of dyslexic students often left them feeling misunderstood and undervalued. For example, ID-12 described their supervisor's lack of empathy, stating, "I've had multiple encounters with him, and every time, I leave feeling uneasy. As a student social worker, empathy and sympathy are essential in making someone feel at ease, but he lacked those qualities".

These negative supervisory experiences resonate with findings in existing literature, which identify the critical role of informed and empathetic supervision in fostering positive outcomes for students with dyslexia. Studies have highlighted that a lack of awareness or insensitivity to the needs of neurodiverse students can exacerbate existing challenges, resulting in feelings of exclusion and lower self-efficacy (Riddick, 2013; Cameron, 2021). Conversely, positive supervision has been shown to promote inclusivity, skill development and confidence (Golightly and Field, 2019).

Supervision, therefore, emerged as a double-edged sword in participants' experiences. While high-quality, empathetic supervision served as a source of empowerment, inadequate or unsympathetic supervision acted as a barrier to success, compounding the difficulties posed by dyslexia. These findings align with research advocating for the need to train supervisors to better understand dyslexia and adopt inclusive practices. For example, Shaw *et al.* (2020a) emphasised the importance of supervisor training to increase awareness of dyslexia, foster empathy and encourage the provision of reasonable adjustments to meet students' unique needs.

Conversely, the study highlights the positive, transformative potential of supportive environments in mitigating these challenges. Participants who received empathetic and tailored support reported significant improvements in their confidence, engagement and overall performance. ID-14 expressed gratitude for their placement environment,

I'm quite fortunate I get on with my PE, I get on with my manager, I get on with my supervisor. I've heard a lot of horror stories of people not getting on with their placement supervisors, and that's another level of anxiety on top of what could be quite a stressful environment in the first place (ID-14).

Supportive relationships with tutors, supervisors and peers emerged as a cornerstone of positive post-diagnosis experiences. Participants valued empathy and encouragement from these figures, which reduced barriers to disclosure and fostered professional growth. As one participant noted, “My supervisor’s understanding made all the difference. Instead of feeling judged, I felt encouraged to learn and grow” (ID-14). Such support not only enhanced participants’ confidence but also facilitated their ability to engage fully in placements. These findings align with calls for inclusive practices that celebrate neurodiverse students’ strengths while addressing their unique needs (Ali, Eliahoo and Lawrence, 2020).

5.2.3.1 Gender and cultural considerations

The findings underscore the influence of gender and cultural dynamics on participants’ experiences of dyslexia. Cultural stigma was particularly pronounced among South Asian participants, who described dyslexia as a taboo subject within their communities. ID-12 noted, “In my culture, dyslexia is viewed negatively. It's something you don't talk about openly”.

Additionally, gender-specific expectations placed additional pressures on female participants to conform to societal norms of academic and professional success. These insights echo findings by Morgan *et al.* (2017) and Cassidy *et al.* (2023), who explored how cultural and gender norms intersect with learning differences to shape individual experiences.

Cultural and systemic factors further shaped participants’ experiences, particularly regarding stigma and support-seeking behaviours. ID-12 shared,

In my Bengali culture, dyslexia is taboo and viewed negatively. Despite my family's support, the stigma can be disheartening (ID-12).

Such insights underscore the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in supporting neurodiverse students.

5.2.4 Theme 4: The impact of dyslexia on daily placement tasks

Participants highlighted how dyslexia influenced their ability to manage daily placement tasks, exposing persistent challenges in professional environments.

Relearning and processing information were laborious and time-consuming. Participants described difficulties with interpreting documents, drafting reports and effectively communicating. ID-02 noted: “You have to work extra hard to

retain that information... and also, I found most difficult with my dyslexia is the costing... making sure that costing is correct". These findings align with Kirby and Gibbon (2018), who highlight the professional implications of dyslexia on reading comprehension and reporting.

The cognitive effort required to manage these tasks often resulted in fatigue and reduced concentration. ID-15 elaborated: "It's like you're trying so hard all the time that by the end of the day, you're exhausted and it feels like you're still behind". These experiences reveal the profound emotional and physical toll dyslexia imposes in professional settings.

Support from supervisors and colleagues was instrumental in alleviating these challenges. ID-13 shared, "When I reached out for help during supervision, my supervisor made adjustments that completely changed my placement experience for the better". These findings, again, underscore the importance of tailored guidance and dyslexia-friendly technologies.

5.2.5 Theme 5: Measures to enhance placement learning experiences

This theme explores the critical role of tailored support and systemic measures in improving placement experiences for dyslexic social work students.

Participants identified a widespread lack of understanding about dyslexia in professional environments. Misconceptions often led to inadequate accommodations, compounding the challenges faced. ID-15 reflected, "Sometimes, it feels like they think you're making excuses, but it's not like that. You just need them to understand how it affects you".

Examples of exemplary practice were noted, where supervisors provided meaningful assistance and fostered inclusive environments. ID-13 remarked, "When I reached out for help during supervision, my supervisor made adjustments that completely changed my placement experience for the better. It was transformative".

The findings also point to the significance of systemic measures, such as policies grounded in the social model of disability. Flexible working hours, assistive technologies and practical learning tools were identified as valuable accommodations. Ravalier and Walsh (2022) highlight the importance of

embedding inclusivity within workplace practices to empower neurodiverse individuals.

The study emphasises the need for raising awareness, challenging misconceptions and implementing practical support mechanisms. By addressing both societal attitudes and structural barriers, organisations can foster equitable and empowering placement environments.

5.3 Introduction to the mediator model as a framework for supporting dyslexic students on placement

The mediator model is a structured framework designed to address the unique challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia during their placements.

Through the qualitative analysis undertaken in this research, I developed the mediator model as a conceptual framework to understand the complex dynamics shaping the experiences of dyslexic social work students during their practice placements. Rooted in the findings of this study, the model captures the intricate interplay of factors that influence support, advocacy and outcomes for individuals with dyslexia in professional environments.

Drawing directly from the insights shared by participants, the mediator model highlights the critical elements that shape placement experiences. These include the essential role of on-site support and advocacy, the importance of raising awareness and understanding of dyslexia among stakeholders, the university's role in providing effective interventions and the necessity of organisational systems that address the specific challenges faced by dyslexic students. For example, participants repeatedly emphasised the positive impact of empathetic supervisors and tailored organisational policies that supported their learning and professional development.

By mapping the relationships between these elements, the mediator model offers a structured way to examine how various components interact to influence placement outcomes. It provides a clear framework for identifying strengths within existing systems and pinpointing gaps that need to be addressed. This model not only reflects the mechanisms through which systemic changes, such as better advocacy, improved stakeholder education and enhanced institutional support (i.e. provision of appropriate resources and accommodations), can transform placement environments but also illustrates

how these changes can lead to more positive experiences and outcomes for dyslexic students.

The development of this model represents a significant contribution to the understanding of dyslexia within professional practice settings. It provides a practical guide for educators, placement agencies and policymakers seeking to enhance inclusivity and responsiveness. By focusing on the pathways and interactions identified in the study, the mediator model offers a roadmap for creating more supportive, equitable and empowering environments for neurodiverse students.

For me, however, this framework represents more than just a theoretical contribution; it is a call to action. By applying the insights gained from this study, I hope this model will inspire tangible changes in how dyslexic students are supported, ensuring their unique strengths are recognised and fostered in both academic and professional settings.

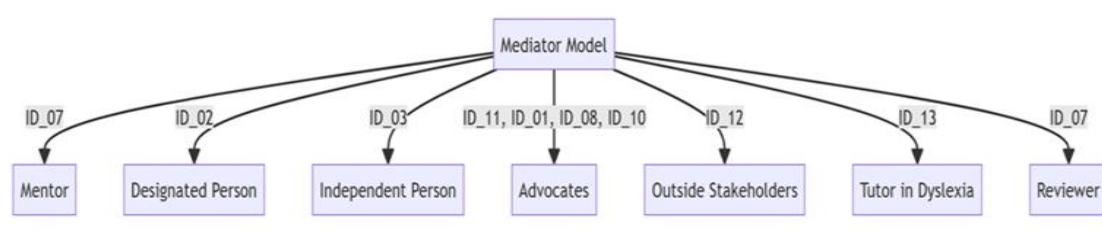


Figure 4: Visual representation of the mediator model as a framework

Figure 4 serves as a visual tool to enrich understanding of the teams involved in practice placements for student social workers, capturing the interconnected roles and mechanisms necessary to foster an inclusive and empowering environment for dyslexic social work students.

The mediator model was designed with a clear objective: to provide dyslexic students with the support they need to overcome placement challenges and thrive in their professional journeys. Participant quotations provide a meaningful lens into the development of this model, offering authentic insights into the challenges faced and the support mechanisms that were most impactful. For instance, the inclusion of roles such as mentors, advocates and reviewers directly stems from participant recommendations, underlining the collaborative essence of the model's development.

This model reflects the diverse needs of dyslexic social work students, highlighting the critical role of tailored support systems in ensuring their success. Participant narratives underscored the need for customised interventions, particularly the value of having dedicated individuals or structures to facilitate understanding and address challenges. Figure 5 further breaks down these roles, illustrating their interactions and the potential benefits of a collaborative, student-centred approach to support.

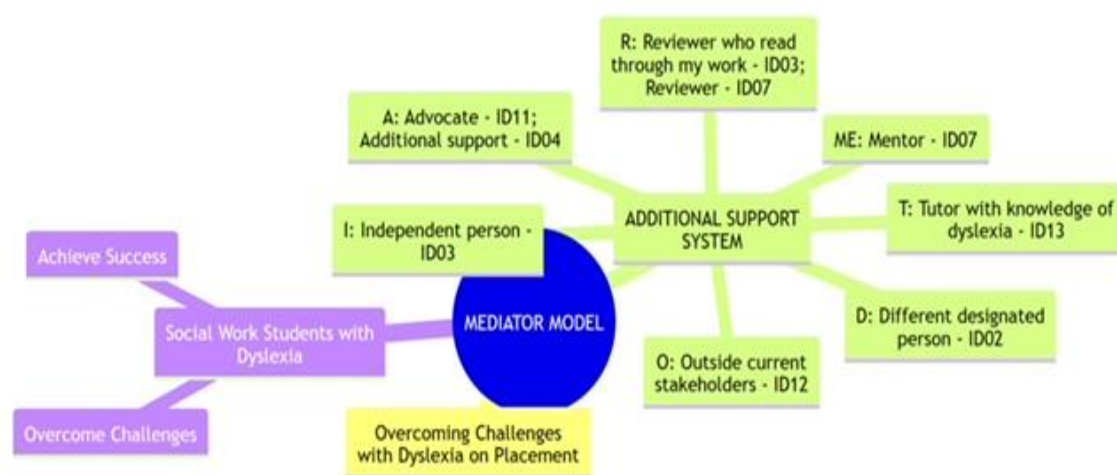


Figure 5: The mediator model: a framework for supporting social work students with dyslexia on placement

Central to the model are participant-provided suggestions, which were pivotal in shaping its components. These include: ‘MEDIATOR’.

Mentor (ME): A trusted figure providing guidance and emotional support throughout the placement.

ID-13 remarked, “Having a mentor who understands me and can guide me step by step has been essential in making me feel less overwhelmed”.

Advocate (A): A representative who ensures the student’s voice is heard, particularly in challenging situations.

ID-15 shared, “I needed someone to stand up for me, to explain to others that my challenges are real and that I’m doing my best”.

Designated person (D): An on-site contact who facilitates accommodations and resolves immediate concerns.

ID-12 noted, “Having someone at work who I could go to immediately when I needed adjustments was so helpful. It made me feel seen and supported”.

Independent person (I): An impartial individual outside the placement agency to address broader or unresolved issues.

ID-09 suggested, “Sometimes you need someone outside of it all to step in and mediate when things get tough”.

Tutor with knowledge of dyslexia (T): An academic ally who provides informed advice and connects the student to resources.

ID-07 explained, “My tutor was amazing. They understood what I needed and helped me find tools that worked for me”.

Outside stakeholder (O): External advocates and independent organisations offering impartial assessments, advocating for systemic changes and providing specialised resources tailored to neurodiverse needs.

ID-14 reflected, “Working with external advocates helped bring in a fresh perspective and push for changes that benefited not just me but others in similar situations”.

Reviewer (R): A professional responsible for assessing and revising the support strategies to ensure their effectiveness over time.

ID-11 highlighted, “Having regular reviews of how things are going and what’s working or not has been invaluable. It keeps things on track”.

These integrated components offer a robust framework for addressing the specific challenges faced by dyslexic students, fostering a culture of inclusivity and empowerment on placement. By drawing directly from participant feedback, the mediator model not only highlights practical solutions but also contributes significantly to the discourse on inclusive social work education and practice.

By providing tailored, collaborative support, this model ensures successful integration and participation in professional environments. It aligns with literature advocating for systemic and inclusive frameworks that empower neurodiverse learners within higher education institutions (HEIs) and professional practice settings (Shaw *et al.*, 2020b; Reid, 2011).

This model integrates proactive, customised and collaborative strategies to minimise barriers and enhance the learning and professional experiences of students with dyslexia. It reflects principles from the social model of disability, which emphasises the dismantling of societal and systemic barriers to foster accessibility and inclusion (Oliver, 1990; Levitt, 2017). By embedding actionable

tools and practices into the structures of social work education, the mediator model facilitates seamless inclusion and empowers students to succeed.

The mediator model provides practice educators (PEs) with a practical framework to address the specific needs of dyslexic students. It facilitates early identification of learning requirements, enabling timely interventions to prevent challenges from escalating. PEs work collaboratively with students and placement supervisors to create and regularly review personalised support strategies, addressing both academic and professional challenges. This model emphasises open and regular communication among students, support staff and placement providers. By fostering a cohesive approach to student support, PEs encourage dyslexic students to articulate their needs confidently, seek necessary adjustments and engage meaningfully in their placements.

5.3.1 Key applications and stakeholders

The mediator model provides a practical framework for diverse stakeholders within the practice learning community, addressing critical gaps in support for social work students with dyslexia. Practice educators (PEs) can implement the model to guide teaching, supervision and assessment practices, ensuring that students with dyslexia receive equitable support. This aligns with findings by Cameron and Billington (2015), who highlight the role of empathetic and informed supervision in fostering student success. Placement coordinators and supervisors can apply the model to create inclusive placement environments, embedding tailored strategies such as workload adjustments, assistive technologies and reflective supervision sessions. These approaches echo the recommendations of Reid (2011), who advocates for institutional structures that accommodate neurodiverse learners.

Support staff can use the model to design targeted resources and accommodations, addressing specific challenges faced by dyslexic students, such as difficulties with organisation, time management and written communication. These strategies align with Glazzard's (2010) findings, which underscore the importance of practical interventions in reducing stress and fostering confidence among neurodiverse students. At the systemic level, Higher Education Institution (HEI) leadership can embed the mediator model's principles into institutional policies to promote systemic inclusivity. This includes incorporating neurodiversity training into staff development programmes and

creating frameworks for consistent application of accommodations across placements, as emphasised by Shaw *et al.* (2020a and b).

By operationalising the mediator model, institutions can address critical gaps in the support provided to social work students with dyslexia, ensuring equitable learning opportunities and professional development. The model's emphasis on collaboration and customisation reflects best practices in inclusive education and professional training, fostering environments where students can thrive (Levitt, 2017). Moreover, the mediator model contributes to the broader discourse on neurodiversity and inclusion, reinforcing the need for systemic reforms that value the strengths and contributions of individuals with dyslexia. By promoting accessibility and empowerment, the model advances the goals of equity and diversity within the social work profession, creating a pathway for a more inclusive and effective workforce.

The mediator model provides practical guidance on supporting students with dyslexia throughout their placement journey. Early identification is a critical first step, involving better preparation and proactive communication. This process ensures timely intervention and sets students up for success. ID-13 emphasised this importance, stating, "Identifying it early made all the difference. It gave me the chance to plan ahead and not feel caught off guard during placements". Tailored support plans form the cornerstone of the mediator model. Developed collaboratively with input from educators, support staff and placement supervisors, these plans address the specific needs of each student. Accommodations include extended deadlines, assistive technologies, flexible task allocation and personalised learning strategies. Regular reviews and adjustments ensure the plans remain effective and relevant. ID-15 reflected, "The adjustments we made during my placement helped me focus on what I could do well instead of worrying about what I might miss".

Collaboration and communication among stakeholders are essential to dynamic and consistent support. Regular progress reviews, shared planning and mentorship programmes contribute to fostering an inclusive environment. Peer support groups can provide additional emotional and professional guidance. ID-12 noted, "Having regular check-ins with my PE and knowing there was a plan for support made such a difference. It helped me feel less alone in this process". Promoting self-advocacy is central to the mediator model. Students

are empowered to articulate their needs confidently through workshops, training sessions and practical exercises. Active participation in crafting their support plans helps students build their self-advocacy skills and communicate effectively in professional settings. ID-07 reflected, “Learning how to advocate for myself gave me confidence to speak up and get the support I needed during my placement”.

Unforeseen challenges may arise during placements, requiring flexible and immediate solutions. Contingency planning is embedded in the mediator model to ensure students remain supported even in dynamic circumstances. This adaptability reinforces the model’s practical impact, ensuring it is not just a theoretical framework but a tangible tool for addressing the additional layers of support required by dyslexic students.

This framework is an innovative step towards transforming placement environments into spaces that value diversity, foster inclusion and enable success for dyslexic students in social work. By leveraging early identification, tailored support plans, collaboration, self-advocacy and contingency planning, the mediator model creates an inclusive ecosystem where students can thrive academically and professionally. ID-09 summarised the model’s essence, stating, “The model isn’t just about providing help – it’s about understanding and working together to make sure I can do my best”.

The mediator model is designed for various stakeholders in social work education and practice. PEs can integrate it into teaching, supervision and assessments, ensuring equitable support. Placement coordinators and supervisors can create inclusive environments through workload adjustments, assistive technologies and reflective supervision. Support staff can develop targeted resources, such as dyslexia-friendly software and accessible documentation practices. HEI leadership can embed its principles into institutional policies, fostering systemic inclusivity through neurodiversity training (Tedam, 2010; Glazzard, 2010).

By addressing critical gaps in support for social work students with dyslexia, the mediator model ensures equitable access to learning and professional development. It advances best practices in inclusive education, reflecting Tedam’s (2010) advocacy for comprehensive inclusion and creating

opportunities for neurodiverse individuals to thrive academically and professionally (Tedam, 2010; Levitt, 2017).

5.3.2 Participant comments shaping the mediator model

The mediator model was shaped by comprehensive feedback from participants in this study, which highlighted the key challenges, needs and experiences of dyslexic social work students during their placements. Participant insights provided the foundation for the development of the model, identifying areas where support mechanisms were lacking and suggesting effective strategies for improvement. Below is an analysis of the feedback that informed and shaped the mediator model.

Participants frequently reported facing stigma, scepticism and misunderstanding about their dyslexia, which often discouraged them from disclosing their condition. ID-1 explained, “For some organisations, they think being dyslexic is a liability. That discourages me to come forward”. This feedback underscored the need for mechanisms within the model to raise awareness and foster an inclusive environment, such as regular training for stakeholders to combat stigma and promote understanding.

Delays in recognising dyslexia and implementing support plans were a common challenge. ID-13 stated, “Identifying it early made all the difference. It gave me the chance to plan ahead and not feel caught off guard during placements”. This highlighted the importance of embedding early identification and proactive planning as core components of the mediator model.

Participants reported varying levels of support depending on the placement agency or supervisor. For example, ID-15 noted, “The adjustments we made during my placement helped me focus on what I could do well instead of worrying about what I might miss”. This feedback informed the model’s emphasis on tailored support plans, ensuring consistency in accommodations and adjustments across placements.

The lack of coordinated efforts among stakeholders often left students feeling unsupported. ID-12 reflected, “Having regular check-ins with my PE and knowing there was a plan for support made such a difference. It helped me feel less alone in this process”. This shaped the model’s focus on fostering

collaboration and regular communication between students, educators, supervisors and support staff.

Some participants lacked confidence in articulating their needs, which hindered their ability to access necessary support. ID-07 shared, “Learning how to advocate for myself gave me confidence to speak up and get the support I needed during my placement”. This feedback informed the inclusion of self-advocacy training and tools within the mediator model, empowering students to actively participate in shaping their placement experience.

Participants often encountered unexpected issues during placements without adequate contingency plans in place. ID-09 stated, “The model isn’t just about providing help – it’s about understanding and working together to make sure I can do my best”. This highlighted the need for contingency planning as a critical element of the mediator model, ensuring ongoing support in dynamic situations.

Supportive and empathetic supervisors were frequently cited as pivotal to a positive placement experience. ID-14 said, “I’m quite fortunate I get on with my PE, I get on with my manager, I get on with my supervisor. It made what could have been a stressful environment a positive one”. This feedback emphasised the importance of training supervisors in understanding dyslexia and adopting supportive practices.

Participants appreciated accommodations such as extended deadlines, assistive technologies and flexible task allocations. These practices were identified as transformative in enabling students to succeed. ID-15 shared, “The adjustments we made during my placement helped me focus on what I could do well instead of worrying about what I might miss”. This reinforced the need for personalised support plans as a cornerstone of the mediator model.

Mentorship and peer support were identified as invaluable in providing emotional guidance and practical advice. ID-12 noted, “Having someone who understood and checked in regularly made a huge difference”. This feedback shaped the inclusion of mentorship programmes and peer networks within the mediator model.

Moreover, the mediator model was directly shaped by the lived experiences and feedback of dyslexic social work students. By addressing key challenges and incorporating practices that participants found effective, the model provides a

comprehensive framework for enhancing support during placements. It reflects a collaborative effort to create inclusive, supportive environments that enable students to overcome barriers and thrive professionally.

5.3.3 Context and alignments

The model aligns with literature advocating for inclusive frameworks that empower neurodiverse learners in HEIs and practice settings (Shaw *et al.*, 2020b; Reid, 2011; Tedom, 2010). It integrates proactive, customised and collaborative strategies to minimise barriers and enhance the learning and professional experiences of students with dyslexia. Reflecting the principles of the social model of disability, it emphasises dismantling systemic barriers to foster accessibility and inclusion (Oliver, 1990; Levitt, 2017). As Tedom (2010) highlights, frameworks combining collaboration and structural adjustments are crucial in creating equitable educational and professional environments for neurodiverse learners.

Tedom's MANDELA model (2010) emphasises simplicity, efficiency and usability in addressing support needs. The mediator model aligns with these principles by focusing on actionable and adaptable strategies for supporting social work students with dyslexia during their practice placements. Like the MANDELA model, the mediator model prioritises user-friendliness and integration into existing structures without adding unnecessary complexity.

By adopting the ethos of Tedom's MANDELA model, the mediator model ensures that stakeholders can implement its components seamlessly in the context of social work placements. Early identification, tailored support plans, collaborative interventions and self-advocacy promotion are all designed to mirror the straightforward and effective principles demonstrated in the MANDELA model. This alignment helps bridge theory and practice, ensuring the mediator model remains an accessible and practical tool for educators, placement coordinators, support staff and social work students with dyslexia.

The mediator model fosters a cultural shift within HEIs and practice learning communities by promoting inclusivity through shared responsibility. Simplifying processes is a priority. Comprehensive guidance documents and toolkits for stakeholders can support this goal. Reflective practice among staff is encouraged to continuously improve support mechanisms. Aligning

interventions with established frameworks, such as Tendam's MANDELA model, ensures efficiency and usability.

5.3.3.1 Integration with the practice learning agreement

The Practice Learning Agreement (PLA) serves as a foundational document that outlines the expectations, goals and support arrangements for a student's placement. By integrating the mediator model into the PLA framework, support for social work students with dyslexia can be significantly enhanced. This integration aligns with findings from Shaw *et al.* (2020a) and Tendam (2010), which emphasise the need for structured and collaborative frameworks to support neurodiverse learners in professional practice.

PEs, as registered and practising social workers, are particularly well-positioned to implement the mediator model. Their responsibilities include supervising, assessing and providing continuous support to students. PEs are equipped to secure necessary accommodations, address emerging issues and maintain the effectiveness of support systems through regular reviews and assessments. This aligns with Reid's (2011) emphasis on the importance of reflective supervision and dynamic feedback mechanisms to foster student success.

Higher Education Institution (HEI) staff also play a critical role in the integration process. Placement tutors and support services collaborate with PEs to create a comprehensive support system, providing academic resources, coordinating placements and addressing additional needs such as mental health and cultural competence resources. These collaborative efforts reflect Tendam's (2010) advocacy for multi-stakeholder involvement in creating inclusive and supportive learning environments.

The mediator model, when integrated into the PLA, incorporates its core components – early identification, tailored support plans, collaborative interventions and self-advocacy promotion. Additionally, it introduces further steps, such as fostering inclusive environments and conducting regular reviews and assessments. Inclusive practices promote equal participation and reduce stigma, while continuous evaluation ensures that support strategies remain responsive and effective. These practices align with the Social Model of Disability's emphasis on systemic reforms to reduce barriers (Oliver, 1990; Levitt, 2017).

By aligning the roles of PEs and HEI staff, the mediator model ensures a coordinated approach to supporting dyslexic students. This collaborative framework enhances learning experiences, improves outcomes and reflects best practices in inclusive social work education and professional training.

5.3.3.2 Alignment with higher education assessments and individual support plans

The mediator model complements, rather than replaces, the individual support plans developed by HEIs. These plans, grounded in thorough assessments, provide a foundation for understanding each student's unique needs and challenges. However, the mediator model adds significant value by ensuring that support remains dynamic and evolves in response to the unpredictable challenges of placement environments. This aligns with Tendam's (2010) recognition of the need for adaptable and proactive support systems.

HEIs play a vital role in pre-placement preparation, identifying potential challenges and coordinating with placement providers to implement reasonable adjustments. These adjustments, such as assistive technologies, modified tasks, or adjusted deadlines, create an inclusive learning environment that supports students' academic and professional development. As Shaw *et al.* (2020a) note, proactive engagement by HEIs is essential in mitigating barriers and fostering success.

The mediator model addresses gaps in traditional support plans by offering continuous oversight and fostering collaboration among students, educators and placement providers. Unlike static support plans, which may be reviewed infrequently, the mediator ensures that support strategies are actively monitored and adapted to meet evolving needs. This dynamic approach reflects Reid's (2011) emphasis on responsive and flexible support systems in inclusive education.

By integrating the mediator model into the PLA and aligning it with HEI assessments and support plans, institutions can create a comprehensive framework for supporting social work students with dyslexia. This approach not only addresses immediate challenges but also equips students with skills and strategies for long-term success.

5.3.4 The mediator model: A guide for stakeholders

The effective implementation of the mediator model requires collaboration, commitment and adaptability among stakeholders, including PEs, placement supervisors, university coordinators, support staff and the broader learning community. Together, these groups can integrate its principles to foster inclusive placement environments.

Early identification is critical for ensuring that students' unique needs are recognised and addressed proactively. This aligns with Tedom (2010), who underscores the importance of pre-emptive strategies to mitigate barriers before they arise. Proactive communication between university placement teams and students helps identify learning needs through screening tools and interviews. With consent, relevant information is shared with placement agencies to prepare supervisors and teams. ID-13 emphasised, "Identifying it early made all the difference". Training for practice educators and supervisors on dyslexia-related challenges and strategies is crucial for effective implementation. By identifying students' needs early, institutions can implement tailored accommodations, such as assistive technologies, extended deadlines and customised learning strategies, well before placements begin. Regular reviews of these mechanisms ensure interventions remain effective and relevant, reflecting best practices in inclusive education (Shaw *et al.*, 2020a).

Tailored support plans co-created through meetings involving students, university staff and placement supervisors are essential. Accommodations such as extended deadlines, assistive technologies and flexible task allocations are detailed in these plans. Regular reviews ensure adaptability, as ID-15 shared, "The adjustments we made during my placement helped me focus on what I could do well instead of worrying about what I might miss".

Collaboration between educators, placement supervisors and support staff is a cornerstone of revised practice. Consistent communication and coordinated efforts create a supportive and inclusive environment for dyslexic students. These principles mirror Tedom's (2010) advocacy for stakeholder collaboration to foster environments conducive to neurodiverse learning. Mentorship programmes and peer support groups further enhance this framework by providing practical advice and encouragement, helping students build confidence and develop effective coping strategies (Glazzard, 2010). Regular

check-ins address challenges and track progress, while mentorship programmes provide guidance. Peer support groups encourage shared learning and connection. ID-12 noted, “Having regular check-ins with my PE and knowing there was a plan for support made such a difference. It helped me feel less alone in this process”.

Self-advocacy is a key component of the model. The promotion of self-advocacy is fundamental to empowering dyslexic students. Through workshops and training sessions, students learn to articulate their needs and confidently request accommodations, reflecting Reid’s (2011) emphasis on the transformative potential of self-advocacy in fostering autonomy and professional growth. This empowerment enhances self-esteem and helps students take ownership of their learning and placement experiences, enabling them to navigate professional environments with confidence. Templates, checklists and active involvement in creating support plans empower students to take ownership of their learning journeys. ID-07 reflected, “Learning how to advocate for myself gave me confidence to speak up and get the support I needed during my placement”.

Flexibility is crucial for managing unforeseen challenges during placements. Clear protocols for emergencies, such as workload changes or conflicts, ensure students know who to approach for immediate support. Feedback loops allow real-time adjustments to support plans.

The model provides a neutral platform to manage and resolve conflicts that may arise during placements. Potential conflicts or misunderstandings are identified and addressed promptly to minimise disruptions to the placement experience. The mediator model acts as a bridge between the student and other stakeholders, fostering understanding and empathy while promoting practical solutions. The conflict resolution process emphasises finding constructive ways to overcome challenges, ensuring that the student remains engaged and motivated.

Reflective practice is integral to social work education and is particularly emphasised within the mediator model. The model facilitates guided reflection sessions where students can analyse their experiences and identify areas for improvement. Reflective discussions consider the impact of dyslexia on learning and practice, helping students develop coping mechanisms and strategies to

overcome barriers. Practice Educators and university tutors provide constructive and empathetic feedback, reinforcing the student's progress and achievements.

Revised practice incorporates a dynamic feedback loop of continuous review and assessment to ensure strategies remain effective and responsive to students' evolving needs. This iterative process aligns with Levitt's (2017) call for adaptable frameworks that prioritise student feedback in optimising outcomes. As a result, students benefit from enhanced academic performance, improved reflective practices and the production of higher-quality written assignments and reports, essential components of social work education.

Embedding the mediator model into institutional policies ensures sustainability. Policies mandating tailored support, regular training and systems for monitoring and accountability reinforce commitment to inclusivity. Higher education institutions and placement agencies play a vital role in embedding these principles. The mediator model also reduces stigma by promoting understanding among placement stakeholders, creating an empathetic environment where students feel valued. Through these measures, the mediator model transforms placements into environments that value diversity, foster inclusivity and enable dyslexic students to thrive. It equips students with the confidence and skills needed to succeed in their social work careers while fostering a culture of understanding and collaboration among stakeholders. As ID-09 summarised, "The model isn't just about providing help – it's about understanding and working together to make sure I can do my best".

The mediator model works in conjunction with the PE and revised practices to create an inclusive and supportive framework for students.

The following table summarises the main functions and focuses of each role: the PE, the mediator model and the revised practice. Each plays a distinct part in supporting students with dyslexia by emphasising various aspects of their learning needs and placement success.

Table 2: Revised practice outcomes

Practice educator	The mediator model	Revised practice
Supervises the application of theory and policy to practice on placement.	Oversees accessibility by highlighting student needs.	Promotes student learning needs to enhance the placement experience.

Conducts evidence-based assessments.	Identifies and addresses challenges arising from dyslexia.	Reduces the impact of dyslexia on placement success.
Ensures the student has access to learning opportunities.	Ascertains how the student's learning needs are supported.	Enables students to benefit from an inclusive approach to evidencing learning opportunities whilst on placement.
Promotes reflection on action to enhance practice skills.	Facilitates reflective discussions around the impact of dyslexia to mitigate barriers to learning.	Promotes better, more reflective outcomes for students on placement.

The mediator model process introduces a collaborative framework that fosters open communication and inclusivity. It involves all relevant stakeholders, such as the student, PE, university tutors and on-site supervisors, working together to address conflicts and challenges that arise during placement. This process ensures that dyslexic students can openly express their concerns and seek solutions in a supportive environment.

The mediator model works in conjunction with the PE to address specific challenges faced by students with dyslexia, focusing on creating a structured yet flexible approach to support their individual needs. While the PE ensures the application of theory to practice and supervises learning opportunities, the mediator model emphasises addressing accessibility and overcoming barriers to success. Together with revised practices, this framework ensures that students' learning needs are not only acknowledged but actively supported.

The mediator model is not universally applied to all students; it is specifically tailored for those who require additional support to address challenges such as dyslexia. For other students, the PE and university support services provide sufficient mentorship and supervision. By integrating the mediator model into placements, this inclusive approach ensures that all students can maximise their potential while fostering equitable and supportive learning environments.

5.3.5 When the mediator model should be implemented

An essential aspect of the mediator model is the timing of its implementation. When a student's learning needs are known before the start of their placement, the mediator's role can begin prior to the induction phase. Early involvement

ensures that tailored support is identified and implemented in advance, facilitating a smoother transition into the placement.

This proactive approach includes assessing the student's specific needs, ensuring that appropriate assistive technologies and software are available and facilitating communication among stakeholders. Collaboration between educators, placement coordinators and support staff allows for the development of an effective support plan that addresses the student's requirements. Early engagement also provides an opportunity to build the student's confidence, address any concerns and set clear expectations for the placement experience.

Collaborative interventions enhance the inclusivity of the placement process by fostering regular communication and cooperation among educators, placement supervisors and support staff. This ensures that students receive consistent and comprehensive support throughout their placements. By addressing challenges proactively, the mediator model creates a placement environment conducive to learning and professional growth.

Through early involvement and collaboration, the mediator model not only benefits students but also supports placement providers in creating a framework that promotes inclusivity, reduces fitness to practice concerns and upholds the integrity of social work education and practice.

5.3.6 Revised practice: The impact of the mediator model

Revised practice represents the tangible improvements that can be achieved through the effective implementation of the mediator model, encompassing key components such as early identification, tailored support plans, collaborative interventions and the promotion of self-advocacy. These elements align with the principles of inclusive education and professional training as advocated by Oliver (1990), Reid (2017) and Levitt (2017), which emphasise dismantling systemic barriers and empowering neurodiverse learners.

Revised practice incorporates a dynamic feedback loop of continuous review and assessment to ensure strategies remain effective and responsive to students' evolving needs. This iterative process aligns with Levitt's (2017) call for adaptable frameworks that prioritise student feedback in optimising outcomes. As a result, students benefit from enhanced academic performance,

improved reflective practices and the production of higher-quality written assignments and reports, essential components of social work education.

By integrating these refined practices, the mediator model fosters an inclusive and effective placement process that supports both academic and professional development. Early identification removes barriers, collaborative interventions provide comprehensive support and self-advocacy training equips students with lifelong skills for navigating professional environments. These practices reflect the social model of disability's focus on structural inclusivity (Oliver, 1990) and contribute to best practices in social work education.

Revised practice embodies the impact of the mediator model, highlighting significant improvements in academic performance, reflective practices and overall learning experiences for dyslexic students. By focusing on early identification, continuous support, collaboration and self-advocacy, the mediator model creates an inclusive placement process, addressing immediate challenges while equipping students with strategies for long-term success. These outcomes not only enhance the experiences of dyslexic social work students but also promote systemic reforms in social work education, aligning with the broader goals of inclusivity and equity within professional training (Tadam, 2010; Reid, 2011).

5.3.7 Fitness to practise

Fitness to practise (FTP) is a crucial concept in social work education, requiring students to demonstrate the competence, conduct and character necessary to uphold professional standards (Social Work England (SWE), 2021). As a regulated profession, social work demands adherence to ethical and practice guidelines that safeguard public trust and maintain the profession's integrity. For social work students, maintaining FTP is a core requirement throughout their academic journey and placement experiences.

FTP encompasses a combination of academic, professional and personal attributes that enable students to meet the rigorous standards of professional practice. These attributes include professional competence, ethical behaviour, personal conduct and health and well-being (Basnett and Sheffield, 2010). Compliance with regulatory standards, such as those established by SWE, is fundamental (SWE, 2021a). Active engagement in supervision and reflective

practice further supports students in evaluating their experiences and addressing areas for improvement constructively (Enlow *et al.*, 2019).

Challenges in meeting FTP standards often arise from personal, academic or placement-related pressures. These challenges can include managing workload, navigating ethical dilemmas or addressing health-related issues that impact performance (Basnett and Sheffield, 2010). Universities and placement organisations play a critical role in mitigating these challenges through reasonable adjustments, pastoral care and clear guidelines. Resilience is particularly important in helping students cope with the demands of their roles, ensuring they can maintain their professional obligations despite adversity (Grant and Kinman, 2014).

Concerns about FTP may stem from unprofessional conduct, breaches of ethical codes or significant health-related issues. Such concerns are addressed through formal procedures, which may include investigations, supportive interventions or, in severe cases, disciplinary actions (SWE, 2021a).

FTP is essential for the development of ethical and competent social workers. By fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment, universities and placement providers empower students to meet professional standards, ensuring they are well-prepared for the challenges of social work practice.

The mediator model is highly effective in addressing challenges that may lead to FTP concerns. It facilitates conflict resolution processes, reducing the need for frequent meetings and streamlining responses to issues (Budeva, 2018; Roulston *et al.*, 2021; Hunt and Matthew, 2018; Gant and Hewson, 2022). By identifying and addressing unresolved conflicts or unaddressed learning needs early, the mediator model mitigates potential FTP issues, reducing risks to the public and promoting best practices within social work placements.

FTP evaluations focus on professional performance and conduct that may undermine public trust, including behaviours outside the workplace that could result in criminal investigations. Impairment of FTP signals serious concerns about a student or social worker's ability to practise safely and effectively. Investigations into allegations such as professional incompetence or ethical breaches aim to validate the claims and determine appropriate actions (SWE, 2020).

Regular progress reviews and feedback sessions ensure that support strategies remain effective and aligned with best practices. By proactively addressing challenges, the mediator model reduces the likelihood of FTP concerns, ensuring students can develop the competencies needed to practise safely and effectively. This approach not only safeguards public trust but also fosters a culture of inclusivity and professional excellence within social work placements.

5.3.8 The mediator model as a framework, not a role

The mediator model introduces a structured framework aimed at addressing conflicts and challenges that students may encounter during their placements. It integrates seamlessly with existing roles, such as PEs and university support services, to ensure a coordinated approach to student support. This framework avoids redundancy by enhancing collaboration and communication between these stakeholders, creating a cohesive and comprehensive support system tailored to the unique needs of dyslexic students.

It facilitates collaborative conflict resolution by providing a neutral, third-party mediator and promotes open communication and cooperation among stakeholders, including students, PEs, university tutors and on-site supervisors (Budeva, 2018). This approach fosters inclusivity by considering the unique needs and challenges of dyslexic students, allowing them to express their concerns and seek solutions within a supportive setting.

The mediator model is specifically designed to support social work students with dyslexia or those with similar learning needs. Mediator involvement is determined based on the unique challenges a student faces. For instance, if the existing support systems provided by PEs and university services are insufficient to address specific difficulties, the mediator role is introduced to offer targeted, specialised support. Therefore, not all students have a mediator, as the role is tailored to ensure the right level of assistance is provided only where necessary.

The role of the mediator is introduced only where additional, specialised support is required to address specific challenges. For other students, PEs and university support services provide adequate supervision and mentorship. This distinction ensures a comprehensive understanding of the mediator's purpose and scope while avoiding unnecessary duplication of roles.

5.3.9 Reasonable adjustments

Placements pose unique challenges for dyslexic students due to the need to balance academic and practical responsibilities. Tasks such as completing assignments, maintaining portfolios and adhering to tight deadlines require significant cognitive effort, often leading to stress and anxiety.

Tailored adjustments, including extended deadlines, simplified instructions and the provision of assistive technologies, can alleviate these pressures.

Additionally, mentorship and workshops on time management and stress reduction can help students develop practical coping strategies.

Proactively addressing these needs ensures an inclusive placement experience, enabling dyslexic students to excel and contribute meaningfully to the social work workforce. This approach not only supports individual success but also enriches the profession with diverse perspectives and skills.

The mediator model prioritises the consistent implementation and maintenance of these adjustments during practice placements, working closely with PEs and placement supervisors to promptly address any emerging issues, reflecting best practices in inclusive education (Budeva, 2018; Shaw *et al.*, 2020a).

Students participating in the mediator model must be recipients of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), which typically funds assistive technologies. The model ensures students receive the necessary tools and equips them with the skills to use them effectively. Training sessions and ongoing support help students integrate these technologies into daily practice, enhancing learning and performance during placements (Rontou, 2021).

The model begins, as mentioned already, with early identification of dyslexic students through comprehensive initial assessments, aligning with HEI frameworks to understand individual needs. Personalised support plans are developed collaboratively with HEI staff, PEs and placement supervisors. These plans incorporate adjustments identified during assessments, supplemented by additional strategies supported by the mediator model, such as the integration of assistive technologies.

To maintain the effectiveness of these support plans, regular check-ins and adaptive strategies are used. Continuous communication among stakeholders ensures that the support remains relevant and effective. The mediator model

further enhances this by offering training and troubleshooting sessions for assistive technologies provided through DSA, ensuring they aid learning and professional development (Rontou, 2021).

A feedback loop is integral to the model, allowing for timely adaptations to support plans based on changes in student needs or placement conditions. This dynamic approach aligns with best practices in inclusive education, emphasising flexibility and responsiveness in supporting neurodiverse students (Shaw *et al.*, 2020a).

This approach reflects the principles of the social model of disability, advocating for systemic changes to reduce barriers and promote equity (Oliver, 1990). By prioritising early identification, personalised support and continuous adaptation, the mediator model equips dyslexic students with the tools they need to thrive academically and professionally, aligning with recommendations from Coffield *et al.* (2004) and Rontou (2021). This comprehensive framework addresses immediate placement needs while laying a foundation for long-term success in social work practice.

5.3.10 Acknowledging the debate on learning preferences

Research by Coffield *et al.* (2004) and Pashler *et al.* (2008) highlights that while the concept of learning styles is popular, there is insufficient empirical evidence to support the notion that tailoring instruction to individual learning styles significantly enhances learning outcomes. However, the mediator model does not rely on rigid categorisation of learning styles but instead emphasises understanding individual learning preferences and needs.

The model aims to create a flexible and responsive support system that adapts to the unique challenges and strengths of each student. By focusing on personalised learning plans and adaptive teaching methods, the mediator model aligns with best practices in inclusive education (Gant and Hewson, 2022; Rontou, 2021).

Within social work placements, learning requirements extend beyond theoretical knowledge to include practical skills, professional behaviours and reflective practice. The mediator model supports these learning requirements by providing tailored support plans that address dyslexic students' specific needs, such as

assistive technologies for reading and writing, organisational strategies and time management skills (Budeva, 2018).

The model also promotes collaborative interventions and continuous feedback mechanisms, ensuring that students receive ongoing support and adjustments based on their progress and feedback. This approach fosters an inclusive and supportive learning environment, enhancing the overall educational experience for dyslexic students in social work placements.

5.3.11 Call to action

I encourage educators and HEIs to integrate the mediator model's principles into policy and curriculum design. Placement coordinators and supervisors can adopt the model as a practical guide to enhance placement accessibility.

Support staff should facilitate regular training sessions to raise awareness of dyslexia-related challenges. Students are encouraged to actively engage with the resources available and build the confidence to express their needs.

By embracing the mediator model, we can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment, ensuring that students with dyslexia excel in their academic and professional journeys.

5.4 Summary of Chapter 5

This chapter is in two distinct parts. First there is a discussion that integrates the findings of Chapter 4, with the literature of Chapter 2 that draws some cohesion from the analysis of the data collected. Second, it introduces my mediator model as a comprehensive framework for supporting social work students with dyslexia during practice placements that is based on the contributions received from participants and the supporting literature. The model emphasises, among other matters, personalised learning, adaptive support and reflective practice, aligning with the principles of the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990) and current educational research.

The mediator model integrates tailored accommodations, proactive conflict resolution and stakeholder collaboration to create an inclusive environment. It supports dyslexic students in developing critical skills such as practical application, ethical decision-making, communication and cultural competence. By addressing specific learning needs, the model equips students to meet

placement demands and build strong foundations for professional practice (Budeva, 2018; Rontou, 2021).

Through fostering cooperation and reducing discrimination, the mediator model aligns with calls for equity and systemic approaches in education (Barnes, 2012; Rontou, 2021). It offers a transformative solution to the challenges faced by neurodiverse students, ensuring their educational experiences prepare them for the complexities of professional social work.

The chapter highlights how the mediator model integrates HEI assessments, reasonable adjustments, assistive technologies and individual support plans into a cohesive system. Grounded in participant feedback, the model addresses key concerns through early identification, stakeholder collaboration and contingency planning. This structured framework empowers dyslexic students to overcome barriers, achieve success and build confidence during placements.

Broader implications for social work education are also discussed, including the potential of the mediator model to influence policy and foster inclusion in HEIs and practice settings. By promoting neurodiversity, the model supports equitable education and ensures that all students can thrive during their learning placements.

This chapter lays the groundwork for Chapter 6, which explores the broader implications of these findings and the potential of integrating student-centred frameworks like the mediator model into social work education.

Chapter 6: Implications, recommendations and dissemination

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the implications of my study's findings for social work education and practice, offer a comprehensive set of recommendations and lay out a detailed strategy for dissemination of these insights.

With the aim of bridging the gap between research and practice, this chapter translates the findings into actionable steps for improving support systems for social work students with dyslexia. This complies with the overarching goal of fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for students during their practice placements.

In addition, this chapter expands on the concept of dissemination, which refers to the process of sharing research findings with stakeholders and wider audiences. Dissemination is a vital step in ensuring that the study's insights are understood, embraced and applied in practical settings. This chapter outlines how I planned to communicate these findings effectively to educators, practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders within the field of social work.

Overall, this chapter aims to provide a coherent and practical framework for implementing the study's recommendations. It highlights the importance of collaboration among educational institutions, placement providers and other stakeholders to create an environment where social work students with dyslexia can thrive. Through these efforts, I hope to contribute to a shift in practice that not only addresses individual challenges but also promotes systemic change.

6.2 Implications and recommendations for practice placements

Dyslexia presented complex challenges for the social work students participating in this study, influencing both their personal and professional experiences during their placements. These students often face heightened pressures to meet competencies alongside their peers, frequently without adequate support tailored to their specific needs. The role of social work practice education in preparing them to work with vulnerable populations is,

therefore, pivotal. The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), outlined by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) (2018), has established standards for the knowledge, skills and values social work students are expected to demonstrate, and learning placements provide critical opportunities for students to develop and showcase these competencies (Social Work England (SWE), 2020). Therefore, the need for comprehensive training within supportive and inclusive learning environments must be emphasised (BASW, 2021; Samuel, 2023).

6.2.1 Implications for practice educators

The findings of this study reveal some profound implications for PEs, particularly in their capacity to bridge the gap between the challenges identified in research and actionable solutions in practice. The research illuminates the specific barriers dyslexic students face during placements (for example, difficulties with written tasks, time management and meeting stringent professional expectations). For PEs, these findings highlight a need to rethink and expand their role, not just as supervisors but as proactive enablers of inclusive and equitable learning environments (Samuel, 2023; Gant and Hewson, 2022).

The study underscores the importance of equipping PEs with practical tools and frameworks, such as the mediator model, to address these challenges effectively. This framework provides a structured approach to early identification of dyslexic students' needs, ensuring interventions are timely and well-coordinated. The mediator model has not yet been tested. However, if PEs were to adopt this model, it could enable them to translate data into action by fostering open communication with students, creating tailored support plans and ensuring continuous collaboration with other stakeholders. For these PEs, the model would represent more than a theoretical concept (Morgan *et al.*, 2017; Samuel, 2023). Through the mediator model, PEs can strengthen their advocacy, mentorship and structured support for dyslexic students. This approach aligns with professional standards guidelines (SWE, 2021a, b) and promotes a culture of equity and inclusion within social work placements.

This research has also demonstrated the far-reaching effects of fostering inclusivity within placements. McNally and Ryan (2019) cited in Snowling *et al.*, (2020) showed that by addressing systemic barriers, PEs can significantly

enhance the academic and professional trajectories of dyslexic students. They report that students supported through tailored interventions often exhibited increased confidence, resilience and ability to self-advocate. These outcomes not only benefited individual students but also created ripple effects, influencing placement providers and institutions to prioritise inclusivity in their wider policies and practices (McNally and Ryan, 2019, cited in Snowling *et al.*, 2020). The implications for PEs, therefore, extend to their influence as change agents within the broader social work education framework. It is suggested that PEs who manage effectively to implement inclusive strategies could model best practices for their peers and champion systemic changes within institutions. Thus, by integrating the mediator model into their professional development and engaging in reflective practice informed by the study, PEs could elevate the standards of practice education for all students, not just those with dyslexia (Samuel, 2023; SWE, 2021a).

In short, this study, its findings and the mediator model proposed provide PEs with a roadmap for transforming the insights from research into meaningful action. By embracing these implications, PEs can more successfully support dyslexic students to not only meet the professional standards required of them but also thrive as confident and competent social workers, ready to address the diverse needs of vulnerable populations. Through this, the research emphasises the potential of PEs to act as catalysts for broader systemic improvements within social work education (BASW, 2021; SWE, 2021a).

6.2.2 Recommendations for practice educators and stakeholders

As placement agencies are responsible for creating environments that promote equity and inclusion, placement supervisors must receive training to implement strategies that facilitate the success of dyslexic students.

The mediator model outlined in detail in the last chapter, provides a structured framework for practice educators (PEs) to secure accommodations, address challenges collaboratively and ensure consistency in support strategies. Incorporating this model into PE training would ensure clarity and equity, but comprehensive training for PEs and other stakeholders is critical to implementing the mediator model effectively. Training should cover recognising signs of dyslexia, employing effective communication strategies and providing reasonable adjustments such as assistive technologies and support for

managing written assignments. Emotional well-being must be central to this training, equipping PEs to create supportive environments that prioritise resilience alongside academic success. Training programmes must also address stigma and biases associated with dyslexia and learning difficulties.

The preparation of stakeholders, including PEs, university placement tutors and onsite supervisors, to challenge biases and support students empathetically is vital. In addition, continuous professional development (CPD), through refresher courses and ongoing learning opportunities, would ensure that stakeholders remain informed on best practice and the latest research for supporting dyslexic students.

This study has highlighted how dyslexia awareness training for PEs might shift perceptions and practices, particularly in reducing stigma and biases associated with learning differences. Training programmes informed by the study's findings would encourage PEs to critically evaluate their own assumptions and adopt a strengths-based perspective when supporting dyslexic students. This shift in mindset would enable PEs to move beyond mere compliance with standards and towards actively championing equitable practices, creating a culture of belonging and empowerment within the placement environment (Morgan *et al.*, 2017; Gant and Hewson, 2022).

6.3 Implications and recommendations for Higher Education institutions

HEIs are also pivotal in fostering inclusivity and ensuring equitable opportunities for students with dyslexia. Their role extends beyond fulfilling legal requirements such as those outlined in the Equality Act 2010, to actively creating environments where neurodiverse students can thrive academically, professionally and personally. The findings of this study have revealed actionable strategies that HEIs can adopt to better support social work students with dyslexia. These recommendations, again, align with the principles of the social model of disability, focusing on removing barriers to inclusion rather than perceiving dyslexia as an individual deficit.

6.3.1 Early identification and intervention

The process must begin with early identification during admissions or the initial stages of academic engagement. Proactively identifying students' needs

ensures timely interventions that minimise barriers and reduce stigma. This early support helps students access the necessary resources, including tailored learning plans and assistive technologies, from the outset of their academic journey.

6.3.2 Support systems

Comprehensive systems addressing both academic and emotional needs are crucial for student success. It is recommended that HEIs establish centralised, 'one-stop' support centres where students can access academic resources, mental health services and guidance on navigating university life. Workshops focusing on study skills, time management and resilience can further equip students for the demands of higher education. Dedicated support services, including mentoring, counselling and tutoring, should be tailored to the needs of dyslexic students.

Raising awareness throughout the university community is equally important. Training sessions for faculty, administrative staff and peers can improve understanding and reduce bias. Online resources and interactive tools, such as dyslexia simulation apps, foster empathy and inclusive practices.

6.3.3 Accessible learning resources

Accessible resources integrated into the HEI's learning management systems (LMS) are fundamental to fostering inclusivity. Materials for lectures – handouts and digital content – must be accessible and compatible with assistive technologies. They should be available in multiple formats, such as audio, text and video, to accommodate diverse learning styles. Assistive technologies, including text-to-speech software and speech-to-text tools, should be readily accessible and supported by institutional training. The adoption of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles (Meyer, Rose and Gordon, 2014) further ensures inclusivity in the curriculum, benefiting all students, with the recommendation that educators become aware of them and begin to integrate them in the design of their learning materials.

6.3.4 Peer networks and community building

Establishing peer networks can mitigate feelings of isolation and foster a sense of belonging. Through mentorship programmes and peer support groups,

students can share experiences, strategies and resources, creating a collaborative and supportive academic community.

By implementing these strategies, HEIs can empower dyslexic students to excel and foster a more diverse, inclusive and innovative academic environment.

6.4 Implications and recommendations for policy and regulation

SWE plays a pivotal role in fostering an inclusive and equitable environment for social work students with dyslexia within practice education. As the regulator of social work education and practice, SWE's policies and standards significantly influence how educational institutions and placement agencies support neurodiverse students. Aligning these policies with disability equality principles and the Equality Act 2010 ensures fair access to practice learning opportunities and supports the professional development of students with dyslexia (SWE, 2021a and b; BASW, 2021).

SWE's (2021a) education and training standards provide a framework for preparing students for professional practice. To enhance inclusivity, these standards should explicitly require HEIs to develop tailored support plans for dyslexic students in practice settings. These plans should address individual needs, accommodations and equipment and include regular support meetings, ensuring students are fully supported throughout their placements.

Additionally, practice settings must be evaluated for accessibility under SWE's guidance. Placement providers should ensure clear communication, accessible information formats and flexible working arrangements to reduce barriers for dyslexic students. Inclusive assessment methods, such as reflective logs, oral presentations, case studies and portfolio-based evaluations, should be encouraged to accommodate dyslexic students while aligning assessments with practice-specific competencies.

Embedding these policies into SWE's (2021a) education and training standards drives systemic change, ensuring consistent and inclusive support across social work practice education. Tailored support for dyslexic students not only benefits individuals but also strengthens the profession by creating a workforce reflective of the diverse communities it serves.

6.4.1 Implications for government policy

Government policy recommendations aimed at fostering more inclusive environments for social work students with dyslexia must align not only with Social Work England's (SWE) principles of disability equality and inclusion, as outlined by the BASW in 2021, but also with the mandates of the Equality Act 2010 (SWE, 2021; BASW, 2021; Equality Act 2010). This dual alignment is intended to ensure that all students, regardless of dyslexia, or any other disability, receive fair and equal access to placement learning experiences.

These recommendations hold the potential to catalyse transformative shifts in social work education (Oliver, 2006). By adhering to the Equality Act 2010, the recommendations in this chapter not only uphold legal obligations but also affirm a commitment to creating environments that are accessible and accommodating to all students, including those with dyslexia.

SWE ensures that social work programmes meet exacting standards (SWE, 2012a), protecting the public by ensuring that graduates are competent to enter the profession. This regulatory oversight includes setting out the requirements for social work education providers, approving and monitoring education and training programmes and ensuring that students receive high-quality learning experiences (SWE, 2021b). By endorsing policy recommendations that align with both legal requirements and progressive models of disability, SWE can set a precedent for inclusivity within the field. This includes revising current placement guidance to explicitly incorporate the needs of students with dyslexia, ensuring that reasonable adjustments are clearly mandated and monitored.

Specific policies and educational standards suggested for change include SWE's education and training standards. These currently outline the necessary requirements for social work education and training programmes to ensure that students are adequately prepared for professional practice (SWE, 2021a). To better support students with dyslexia, these standards should be updated to require HEIs to demonstrate how they will provide tailored support and accommodations for students with dyslexia during placements. This includes creating individualised support plans that outline specific accommodations such as extended time for tasks, use of assistive technology and regular meetings with support staff (SWE, 2021a, b).

Assessing placement settings for accessibility is crucial. Placement settings must be evaluated, and adjustments should be made to accommodate students with dyslexia. This could involve providing information in multiple formats, ensuring clear and straightforward communication and offering flexible working arrangements where necessary.

Additionally, assessment methods should be flexible and inclusive, allowing for alternative formats that accommodate the needs of students with dyslexia. This might include the use of oral assessments, practical demonstrations or portfolio-based assessments in place of traditional written exams.

The SWE placement guidance outlines the responsibilities of placement providers and educational institutions to ensure that placements are accessible and supportive, providing guidance on reasonable adjustments and promoting equality and diversity within placement settings. This document highlights the need for clear communication and collaboration between students, placement providers and educational institutions to ensure successful placement experiences (SWE, 2021a, b).

6.4.2 Mediator model-based recommendations for policy change

The mediator model helps ensure that all the outlined issues are addressed proactively. First, it recommends early identification of dyslexic students' specific needs before placements commence. Collaborative discussions between HEIs and students ensure a comprehensive support plan addressing personalised accommodations. Mediators must facilitate these discussions, ensuring all stakeholders understand the support plan and their responsibilities (SWE, 2021b; BASW, 2021).

Second, ongoing communication is integral to the mediator model, therefore, with mediators acting as liaisons between students, placement providers and HEIs, consistent dialogue ensures regular reviews and adaptation of support strategies, enabling timely interventions when challenges arise. Mediators must address issues promptly, ensuring that support plans remain effective and responsive to students' evolving needs (Samuel, 2023).

Third, placement supervisors, guided by mediators, must adapt tasks like report writing and case documentation while providing accessible feedback. Regular

supervisor–student meetings will help monitor progress, address concerns and maintain inclusivity. To operationalise this framework effectively, supervisors and staff must receive training on implementing the mediator model, understanding dyslexic students' needs and fostering inclusive practices within placements (Morgan *et al.*, 2017).

Fourth, embedding the mediator model into placement policies will institutionalise its principles. These policies should define mediators' roles, including assessing needs, facilitating communication and monitoring support plan implementation. This approach will promote a structured, consistent framework across placements, fostering equity and accessibility for all students (Samuel, 2023).

Fifth, regular reviews, coordinated by mediators, must be conducted to provide opportunities to reflect on students' progress, address emerging challenges and adjust support strategies. This iterative process will help to ensure that placements continually improve, reinforcing their inclusivity and effectiveness (McNally and Ryan, 2019, cited in Snowling *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, it is recommended that through its regulatory oversight, SWE should champion equity and inclusion within social work education by embedding the mediator model into placement guidance. This structured framework transforms support delivery, shifting the focus from reactive adjustments to proactive planning and continuous collaboration.

By operationalising these measures, SWE will reinforce its commitment to creating inclusive environments where students with dyslexia can thrive. These initiatives embody the principles of social justice and accessibility central to social work, ensuring that social work education reflects the diversity of the communities it serves (SWE, 2021a; BASW, 2021).

6.4.3 Recommendations for institutional policy change

This study highlights the need for substantial policy revisions to address systemic barriers and ensure consistent support for dyslexic students. These recommendations aim to create equitable learning environments and standardised practices across institutions.

6.4.3.1 Flexible assessment policies

Assessment policies should provide diverse methods to accommodate the unique needs of dyslexic students. Oral examinations, portfolio-based evaluations and extended deadlines should be standard options. These flexible approaches allow students to demonstrate their competencies in ways that align with their strengths, reducing stress and improving performance.

Institutions should also ensure that assessment criteria are transparent and communicated clearly to students. This clarity will help dyslexic students prepare effectively and understand the expectations of their placements.

6.4.3.2 Placement policies

Placement policies must include tailored learning objectives that align with students' individual needs and professional goals. Access to assistive technologies, such as text-to-speech software, should be guaranteed for all students requiring them.

Standardised accommodations should be implemented across institutions to ensure consistency. Placement supervisors should receive detailed guidance on supporting dyslexic students, including strategies for adapting tasks such as report writing and case documentation.

6.4.3.3 Training policies

Comprehensive training programmes should be mandatory for all PEs, placement supervisors and support staff. These programmes should cover key topics such as identifying dyslexia-related challenges, implementing reasonable adjustments and fostering a supportive placement environment.

Training should also address cultural competence, recognising the intersectionality of learning disabilities with cultural and social factors. This holistic approach will ensure that all students feel valued and supported.

6.4.3.4 Resource allocation policies

Institutions must allocate sufficient funding for resources such as assistive technologies, accessible learning materials and dedicated support staff.

Adequate funding is critical to ensuring that students have the tools and support necessary to succeed academically and professionally.

6.4.3.5 Accountability mechanisms

Regular reviews, audits and feedback loops are essential for monitoring compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and SWE standards. These mechanisms should include student feedback to ensure policies remain relevant and effective. Institutions should publish annual reports on their progress in implementing inclusive practices, fostering transparency and accountability.

6.4.3.6 Advocacy, awareness and policy promotion

Universities and placement agencies must actively champion the consistent application of inclusive policies through targeted advocacy and awareness initiatives. These efforts should emphasise the value of neurodiversity and highlight the importance of creating equitable opportunities for all students.

Raising policy awareness and fostering advocacy are essential to ensuring institutions fulfil their commitments to inclusivity and equity. Campaigns should promote best practices, encourage collaboration among stakeholders and ensure policies align with legislative standards.

Regular workshops and seminars should be organised to educate HEI staff and placement partners about the impact of dyslexia on learning and professional performance, as well as the accommodations necessary to support students effectively.

Raising awareness and fostering sensitivity towards the challenges faced by students with dyslexia are essential steps in creating an inclusive culture within both HEIs and placement settings.

6.4.3.7 Collaborative networking

Collaborative networks among HEIs, placement providers and professional bodies should be established to share best practice and strengthen support systems. These networks can facilitate the exchange of resources and knowledge, ensuring consistent implementation of inclusive policies.

6.4.3.8 Regular briefing sessions

Frequent briefing sessions for PEs, supervisors and staff should focus on practical strategies for supporting students with dyslexia. These sessions will ensure that all stakeholders are informed and equipped to apply inclusive practices consistently.

6.4.3.9 Flexible and accessible policies

Policies must explicitly incorporate flexibility and accessibility to ensure equitable opportunities for all students. This includes embedding inclusive practices into institutional guidelines and ensuring alignment with the Equality Act 2010 and SWE standards.

6.5 Further recommendations for future practice

While participants identified multiple key areas for improvement, a broader, more comprehensive training programme emerged as a significant recommendation from the synthesis of their feedback and the researcher's analysis. The following recommendations aim to provide actionable insights to enhance inclusivity and support within the entire sector of social work education and training.

Written guides, collaboratively developed by educational psychologists, experienced practitioners and HEIs, can serve as proactive resources for enhancing understanding. These guides should outline the specific ways dyslexia affects placement experiences and provide practical strategies for addressing these challenges.

Cultural competence training is also critical, addressing how learning disabilities intersect with cultural, religious and social norms. Such training fosters empathy, reduces isolation and equips stakeholders to provide more effective support for students navigating diverse challenges in their placements. These efforts should be complemented by awareness campaigns led by HEI diversity and inclusion offices, emphasising the importance of cultural and gender sensitivity to enhance inclusivity across all levels of the institution.

CPD opportunities must also be prioritised. Regular learning sessions, including workshops, peer-sharing activities and research-based training, can ensure that staff remain informed about emerging strategies for supporting students with disabilities. This commitment to ongoing learning fosters a workforce equipped to provide inclusive and effective learning environments.

6.6 Dissemination strategy

This section outlines a comprehensive dissemination strategy and actionable recommendations aimed at fostering inclusivity and improving support for social work students with dyslexia. By effectively sharing the findings and addressing

systemic barriers, these strategies seek to influence practice, shape policies and promote equity in social work education and placements. The dissemination strategy focuses on reaching diverse stakeholders, while the recommendations address key policy changes necessary for sustainable improvement.

To maximise the impact of the study's findings, a multi-faceted dissemination strategy will target academics, practitioners, policymakers and professional bodies. These approaches are designed to ensure the widespread adoption of best practices and the integration of inclusivity into social work education.

6.6.1 Academic and professional engagement

Publishing the study's findings in peer-reviewed journals will ensure that the research reaches an academic audience, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on supporting students with dyslexia in higher education. Journals focusing on social work education, neurodiversity and inclusive practice will be prioritised to align with the study's themes.

In addition to publications, presenting at national and international conferences will facilitate dialogue with practitioners and academics. These conferences provide a platform for sharing the practical implications of the study, encouraging collaboration on improving support systems. Examples of suitable conferences include the Joint Social Work Education Conference (JSWEC) and international forums on disability and inclusion.

6.6.2 Workshops and training

Workshops and training sessions will be held at HEIs and partner institutions to provide practical guidance on implementing the study's recommendations. These sessions will focus on educating staff, placement providers and support teams about the challenges faced by dyslexic students and equipping them with strategies for effective support.

Workshops will be interactive, using real-life case studies to demonstrate the application of inclusive teaching practices and reasonable adjustments. Training materials will include guides on using assistive technologies, facilitating flexible assessment methods and fostering open communication with students.

6.6.3 Collaboration with professional bodies

Partnerships with organisations such as the BASW and SWE will be established to ensure the study's recommendations are embedded into professional standards. Collaboration with these bodies will include the co-development of guidelines and resources tailored to social work education.

Engaging professional bodies will also amplify the reach of the recommendations, ensuring that inclusive practices become standardised across institutions and placement agencies.

6.6.4 Online resource repository

An online repository will be created to house a range of resources, including training materials, best practice guides, tutorials and case studies. This platform will be accessible to educators, students and placement providers, offering a centralised hub for information on supporting students with dyslexia.

The repository will include multimedia content, such as video tutorials on using assistive technologies and webinars on cultural competence. By providing free access to these resources, the repository will support CPD and promote consistent application of inclusive practices.

6.6.5 Policy engagement

Policymakers in higher education and the social work sector will be engaged through targeted discussions, policy briefs and collaborative forums. These efforts will focus on advocating for systemic changes, such as mandatory training for staff on inclusive practices and the allocation of funding for assistive technologies.

Engagement with policymakers will also involve presenting evidence from the study to demonstrate the long-term benefits of inclusivity, including improved student outcomes and enhanced workforce diversity.

6.7 Emergent challenges and opportunities

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted dyslexic students, particularly during remote placements. Challenges included managing time, navigating digital platforms and staying organised in unfamiliar virtual environments. The lack of in-person support exacerbated feelings of isolation and stress.

To address these challenges, institutions should provide assistive technologies such as screen readers, accessibility features on digital platforms and comprehensive training for students and supervisors on navigating virtual tools. Flexible deadlines, asynchronous learning tasks and regular virtual check-ins can reduce stress and support progress. Online forums and peer networks can foster connection, helping students feel supported despite physical distance.

These measures can create a more resilient and adaptable learning environment, equipping students to overcome challenges during remote placements and enhancing their overall educational experience.

6.8 Summary of Chapter 6

This chapter explores the critical strategies and recommendations to enhance support for dyslexic students in social work education. Key approaches include flexible assessments, accessible learning materials and dedicated support services tailored to the diverse needs of students. The mediator model is highlighted as a structured framework for providing comprehensive and personalised support.

Policy recommendations emphasise the alignment of institutional practices with disability equality principles, SWE standards and the Equality Act 2010. Addressing these systemic barriers is crucial to fostering inclusivity and equity in social work education and placements.

Emerging challenges, such as those posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, underscore the need for adaptability and resilience in support systems. Tailored adjustments and proactive measures during placements can alleviate pressures and promote student success.

The dissemination strategy outlined in this chapter ensures the study's findings reach a broad audience, including academics, practitioners and policymakers. By fostering collaboration and implementing these recommendations, institutions can drive systemic improvements and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable social work education landscape.

The concluding chapter reflects on the research process, discussing its contributions to knowledge, its limitations and its implications for future studies.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This thesis explored the lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their placements, addressing their challenges, coping strategies and desired improvements. It has revealed gaps in practice, knowledge and policy and offered solutions to promote equity and inclusivity in social work education. The findings are highly relevant to the field of social work practice education, where inclusivity, understanding and systemic support are vital for fostering professional competence and personal growth.

The study's three research questions provided a structured framework for understanding the students' experiences, the practical implications of dyslexia in placement settings and the actionable changes required to enhance their educational journey. These insights contribute to addressing the significant practice gap in structured and inclusive support systems for students with dyslexia.

Key contributions include the mediator model, which offers a proactive and structured framework for early identification of student needs, tailored support plans and continuous collaboration among stakeholders. The study's application of the social model of disability redefined dyslexia not as an individual deficit but as a condition requiring systemic changes to remove societal barriers. This perspective underscores the importance of a cultural shift in social work education to create environments where all students can thrive.

The research has also proposed actionable recommendations for policy and practice, including awareness training, inclusive teaching, flexible assessments and improved placement practices. These recommendations, alongside the dissemination strategy, provide a pathway for Higher Education institutions (HEIs), placement agencies and policymakers to implement systemic changes that benefit not only dyslexic students but also the broader academic and professional community.

Reflecting on the research process highlighted personal and academic growth. Conducting the study during the Covid-19 pandemic required adaptability and fostered resilience in overcoming methodological challenges. The reflective

journey reinforced the importance of advocacy, systemic change and the role of research in influencing policy and practice.

This study has demonstrated that students with dyslexia bring valuable strengths to social work, including creativity, empathy and problem-solving abilities. These strengths make them assets to the profession, highlighting the urgency of addressing their challenges through inclusive policies and practices. The research validates the idea that with tailored support, these students can excel, contributing meaningfully to the diverse and demanding field of social work.

In closing, this thesis emphasises the need for collaboration among HEIs, placement providers and policymakers to create equitable learning environments. The mediator model offers a tangible solution for addressing barriers, ensuring all students can succeed. This work serves as a call to action for stakeholders to prioritise inclusivity, equity and systemic reform in social work education, enriching the profession and the communities it serves.

7.2 Addressing the research questions

This study examined the lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia during their placements, guided by three core research questions (RQs). These questions explored perceptions, daily challenges and desired changes to enhance inclusivity and support.

RQ 1: What is the perception of social work students with dyslexia regarding their experiences on placement?

The findings revealed a wide emotional spectrum, from frustration and inadequacy to determination and resilience. Many students opted for non-disclosure of their dyslexia to avoid stigma, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive support. Educators and mentors were urged to consider cultural differences in responses to dyslexia to provide appropriate and empathetic support.

RQ 2: In what ways does dyslexia impact the daily placement experience?

Dyslexia posed significant challenges in tasks such as reading, writing, time management and communication, often leading to stress and isolation.

Educators' understanding and empathy played a crucial role in mitigating these difficulties. Applying the social model of disability helped identify systemic

barriers and suggested strategies to address these challenges, promoting a more equitable placement experience.

RQ 3: What changes do social work students want to see to enhance their placement experiences?

Students recommended tailored support plans, assistive technologies, flexible deadlines and mentorship opportunities. These suggestions emphasised the need for systemic change to make placements more inclusive and supportive. Recommendations, detailed in Chapter 6, align with best practices to address the challenges identified, fostering academic and professional success for dyslexic students.

This study provided a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia. By identifying actionable solutions, it offers a foundation for future research and policy development aimed at promoting inclusivity in social work education.

7.3 Practice gap

Through this research, I identified a significant practice gap in the availability of structured and inclusive support systems for social work students with dyslexia during their placements. Despite the growing recognition of disability through the lens of the social model, many students still choose not to disclose their condition, relying instead on personal coping mechanisms due to fears of discrimination. For those who do disclose, systemic barriers often persist, hindering their ability to thrive. This study demonstrated that these barriers can be addressed and removed through education, awareness and concerted efforts by placement providers and institutions.

7.4 The study's contribution

This study has made a meaningful contribution to knowledge within social work education and practice by addressing several critical areas. By documenting the experiences of social work students with dyslexia, I have illuminated unique challenges that were previously underexplored in academic discourse. These insights bring much-needed attention to a population whose needs often go unrecognised.

One of the key contributions of this research is the mediator model, a structured framework designed to support social work students with dyslexia. The model

includes early identification of needs, the development of tailored support plans and continuous collaboration between students, practice educators and HEI staff. By providing a proactive and systematic approach, this model aims to enhance placement experiences and academic outcomes for students with dyslexia.

I also applied the social model of disability to the context of social work education, shifting the focus from viewing dyslexia as an individual limitation to recognising the societal barriers that impact these students. This perspective highlights the need for systemic changes to create environments that are more inclusive and supportive.

Furthermore, this research has provided actionable recommendations for educational institutions and placement providers. These include advocating for policy revisions, delivering targeted awareness training and implementing structured support systems. Together, these strategies create pathways for meaningful improvements in the way social work students with dyslexia are supported.

Another important contribution of this study is the emphasis on raising awareness among educators, placement supervisors and peers. By fostering greater understanding of dyslexia, this research promotes empathetic and effective support, helping to reduce stigma and enhance the educational experiences of dyslexic students.

In conclusion, this study advances the field of social work education by addressing the challenges faced by students with dyslexia and offering practical solutions and systemic changes to promote inclusivity and equity. These contributions not only enrich the academic discourse but also provide tangible strategies to ensure that social work education supports all students in reaching their full potential.

7.5 Limitations of the study

While this research has made significant contributions to understanding the experiences of social work students with dyslexia, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, which provide context for interpreting the findings and suggest areas for future research.

A key limitation is the small sample size of 15 participants, which restricts the generalisability of the findings. Although the rich qualitative data provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of these students, a larger and more diverse sample could have offered a broader perspective and enhanced the robustness of the conclusions.

The study's geographic focus on London also limits its applicability to other regions or contexts. Social work education and placement practices vary across different geographic and institutional settings and the findings may not fully reflect the experiences of dyslexic students in rural areas or other countries. Expanding future research to include diverse locations and institutional types would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by social work students with dyslexia.

Additionally, the gender imbalance within the participant group introduced another limitation. While the study captured a range of experiences, the majority of participants were female, which may have influenced the findings. Including more male participants and other gender identities in future research could provide a fuller understanding of how gender intersects with dyslexia in social work education.

The reliance on online data collection during the Covid-19 pandemic posed further challenges. Online interviews, while convenient, may have affected the depth and quality of data collection when compared with face-to-face interactions. Technical issues, limitations in non-verbal communication and varying levels of comfort with virtual platforms may have impacted participants' ability to share their experiences openly. Additionally, the absence of in-person observations limited the opportunity to contextualise findings within placement settings.

Finally, the study's findings were shaped by the specific context of social work education, which may not be entirely generalisable to other disciplines. While many of the challenges faced by dyslexic students may be similar across fields, future research could explore how these issues manifest in other professional and academic contexts to draw broader conclusions.

7.6 Researcher's reflections

Reflecting on this research journey has been deeply transformative, offering both personal and academic growth. Engaging with the lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia has deepened my understanding of their challenges and highlighted the importance of systemic change and advocacy in education.

This research was driven by my passion for supporting dyslexic students and advocating for their rights. Throughout the process, I have engaged in discussions, conferences and practice education forums, which have reinforced the need for raising awareness and promoting inclusivity in social work education.

Conducting this study during the Covid-19 pandemic required adaptability and creative problem-solving. The shift to online interviews introduced methodological challenges but also provided opportunities for developing new skills. Participation in online training and conferences helped me navigate these challenges and broadened my methodological expertise.

Engaging in critical thinking, data analysis and research management has significantly enhanced my academic and professional skills. This process has strengthened my capacity to contribute meaningfully to social work practice education, particularly in addressing the needs of dyslexic students.

Reflective practice has been a cornerstone of this research journey. Maintaining a reflective journal allowed me to document insights, emotions and learning experiences, fostering continuous personal and professional development. As reflective practice is integral to social work education in the UK, this approach not only enriched my research but also aligned with the core values of the profession.

In conclusion, this research journey has been marked by passion, resilience and growth. It has advanced my understanding of the challenges faced by dyslexic students and contributed to the field of social work education by offering actionable insights and systemic solutions. I am proud of the knowledge this study has generated and confident that it will guide future research and efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all social work students.

7.7 Summary of Chapter 7

This closing chapter brings together the purpose, findings and contributions of this thesis, revisiting the research questions and solidifying the conclusions drawn from the study. It reflects on the unique insights gained into the experiences of social work students with dyslexia and acknowledges the study's limitations, including its small sample size and geographic focus. Despite these constraints, the research has made a meaningful contribution to the field by addressing critical gaps in knowledge and practice.

Through my reflections, I have articulated the transformative journey of this research, highlighting the challenges, growth and profound learning that have characterised the process. This chapter encapsulates the heart of the study: the commitment to understanding and addressing the systemic barriers faced by dyslexic students in social work education and practice placements.

7.8 Closing remarks

This research has underscored the unique and essential skill set that social workers must cultivate – problem-solving, communication, building trust, creative thinking and intuitive people skills. Importantly, it has shown that individuals with dyslexia, despite their challenges with reading, writing and organisation, often excel in these areas. This makes them invaluable to the profession and highlights the urgency of addressing the barriers they face in their educational and professional journeys.

The study has revealed the complexity of training social work students, involving multiple stakeholders with diverse priorities. However, it has also demonstrated that, with collaboration and determination, these challenges can be addressed. The adoption of the social model of disability provided a critical framework for understanding that many barriers are societal and can be removed through cultural and attitudinal change.

A central contribution of this study is the development and adaptation of the mediator model, a structured framework for addressing the needs of dyslexic students. By fostering collaboration and tailoring support, this model empowers stakeholders to create more inclusive and supportive environments. It offers a practical and actionable solution to enhance equity and inclusion in social work education.

This research has not only identified key issues but also proposed meaningful solutions that empower all students to achieve academic and professional success. By doing so, it promotes inclusivity in social work education and contributes to enriching the profession with talented and well-prepared individuals. As a researcher, I take pride in the knowledge generated through this work and its potential to influence future practices and policies that support dyslexic students and advance social work practice education.

References

- AbilityNet, n.d. *Dyslexia Tools, Software and Free Resources*. [online] Available at: <https://abilitynet.org.uk/news-blogs/dyslexia-tools-software-and-free-resources> [Accessed 18 November 2024].
- Adams, T. E. (2018) 'Autoethnography as methodology: Writing the self into research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(2), pp. 180–193.
- Alexander-Passe, N. (2015a) *Dyslexia and mental health: Helping people identify destructive behaviours and find positive ways to cope*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Alexander-Passe, N. (2015b) 'The dyslexia experience: Difference, disclosure, labelling, discrimination and stigma', *Asia Pacific Journal of Developmental Differences*, 2(2), pp. 202–233. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3850/S2345734115000290>.
- Ali, A., Eliahoo, R. and Lawrence, J. (2020) 'The impact of dyslexia on the work-based learning experiences of nursing students', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 76(3), pp. 789–799.
- Alvesson, M. and Sköldbberg, K. (2017) *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.
- Andresen, J. and Monsrud, M. (2022) 'Supporting students with dyslexia in higher education: A review of interventions and strategies', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 45(2), pp. 103–119.
- Araújo, S., Reis, A., Petersson, K. M. and Faísca, L. (2021) 'Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN) as a predictor of reading in children with dyslexia', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 54(5), pp. 374–385.
- Armstrong, T. (2010) *Neurodiversity: Discovering the Extraordinary Gifts of Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Other Brain Differences*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Barnes, C. (2012) *The social model of disability: Valuable or irrelevant?* London: Routledge.
- Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (2003) *Disability*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (2010) *Exploring Disability: A Sociological Introduction*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Basnett, F. and Sheffield, D. (2010) 'The role of practice educators in social work placements: collaborating with educational institutions to enhance learning outcomes', *Social Work Education*, 29(1), pp. 78–91. BASW. (2018) *Professional Capabilities Framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.basw.co.uk/pcf>.
- Berger, P. L. and Luckmann, T. (1967) *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Bogo, M., Regehr, C., Power, R. and Regehr, G. (2007) 'When values collide: field instructors' experiences of providing feedback and evaluating competence', *The Clinical Supervisor*, 26(1–2), pp. 99–117.
- Bolderston, A. (2012) 'Conducting a research interview', *Journal of Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences*, 43(1), pp. 66–76.
- Borrell-Carrió, F., Suchman, A.L. and Epstein, R.M., 2004. The biopsychosocial model 25 years later: principles, practice, and scientific inquiry. *Annals of Family Medicine*, 2(6), pp.576–582.
- Brady, S., Braze, D. and Fowler, C. A. (2020) 'phonological processing and literacy: a neuroscientific perspective', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55(S1), pp. S183–S201.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2019) 'Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis', *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), pp. 589–597.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2021) *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Brinkmann, S. and Kvale, S. (2005) 'Confronting the ethics of qualitative research interviewing', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(1), pp. 91–108.
- British Dyslexia Association (2017) Reasonable adjustments. Retrieved from <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/reasonable-adjustments>.

- British Dyslexia Association (2020) Dyslexia prevalence and demographics. Retrieved from <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexia/about-dyslexia/what-is-dyslexia/dyslexia-prevalence>.
- Brown, C. and Ravallion, M. (2022) Inequality and social distancing during the pandemic [Preprint]. Available at: doi:10.3386/w30540.
- Brown, L. and Davis, S. (2018) 'Supporting social work students with dyslexia in practice learning', *Practice: Social Work in Action*, 30(1), pp. 47–63.
- Brown, M. I. (2005) *Dyslexia and stress*. University of Manchester.
- Bryman, A. (1989) *Research methods and organization studies*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods*. 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Budeva, S., 2018. Mediation and social work. *Forum on Studies of Society*, 7, pp.39-47.
- Cameron, H. (2021) 'Dyslexia: Research, practice and policy', *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 37(2), pp. 123–140.
- Cameron, H. and Billington, T. (2015) 'Dyslexia: An exploration of the role of educational psychology in addressing the needs of students', *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 31(3), pp. 195–209. Available at: doi: 10.1080/02667363.2015.1037139.
- Cassidy, L., Reggio, K., Shaywitz, B. A. and Shaywitz, S. E. (2023) 'Prevalence of undiagnosed dyslexia in African-American primary school children', *npj Science of Learning*, 8(1), p. 52.
- Charmaz, K., Thornberg, R. and Keane, E. (2010) Evolving grounded theory and social justice inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th edn.), pp. 359–380). SAGE Publications.
- Cleak, H. and Smith, D. (2012) 'Student satisfaction with models of field placement supervision', *Australian Social Work*, 65(2), pp. 243–258.
- Coffield, F., Moseley, D., Hall, E. and Ecclestone, K. (2004) *Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning: A systematic and critical review*. Learning and Skills Research Centre, London.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research methods in education*. 6th edn. London: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2010) 'The Methodology of Black Feminist Thought', in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd edn. New York: Routledge, pp. 273–291.
- Coomber, C. (2019) 'The practice educator role in supporting students', in *Practice Learning*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 32–48.
- Cousin, G. (2009) *Researching learning in higher education: An Introduction to contemporary methods and approaches*. London: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. and Poth, C. N. (2018) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- den Houting, J. (2019) 'Neurodiversity: An insider's perspective', *Autism*, 23(2), pp. 271–273. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318820762>.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2003) *The landscape of qualitative research: theories and issues*. Sage.
- Department of Health and Social Care (2019) *Strengths-based approach: Practice Framework and Practice Handbook*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strengths-based-social-work-practice-framework-and-handbook> (Accessed: 3.12.24).
- Disabled Students' Allowance Quality Assurance Group (2019) *DSA Guidance*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-students-allowances-dsa>.
- Doody, O. and Noonan, M. (2013) 'Preparing and conducting interviews to collect data', *Nurse Researcher*, 20(5), pp. 28–32.
- Duncan, R. (2018) 'Inclusive education for students with dyslexia in social work practice', *Journal of Social Work Education*, 54(2), pp. 271–283.

- Dwyer, C. (2022) 'The systemic barriers faced by social work students with dyslexia', *British Journal of Social Work*, 52(5), pp. 1123–1137.
- Ehri, L. C., Nunes, S. R., Stahl, S. A. and Willows, D. M. (2016) 'Systematic phonics instruction helps students learn to read: Evidence from the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis', *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), pp. 1–55.
- Eide, B. and Eide, F. (2011) *The Dyslexic Advantage: Unlocking the Hidden Potential of the Dyslexic Brain*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.
- Elliott, J. G. and Grigorenko, E. L. (2020) *The dyslexia debate*. Cambridge University Press.
- Engel, G. L. (1977) 'The need for a new medical model: A challenge for biomedicine', *Science*, 196(4286), pp. 129–136.
- Englander, M. (2016) 'The phenomenological method in qualitative psychology and psychiatry', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing*, 11(1), p. 30682.
- Enlow, P. T., McWhorter, L. G., Genuario, K. and Davis, A. (2019) 'Supervisor–supervisee interactions: The importance of the supervisory working alliance', *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 13(3), pp. 206–211. Available at: doi:10.1037/tep0000243.
- Eplin, R. L. (2021) *Experiences of students with dyslexia in higher education in England*. The University of Liverpool (United Kingdom).
- Falzon, H. (2021) 'Dyslexia in professional education: A narrative review', *Disability and Society*, 36(3), pp. 442–458.
- Finch, J. (2022) 'The lived experiences of social work students with dyslexia: Navigating challenges and developing resilience', *Social Work Education*, 41(2), pp. 193–207.
- Finlay, L. (2002) "Outing" the researcher: The provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity', *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(4), pp. 531–545.
- Frith, U. (1999) 'Paradoxes in the definition of dyslexia', *Dyslexia*, 5(4), pp. 192–214.

- Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S. and Vaughn, S. (2017) 'Peer-assisted learning strategies: An effective approach for supporting reading in students with dyslexia', *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 32(1), pp. 15–25.
- Fuchs, L. S., Powell, S. R., Seethaler, P. M., Cirino, P. T., Fletcher, J. M., Fuchs, D. and Zumeta, R. O. (2020) 'Improving the mathematics performance of students with math learning disabilities through intervention: A synthesis of research', *Exceptional Children*, 86(4), pp. 368–386.
- Furness, S. and Gilligan, P. (2014) *Social Work Education and Training*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gant, V. and Hewson, M. (2022). Social work students and dyslexia: outcomes from an empirical study and some implications for practice. *Social Work Education*. 43. 1-13. 10.1080/02615479.2022.2120192.
- Garner, L. (2021) 'Reflective writing and dyslexia', *Journal of Academic Writing*, 11(1), pp. 34–46.
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2018) *Regulation (EU) 2016/679*. Available at: <https://gdpr-info.eu/> (Accessed: 5 December 2024).
- Georgiou, G. K., Parrila, R. and Kirby, J. R. (2019) 'Rapid naming and reading development: The role of visual–verbal integration', *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 176, pp. 109–120.
- Gibbs, S. and Elliott, J. (2020) *Dyslexia and inclusion: Classroom approaches for assessment, teaching and learning*. David Fulton Publishers.
- Glazzard, J. (2010) 'The impact of dyslexia on students' self-esteem and the role of self-disclosure in academic settings', *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 26(1), pp. 63–78.
- Goodley, D., 2014. *Dis/ability studies: Theorising disablism and ableism*. London: Routledge.
- Goswami, U. (2014) 'Dyslexia: A cognitive neuroscience perspective', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 55(1), pp. 30–48.
- Grant, L. and Kinman, G. (eds) (2014) *Developing Resilience for Social Work Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Gray, D. E. (2004) *Doing Research in the Real World*. London: Sage.

- Griggs, M. (2021) 'Supporting dyslexic students in social work practice placements: Resources and strategies', *Journal of Social Work*, 21(5), pp. 567–579.
- Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hafford-Letchfield, T. (2010) *Social Work Practice Learning: A Student Guide*. Exeter: Learning Matters.
- Hafford-Letchfield, T. and Englebrecht, L. (2019) *Contemporary Practices in Social Work Supervision*. London: Routledge.
- Hahn, H. (1986) 'Disability and the urban environment: A perspective on Los Angeles', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 4(3), pp. 273–288.
- Hamill, C. and Sinclair, H. (2010) 'Bracketing – practical considerations in Husserlian phenomenological research', *Nurse Researcher*, 17(2), pp. 16–24.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (2019) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. 4th edn. London: Routledge.
- Harrison, B. and Kinsella, E. A. (2022) 'Artistic inquiry as methodology: New directions for qualitative research', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 35(4), pp. 300–317.
- Harrison, K. and Ruch, G. (2007) 'Social work and the use of self: On becoming and being a social worker', in Lymbery, M. and Postle, K. (eds) *Social Work: A Companion to Learning*. London: SAGE, pp. 40–49.
- Heidegger, M. (1962) *Being and time*. Translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. New York: Harper and Row. (Original work published 1927).
- Henderson, R. (2015a) 'Late diagnosis of dyslexia in higher education', *Dyslexia Review*, 26(1), pp. 17–22.
- Henderson, R. (2015b) 'Stigma and the impact on students with dyslexia in higher education', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 48(5), pp. 491–502.
- Hepburn, S. (2021) 'An exploration of the influence and impacts of dyslexia on social work practice'. *The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services*. Available at: <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/student-research/influence-and-impacts-dyslexia-social-work-practice>.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2022) *Higher Education Student Statistics*. Retrieved from <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/16-01-2022/sb258-higher-education-student-statistics>.

Hollinrake, S., Hunt, J., Dix, A. and Wagner, D. (2021) 'The lived experiences of students with dyslexia in higher education: Challenges in information processing, communication, and time management', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 54(3), pp. 180–192.

Hughes, M. (2018) 'Practice educators' perspectives on supervision', *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 15(1), pp. 71–90.

Hunt, R. and Mathews, I. (2018) 'Supporting students with dyslexia on placement: Theory into practice' in S. Maclean, ed. *Innovations in Practice Learning*. St Albans: Critical Publishing, pp. 121–136.

Husserl, E. (1931) *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology*. Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson. London: George Allen and Unwin.

International Dyslexia Association (2002) 'Definition of dyslexia', *Annals of Dyslexia*, 52(1), pp. 1–3.

International Dyslexia Association, n.d. *Instructional and Assistive Technology: Maximizing the Benefits for Students Who Struggle*. [online] Available at: <https://dyslexiaida.org/instructional-and-assistive-technology-maximizing-the-benefits-for-students-who-struggle/> [Accessed 18 November 2024].

Johnson, K. (2020) 'Strategies for supporting dyslexic students in higher education', *Journal of Inclusive Education*, 12(3), pp. 233–248.

Jones, E. and Smith, J. (2021) 'Applying the mediator and social models of disability in social work practice education', *Journal of Social Work Education*, 57(4), pp. 585–602.

Jones, M., Peters, A. and White, L. (2019) 'The impact of dyslexia on social work students' performance during placements', *Social Work Field Education Journal*, 15(2), pp. 200–215.

Kaushik, V. and Walsh, C. A. (2019) 'Pragmatism as a research paradigm and its implications for social work research', *Social Sciences*, 8(9), p. 255. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8090255>.

- Kirby, A. and Gibbon, H. (2018) 'Dyslexia and Employment', *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, 44(Winter), pp. 27-31.
- Kirby, J. R. (2020) *Reading development and difficulties: bridging the gap between research and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klykken, M. (2021) 'Mixed methods research in practice: Integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 15(3), pp. 280–297.
- Knight, C. (2001) 'A study of student and practice educator roles', *Journal of Social Work Education*, 37(2), pp. 305–318.
- Knight, C., Williams, S. and Harris, M. (2023) 'Social and environmental obstacles faced by social work students with dyslexia', *Journal of Social Work Education*, 59(1), pp. 75–87.
- Kuter, U. and Özer, B. A. (2020) 'The role of reflection in qualitative research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, pp. 1–13.
- Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2009) *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lain, L. (2006) 'Mixed methods in social inquiry: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(1), pp. 65–82.
- Langdridge, D. (2007) *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Lauterbach, D. (2018) *Experiencing Qualitative Research: An Introduction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Learning Ally. (n.d.) 'I don't suffer from dyslexia; I live with it. I suffer from the ignorance of people who think they know what I can and cannot do'. Retrieved from Learning Ally [<https://learningally.org/>].
- Leather, C. and Everatt, J. (2024) *Succeeding and Adult Dyslexia: Personal Perspectives, Practical Ideas, and Theoretical Directions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leech, N. L., and Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2011) Beyond constant comparison qualitative data analysis: Using NVivo. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 26(1), 70–84. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022711>.

- Lervåg, A. and Hulme, C. (2019) 'Understanding and addressing rapid automatized naming deficits in dyslexia: Implications for diagnosis and intervention', *Psychological Science*, 30(5), pp. 659–668.
- Levitt, J. M. (2017) 'Exploring the social model of disability', *Disability and Society*, 32(4), pp. 635–638.
- Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes, 2009. *Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing (LiPS) Program*. [online] Available at: <http://www.lindamoodbell.com> [Accessed October 2009].
- Macdonald, S. J. (2009) *Towards a Sociology of Dyslexia: Exploring Links Between Dyslexia, Disability and Social Class*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag. ISBN 978-3639131130.
- Macdonald, S. J. (2010) 'Towards a social reality of dyslexia', *Disability and Society*, 25(3), pp. 303–315. Available at: doi: 10.1111/j.1468-3156.2009.00601.x.
- Manthorpe, J., Moriarty, J. and Hussein, S. (2014) 'Content and purpose of practice educator training', *Social Work Education*, 33(2), pp. 177–190.
- Martiny, K. M., Høffding, S. and Roepstorff, A. (2021) 'Methodology in phenomenological research: Bridging first-person and third-person perspectives', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 20(1), pp. 1–20.
- Mathews, P. and Saunders, M. (2016) 'Addressing the challenges of dyslexia in social work education', *Journal of Social Work Education*, 52(4), pp. 441–453.
- McIntyre, D. (2005) 'Bridging the gap: Connecting research and policy', *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(4), pp. 435–439.
- Mertens, D. M. (2005) *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Meyer, A., Rose, D. and Gordon, D. (2014) *Universal design for learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

- Meyer, D. K., Lee, C.-J. G. and Thompson, B. (2014) 'The role of graphic organizers in improving reading comprehension among dyslexic students', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 49(3), pp. 293–311.
- Morgan, P. L., Farkas, G., Hillemeier, M. M. and Maczuga, S. (2017) 'Cultural attitudes towards education and learning disabilities: A study of US populations', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 50(6), pp. 623–635.
- Morris, C. and Turnbull, P. (2007) 'The social model of disability: Its application to dyslexia', *Dyslexia Review*, 18(4), pp. 12–20.
- Mortimore, T. and Crozier, W. (2006) *Dyslexia and Learning Style: A Practitioner's Handbook*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Moustakas, C. (1994) *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Myers, M. D. and Newman, M. (2007) 'The qualitative interview in IS research: Examining the craft', *Information and Organization*, 17(1), pp. 2–26. Available at: doi: 10.1016/j.infoandorg.2006.11.001.
- Nalavany, B. A., Carawan, L. W. and Rennick, P. M. (2014) 'Psychosocial experiences associated with confirmed and self-identified dyslexia: A retrospective study', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 47(4), pp. 323–334.
- NCSE. (2021) 'Relearning processes in students with dyslexia'. National Council for Special Education Report.
- Nicolson, R. I. and Fawcett, A. J. (1990) 'Automaticity: A new framework for dyslexia research?' *Cognition*, 35(2), pp. 159–182.
- Nijakowska, J. (2008) *Dyslexia in the foreign language classroom*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Norton, E. S. and Wolf, M. (2018) 'Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN) and reading fluency: Implications for understanding and treatment of reading disabilities', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 69, pp. 427–452.
- Norwich, B. and Eaton, A. (2014) 'The inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools: Policy and practice'. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 29(3), pp. 287–304.

- Ntinda, K. (2019) 'Narrative Research: A constructivist approach to studying the lived experiences of students', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 32(5), pp. 453–467.
- O’Gorman, K. D. and MacIntosh, R. (2015) *Research methods for business and management: A guide to writing your dissertation*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers.
- Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach*. London: Macmillan.
- Oliver, M. (1993) 'The social model of disability: A paradigm shift in the approach to disability', in *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice*. London: Macmillan, pp. 11–27.
- Oliver, M. (2003) 'The social model of disability: Thirty years on', *Disability and Society*, 18(3), pp. 365–374.
- Oliver, M. (2006a) 'Disability in practice', *Journal of Disability Studies*, 14(2), pp. 101–116.
- Oliver, M. (2006b) *Social Work with Disabled People*. 3rd edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oliver, M. (2013) The social model of disability: Thirty years on. *Disability and Society*, 28(7), pp. 1024–1026.
- Oliver, M. (2016) *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice*. 2nd edn. London: Red Globe Press.
- Olsen, K. and Hanssen, N. B. (2024) 'The new Norwegian Education Act as arrangements for inclusive education practices for students with SEN: the vanishing concept of the Nordic model?', *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, pp. 1–15.
- Ortiz, A., Wilkinson, C. Y., Robertson, P. M., Liu, Y., McGhee, B. D. and Kushner, M. I. (2020) 'English learners with learning disabilities: Shifting the focus from struggling learners to thriving learners', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 53(2), pp. 138–151.
- Pashler, H., McDaniel, M., Rohrer, D. and Bjork, R. (2008) 'Learning styles: Concepts and evidence', *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 9(3), pp. 105–119.

Patton, M. Q. (2002) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pinnock, H. and Evans, E. (2021) 'Pragmatic approaches to analyzing qualitative data for implementation science', *Implementation Science Communications*, 2, p. 74. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43058-021-00174-1>.

Prevett, M. (2013) 'The cerebellar deficit hypothesis in dyslexia research', *Journal of Neuropsychology*, 7(3), pp. 333–347.

Pugh, K. R., Mencl, W. E., Jenner, A. R., Katz, L., Frost, S. J., Lee, J. R., Shaywitz, B. A. and Shaywitz, S. E. (2001) 'Functional neuroimaging studies of reading and reading disability (developmental dyslexia)', *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews*, 7(3), pp. 234–243.

Qu, S. Q. and Dumay, J. (2011) 'The qualitative research interview', *Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management*, 8(3), pp. 238–264.

Qureshi, A., Jones, K. and Smith, L. (2023) 'Dyslexia and practice learning in social work education', *Social Work Education*, 42(1), pp. 123–135.

Ramus, F. (2017) *Understanding Dyslexia: A Guide for Educators and Parents*. Cham: Springer.

Ravalier, J. M. and Walsh, J. (2022) 'Creating inclusive environments for dyslexic students in higher education', *Higher Education Research and Development*, 41(1), pp. 45–60.

Reading Rockets, n.d. *How Can I Teach RAN to Improve My Students' Reading?* [online] Available at: <https://www.readingrockets.org/blogs/shanahan-on-literacy/how-can-i-teach-ran-improve-my-students-reading> [Accessed 18 November 2024].

Rees, C. and Taitt, P. (2012) 'The development of reflective writing skills in social work education', *Reflective Practice*, 13(2), pp. 187–204.

Reid, G. (2011) *Dyslexia: A Practitioner's Handbook*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Reid, G. (2017) *Dyslexia: A practitioner's handbook*. 5th edn. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Reid, G., Peer, L. and Szczerbinski, M. (2016) *Dyslexia and inclusion: Classroom approaches for assessment, teaching and learning*. London: Routledge.
- Rich, M., and Patashnick, J. (2011) Narrative research with audiovisual data: Video intervention/prevention assessment (VIA) and NVivo. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 5(3), 245–261. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570110041965>.
- Richardson, J. and Wydell, T. (2003) 'The impact of dyslexia on academic performance', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 73(1), pp. 1–21.
- Riddick, B. (2013) *Living with dyslexia: The social and emotional consequences of specific learning difficulties/disabilities*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
- Riddle, C. (2019) 'Barriers to success: Understanding the placement experiences of social work students with dyslexia', *Journal of Social Work Education*, 45(3), pp. 361–375.
- Robinson, O.C. (2014) 'Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), pp. 25–41. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543>.
- Rokahr, S. (2021) 'Mediation as a tool for conflict resolution in educational settings', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 65(3), pp. 489–506.
- Rontou, M. (2021). Mediating the Learning of a Student with Dyslexia in a Greek Supplementary School in the UK. 10.5772/intechopen.94267.
- Rose, J. (2009) *Identifying and teaching children and young people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties*. London: Department for Education.
- Rose, J., Atkinson, T. and Croll, P. (2009) 'Understanding the stigma of dyslexia in professional contexts', *Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13(5), pp. 497–508.
- Rose, J., Singleton, C. and Elton, M. (2009) 'The nature and extent of dyslexia in the UK: Report'. London: Department for Education.
- Roulston, A., Cleak, H., and Vreugdenhil, A. (2018). Promoting readiness to practice: Which learning activities promote competence and professional identity for student social workers during practice learning? *Journal of Social Work Education*, 54(2), 364–378

Roulston, A., Cleak, H., Hayes, D., McFadden, P., O'Connor, E. and Shore, C. (2021) 'To fail or not to fail: Enhancing our understanding of reasons why social work students failed practice placements (2015–2019)', *Social Work Education*, 42(4), pp. 459–475. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2021.1973991>.

Roulston, A., Cleak, H., Nelson, R., and Hayes, D. (2021). How power dynamics and relationships interact with assessment of competence: Exploring the experiences of student social workers who failed a practice placement. *British Journal of Social Work*. <http://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcab070>

Rybas, N. (2023) 'Dyslexia in higher education: A comparative study', *Journal of Higher Education*, 92(2), pp. 245–258.

Saleebey, D. (2006) *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice*. 4th edn. Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

Salisbury, Y., Foster, R., Hill, S. and Buck, G. (2024) 'Neurodiverse inclusive social work education considered through a student partnership', *Social Work Education*, pp. 1–16. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2024.2378915> (Accessed: 3.12.24).

Samuel, E. (2023) 'Preparing social work students to serve vulnerable populations: A review', *Journal of Social Work Education*, 39(2), pp. 98–112.

Schwandt, T. A. (1994) 'Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry', in Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds) *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 118–137.

Séror, J., and Weinberg, A. (2021) Exploring the affordances of NVivo for the analysis of qualitative data in writing research. *Journal of Writing Research*, 13(1), 103–131. <https://doi.org/10.17239/jowr-2021.13.01.04>

Shakespeare, T. (2006) *Disability Rights and Wrongs*. London: Routledge.

Shakespeare, T. (2013a) 'The social model of disability: Thirty years on', *Disability and Society*, 28(7), pp. 1024–1026.

Shakespeare, T. (2013b) *Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited*. London: Routledge.

Shakespeare, T. and Watson, N. (2001) 'The social model of disability: An outdated ideology?', *Research in Social Science and Disability*, 2, pp. 9–28.

- Share, D. L. (2021) 'The science of reading and dyslexia: Insights from intervention studies', *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 34(6), pp. 1349–1369.
- Shaw, J., Connelly, A. and Doyle, R. (2020a). 'Promoting inclusive teaching practices for students with disabilities.' *Social Work Education*, 39(4), 400–412. <https://doi.org/XXXX>.
- Shaw, S. F., Anderson, S. E. and Downs, P. A. (2020b) 'Dyslexia and self-advocacy in post-secondary education', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 53(4), pp. 309–319.
- Shaywitz, S. E. and Shaywitz, B. A. (2005) 'Dyslexia (specific reading disability)', *Biological Psychiatry*, 57(11), pp. 1301–1309.
- Shaywitz, S. E. and Shaywitz, B. A. (2008) 'Dyslexia (specific reading disability)', *Biological Psychiatry*, 57(1), pp. 1301–1309.
- Shaywitz, S. E. and Shaywitz, B. A. (2020) *Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level*. New York: Knopf.
- Simon, M. K. (2011) *Dissertation and scholarly research: Recipes for success*. Seattle, WA: Dissertation Success, LLC.
- Singer, J. (1999) 'Why can't you be normal for once in your life? From a 'problem with no name' to the emergence of a new category of difference', in *Disability Discourse*, edited by M. Corker and S. French, pp. 59–67. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Smith, J. A. (2018) "'Yes, it is phenomenological": A reply to Max Van Manen's critique of interpretative phenomenological analysis', *Qualitative Health Research*, 28(12), pp. 1955–1958.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P. and Larkin, M. (2009) *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Snowling, M. J. (2019) 'Dyslexia: A cognitive neuroscience perspective', *Cognitive Neuropsychology*, 36(5–6), pp. 308–327.
- Snowling, M. J. (2019) *Dyslexia: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Snowling, M. J. and Hulme, C. (1989) 'The nature and causes of reading difficulties in children', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 59(1), pp. 1–21.

Snowling, M. J., Hulme, C. and Nation, K. (2020) *The Science of Reading: A Handbook*. 2nd edn. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Social Work England (2020) Fitness to Practise: Guidance for Students and Educators.

Available at: <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/fitness-to-practise/guidance-for-students-and-educators/> (Accessed: 5 December 2024).

Social Work England (2021a) *Education and Training Standards*. Available at: <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/education-and-training/education-and-training-standards/>.

Social Work England (2021b) Guidance on practice placements: education and training standards.

Available at: <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/practice-placements-guidance/> (Accessed: 25 January 2025).

Stampoltzis, A., Chatzidaki, A. and Kiosseoglou, G. (2020) 'Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN) performance in dyslexic individuals: A comparative study', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 53(4), pp. 295–307.

Stanley, E. (2018) 'Creating supportive environments for students with dyslexia in higher education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(1), pp. 56–70.

Stein, J. (2018) 'The magnocellular theory of developmental dyslexia', *Dyslexia*, 24(1), pp. 59–71.

Stevens, E. A., Walker, M. A. and Vaughn, S. (2021) Current state of the evidence: Examining the effects of Orton-Gillingham reading interventions for students with or at risk for word-level reading disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 87(4), pp.397-417. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1301083.pdf> [Accessed 18 November 2024].

Stoeber, K. and Rountree, J. (2021) 'Supporting students with dyslexia: exploring effective strategies and interventions', *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 11(3), pp. 203–218.

- Strauss, A. L. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Taylor, I., Thomas, J. and Rycroft, N. (2016) *Practice Learning in Social Work: Learning from the Workplace*. London: Macmillan.
- Tedam, P. (2010) 'The MANDELA model of practice learning', *The Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 11(2), pp. 60–76. Available at: doi: 10.1921/175951511X661219.
- Thomas, C. (2004) *Disability and Impairment*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2014) *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*. 2nd edn. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Tsatsou, P. (2020) *Internet Studies: Past, Present and Future Directions*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Tufford, L. and Newman, P. (2010) 'Bracketing in qualitative research', *Qualitative Social Work*, 11(1), pp. 80–96.
- Turnbull, P. (2007) 'The impact of dyslexia on learning and wellbeing in adults', *Dyslexia Review*, 18(3), pp. 4–12.
- Vellutino, F. R., Fletcher, J. M., Snowling, M. J. and Scanlon, D. M. (2004) 'Specific reading disability (dyslexia): What have we learned in the past four decades?', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45(1), pp. 2–40.
- Warren, J. (2005) *Service User and Carer Involvement in Practice Learning*. London: Sage.
- Watson, M. (2020) 'How to undertake a literature search: a step-by-step guide', *British Journal of Nursing*, 29(7), pp. 431–435.
- Wiertz, D. and Boldt, A. (2023) 'Historical methodology in research: Exploring the past to understand the present', *Journal of Historical Research Methods*, 12(1), pp. 35–50.
- Withers, A. J. (2020) *Disability politics and theory: Revised and expanded edition*. Foreword by Robyn Maynard. Afterword by Rachel da Silveira Gorman. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.

- Wolf, M. and Bowers, P. G. (1999) 'The double-deficit hypothesis for the developmental dyslexias', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91(3), pp. 415–438.
- Wolf, M. and Denckla, M. B. (2018) *RAN and Reading: How Are They Related?* New York: Guilford Press.
- Woodward-Smith, R. (2017) 'Using mediation to support students with dyslexia in practice placements', *Social Work Education*, 36(6), pp. 703–714.
- Yan, S., Zhou, W., Zhang, Q. and Liu, J. (2021) 'Neuroimaging of dyslexia: A review of MRI studies', *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 123, pp. 118–133.
- Yin, R.K. (2018) *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. 6th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ziegler, D. (2020) *Social Inclusion and Disability: From Policy to Practice*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Appendices

Appendix A: Approved UEL ethics application

Dear Gloria Alozie,

Application ID: ETH1920-0153

Project title: 'Do You Really Want to Be a Social Worker'? 'A phenomenological exploration of the experiences of dyslexic social work students on practice placements.'

Lead researcher: Ms Gloria Alozie Awosika

Your application to Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee (EISC) was considered on the 19th February 2024.

The decision is: **Approved**

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation.

Your project has received ethical approval for 4 years from the approval date.

If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the administrator for the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee.

Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research/consultancy project you must complete 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'.

The approval of the proposed research/consultancy project applies to the following site.

Project site: **Microsoft Teams**

Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator: Ms Gloria Alozie Awosika

Approval is given on the understanding that the [UEL Code of Practice for Research](#) and the [Code of Practice for Research Ethics](#) is adhered to.

Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research/consultancy project should be reported using the University's form for [Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction](#).

The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of the project.

Yours sincerely,

Fernanda Da Silva Hendriks

Research Ethics Support Officer

Amendment:

Dear Gloria Alozie,

Application ID: ETH2425-0163

Original application ID: ETH1920-0153

Project title: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF DYSLEXIC SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS ON PRACTICE PLACEMENTS

Lead researcher: Ms Gloria Alozie Awosika

Your application to Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee (EISC) was considered on the 24th February 2025.

The decision is: **Approved**

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation.

Your project has received ethical approval for 4 years from the approval date.

If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the administrator for the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee.

Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research/consultancy project you must complete 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'.

Approval is given on the understanding that the [UEL Code of Practice for Research](#) and the [Code of Practice for Research Ethics](#) is adhered to.

Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research/consultancy project should be reported using the University's form for [Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction](#).

The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of the project.

For further guidance and resources please check our [Research Ethics Handbook](#).

Yours sincerely,

Fernanda Da Silva Hendriks

Research Ethics Support Officer

Ethics ETH1920-0153: Ms Gloria Alozie Awosika (High risk)

Appendix B: Participant information sheet

Project Title

A phenomenological exploration of the experiences of dyslexic social work students on practice placements.

Project Description

As part of my professional doctorate in social work, this study aims to explore the experiences of social work students with dyslexia on practice placements. I want to find out about how being diagnosed with dyslexia affects students' placement learning experiences and how placement experiences can be improved. Students' views will provide a better insight into their experiences on placement.

The aims of this study are as follows:

To gain an insight into how dyslexic social work students make sense of their individual lived experiences on placement.

Objectives

To explore the experiences and the perceptions of social work students with dyslexia about the challenges they face on practice placement.

To find out what were the helpful or unhelpful experiences on placement.

Research questions

1. "What are the experiences and challenges that social work students with dyslexia face whilst on practice placement"?
2. What are your personal views about being diagnosed with dyslexia?
3. How do you want to be supported on practice placements?
4. How can social work students with dyslexia be supported to take responsibility for their learning and development on practice placements?

Interview Process

You are invited to participate in this study which aims to understand your experiences as a social work student with dyslexia on placement. There is no fee for participation. The benefit of participating in this study is to talk about your experiences of being on placement as a social work student with dyslexia. Due to the recent *Patton, 2002-19* government guidelines, the interview will be held

via Microsoft Teams for an hour with each participant. Please note that this the interview will be audio recorded.

During the session, I will discuss the following areas with you:

- (1) Your experiences as a social work student with Dyslexia.
- (2) Whether your diagnosis of dyslexia affects you during placement? If so, how?
- (3) Before commencing placement, were you worried about how dyslexia may/may not have affected your placement experience?
- (4) Have you ever been reluctant to disclose that you have dyslexia? If so, why?
- (4a) What prompted your assessment for dyslexia?
- (5) Consider positive experiences you have had on placement; can you recall a time where you have been supported as a dyslexic student?
- (6) Consider difficult experiences on placement, can you recall a time where you feel you have not been supported as a dyslexic student?
- (7) How might you be supported on placement as a dyslexic student?

Description of any hazard or risk

There is no anticipated adverse impact on the participants. I believe that the risk to the participants is minimal, however, discussions may be uncomfortable when talking about your personal placement experiences. If you become upset in any way, I will discontinue the interview and refer you for additional support and advice.

Please note, if there is an indication on the consent form about issues or concerns regarding your participation in this study, I will take time to hear your concerns and will refer you to the appropriate support services such as

- The Samaritans on 116 123
- Students' counselling and wellbeing services
- The British Dyslexia Association helpline: helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk
- British Dyslexia Association helpline: Phone Number 0333 405 4567
- Or British Dyslexia Association on 0333 405 4555

This study does not involve under 16s.

I can confirm that the researcher has no relationship with the participants in this study.

Confidentiality of the data

Your data will be handled confidentially at all times; your name will not be requested. The transcripts will also be kept confidential and only be used for research purposes. A signed consent form will be kept separate from all other data. All data gathered during this study will be held securely and anonymously. It is also important to note that any data generated in this study will be retained in accordance with the university's data protection policy. If you wish to withdraw from the study, contact us with your participant number and your information will be deleted from our files. Please be aware; however, that data in the summary form may already have been used for publication at the time of the request.

You have a right to withdraw from the study at any time. Should you wish to withdraw, please quote the ID number provided to you on the debriefing form so that the researcher will be able to identify your data. Confidentiality will be strictly maintained following the current GDPR requirements and the Data Protection Act 2018. Your confidentiality will be maintained unless disclosure is made that indicates you or someone else is at serious risk of harm. I would like to inform you that there may be situations where this may be breached. For example, if I consider there is a risk you may harm yourself or others; such disclosure may be reported to the relevant bodies.

If you are troubled or worried about any aspect of this study, or issues it may have raised, or wish to speak in confidence about any concerns, please feel free to contact any of the following agencies:

(1) The student counselling service, Telephone: 020 8223 4646

(2) The SAMARITANS, Telephone: 01850 60 90 90.

(3) The NHS Counselling Services at The Tavistock and Portman on 020 87493792

If you have any concerns regarding any aspect of your participation in this study, please do not hesitate to contact me for immediate action.

Location

All interviews are held via Microsoft Teams.

Remuneration

There are no fee payments for participating in this study.

Disclaimer

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during the research. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme, you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to provide a reason. Please note that your data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis – after this point, it may not be possible.

University Research Ethics Sub-Committee



If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

Catherine Hitchens, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43, University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD
(Telephone: 020 8223 6683, Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk).

For general enquiries about the research, please contact the Principal Investigator on the contact details at the top of this sheet.

Appendix C: Participant consent form

To be completed by the participant.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I have read the information sheet about this study• I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study• I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions• I have received enough information about this study• I understand that all information shared in the focus group discussions will need to be treated with confidentiality by myself and other members• I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ at any time (until such date as this will no longer be possible, which I have been told)○ without giving a reason for withdrawing○ If I am, or intend to become, a student at the University of Greenwich) without affecting my future with the university.• I understand that my research data may be used for a further project in anonymous form, but I am able to opt out of this if I so wish, by ticking here. <input type="checkbox"/>• I agree to take part in this study.	
Signed (participant):	Date:
Name in block letters: GLORIA AWOSIKA	
Signature of researcher 	Date
This project is supervised by: Dr. Robin Mutter and Dr Dawn Ludick	
Researcher's contact details (including telephone number and e-mail address): Gloria Awosika Doctoral Student 	

Appendix D: Participants' debrief form



RESEARCH PARTICIPANT DEBRIEFING

Project Title: A phenomenological exploration of the experiences of dyslexic social work students on practice placements.

Thank you very much for participating in the study.

As part of my professional doctorate in social work, this study aims to explore social work students' experiences with dyslexia on practice placements. You are invited to participate in this study to understand your experiences as a social work student with dyslexia. The benefit of sharing your experiences is providing a better insight into their placement experiences.

The purpose of this research is to understand how social work students with dyslexia make sense of their individual lived experiences on placement. Another purpose of the research is to explore the experiences and perceptions of social work students with dyslexia about their challenges on practice placement.

Another purpose of the study is to investigate the perspectives and experiences of students who have dyslexia on the difficulties they face when on practice placement and to determine whether or not the participants' experiences during their placement were beneficial to them. A further aim is to find out the helpful or unhelpful experiences on placement.

If you would like to withdraw from the study, please get in touch with me and provide your participant number so that I can remove your information from the files. Your information is stored in a safe location and is kept confidential.

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation, please raise this with the investigator:

Names of researcher: Gloria A. Awosika (Mrs)

Contact Details: [REDACTED]

If you are a student and feel that you need counselling support after this study, please contact The Student Wellbeing Service, Telephone: [20 8223 3000](tel:2082233000).

If you are a non-student and feel that you need counselling support after this study, please contact the SAMARITANS, Telephone: 01850 60 90 90.

Appendix E: Participant recruitment email

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: 07 October 2020 11:06

To: Ann A Davies [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Recruiting Study Participants

This email is from an external source. Ensure you trust the sender before opening any attachments or clicking on any links.

Hi Anne,

I hope this email finds you well.

As part of my Professional Doctorate in Social Work Programme at UEL, I have now received ethics approval from URES to proceed with recruiting study participants.

I am emailing you to help me to open up a call for expression of interest for the participants.

I have enclosed a participant information sheet and a consent form, as well as the advert for the project.

Let me know if you would like me to send you the ethics approval letter.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Gloria A (ISW/BIA/PE/ FHEA Fellow/ Doctoral Researcher.

Service Manager

Omega Community Living



[illegible]

Appendix G: Interview schedule/prompt questions

1. Could you tell me why you wanted to become a social work student?
2. What led you to get a dyslexia assessment and when did you do so?
Prompt 1: What kinds of emotions/feelings were you experiencing at the time?
Prompt 2: Could you tell me a little more about that?
3. Could you describe what it is like to be a dyslexic student on placement?
Prompt 1: Can you share specific examples of placement experiences you've had?
4. What positive or negative experiences did you face?
Prompt 1: Do you have any particular examples in mind?
5. How does dyslexia affect your day-to-day placement activities, if at all?
Prompt 1: Could you provide me with particular examples?
6. How did you feel about disclosing that you have dyslexia on placement?
Prompt 1: Did this have an effect on your placement learning experiences?
Prompt 2: Did people's perceptions about you changed as a result of the disclosure?
7. What reasonable adjustment do the placement providers offer you?
Prompt: Could you provide me with particular examples?
8. As a dyslexic social work student, what changes would you want to see?
9. Are there any further comments you would want to make regarding your placement experiences?

Thank you very much again for taking the time to come and talk with me today. I appreciate you giving up your time.

Appendix H: Data analysis report

1. Experience of being diagnosed with dyslexia

Table 3: Summary table and extract of coded transcript 1–15

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
Experience and emotions at diagnoses	Do not like sympathies	2	...but I don't want to say it's affecting me because I don't want the stigma. I don't want you to look at me, feel sorry for me. That kind of thinking. (ID-01)
	Feeling ashamed	2	...initially I feel ashamed, I feel ashamed because erm... originally, I feel it was a disability. (ID-07)
	Feeling emotional outburst	6	So I think all this kind of affected my confidence and emotional wellbeing as well at that time. Who's being nervous? I'm anxious. (ID-02)
	Feeling lost	1	...feel a bit lost. Uhm, I feel like I'm not understanding things, uhm and I'm just trying to keep up. That's how I felt, yeah. (ID-11)
	Feeling of stigma	4	...doesn't tell you how the stigma you know in my head like. (ID-01)
	Feeling relieved	4	I mean, I was relieved. OK, yeah it was. I mean it was fine. Good to know what I've been going through all my life like I think it's been a hindrance so it was definitely a relief. (ID-06)
	Feeling sad	1	After I did my assessment with the lady, she told me I'm dyslexic, I felt a little bit sad because it's like I've been trying and now it's just another thing to add on to the list of things that've just been going on (ID-15)
	Feeling shocked	2	I was a victory by then. I was not strong as a bit teary and I was like Oh no, this cannot be. (ID-05)
	Frustrating	3	It's frustrating because you're in an environment where you're not screaming, or I have dyslexia. (ID-12)

	Nervous	2	I felt quite nervous. (ID-13)
	Reluctance to accept	2	...so I found that a little bit hard because it's like I'm I wanna do the work and I don't want that to be a reason why I don't get a good mark on my portfolio. (ID-15)
Fear of disclosing	Apprehensions	1	It turned out that you know my supervisor was very supportive of me and very and proactive in getting me support and offering support, but initially I was very apprehensive to disclose, I was I was dyslexic 'cause I fear of being judged for have been looked down upon. (ID-13)
	Disclosing only when needed	4	Only place I disclose will be, maybe, an application and I think you know my PE, my tutor, my class, my university tutor has helped as well. (ID-01)
	Dyslexia is perceived as liability	1	For some organisations, they think being dyslexic is a liability. That discouraged me to come forward. (ID-01)
	Fear of being perceived dumb	1	...a lot of people who don't have dyslexia, they tend to call people with dyslexia, are stupid and that was the blurred line that I just didn't like. (ID-15)
	Stigma and culture	4	...learning difficult is there's a stigma around there, people look down on you, nothing wrong with you and you're just you're just not, it's not talked about, very hidden, so it stayed that way for me. My culture plays a big part in it. there's a taboo against dyslexia, a stigma around so you know. it's so much of a cultural thing. My parents are loving people, they honestly are my family, immensely supportive, but in terms of the Bengali culture and having any sort of...I wouldn't say disability, but yeah, learning difficult is there's a stigma around there, people look down on you. (ID-12)

Family background	1	Even being a part of a South Asian family, even if I was to bring up, you know, I'm dyslexic there would be loads of questions, so I didn't really voice it. But obviously, later on now coming into my third year of placement, my manager started picking up on a few things and asked me, you know, and I started questioning myself a little bit more. (ID-12)
Feeling ashamed	1	Some students have dyslexia, but they are ashamed of disclosing it. If student refuse to disclose this disability it puts placement provider in a tight corner (ID-07)
Feeling of being judged	6	I was not having the confidence to tell my employers that I was dyslexic, because I think they will judge me, or may think, I am putting it on. (ID-01)
May bring anxiety	1	Is it something that you'll be requiring so there's not so much pressure on the student to come forward and disclose 'cause sometimes with that disclosure comes a lot of anxiety, fear all these emotions, but if it's brought to you in a way where, ok, we're already used to having people with dyslexia, we have this support in place. (ID-13)
Not want to be seen special	3	Not telling them no very locked any. Maybe speak to the manager but not with my colleagues. They like, you know, the other social workers because I don't want to be seen that kind of seeing. (ID-01)
Prone to criticism	1	I didn't even want... yeah, I didn't want to, I think it's because I felt at the time like I was really being critiqued which I know it helped (ID-10)

Motivation for disclosing dyslexic condition	Difficulty in studies and resultant shame	1	Idea books every time I walk is just spellings, everything jumbled, and then that shamed yeah, but that would he then he was the one that said I think you need to go for assessment you know for dyslexia and thinking was that I said is something an. And to do with even my reading as well, my region is very slow like I'll be seeing the word I can't pronounce them (ID-01)
	Disclosing may reduce suffering	1	...if I did not disclose it, I will be suffering in silence, so when I disclosed it that when I discovered that it is when I got enough support because if I did not disclose it, I would not have enough support (ID-07)
	Improved academic performance	1	It boosted my academic performances as well. Ideally, I'm good in calculations but when it comes to literacy skills that where I have issues with specific learning difficulties. So, its.... It's a booster and I didn't look at myself as, um, as a regret or possibly it affected my, um, integrity or my confidence. No, it boosted my confidence, it put me on a good pedestal, you know? That, with my specific learning difficulties, it should be things of which I can capitalise on to enhance my performance when it comes to literacy skills. (ID-07)
	Watching celebrities with dyslexia	1	What encouraged me to come out was that when I saw some celebrities, they said how they were dyslexic, then I decided to come out with it. (ID-01)
Strategies to hide dyslexia	Avoid speaking in meetings	2	I tried to avoid it, seat back if I have something to say, I want to say it because I think people will not understand, and I just sit back. (ID-01)
	Pretending oneself all right	1	I overwork myself to catch up, I pretended. (ID-01)

Pushing oneself hard at work	1	I was pushing myself hard, and I was pushing myself so hard, even in terms of writing, I was struggling but pushing myself so hard to hide my dyslexia. (ID-01)
------------------------------	---	--

Table 4: RQ 1 – Support being provided to students with dyslexia on practice placement

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
01. Provision of resources	Laptop with additional support	1	I've already got a laptop that has additional support on it, I actually didn't need anything else. (ID-14)
	Provision of extra time to finish tasks	3	I would spend more time reading just so I understand and it's just important because it's a part of the role, so... (ID-11)
	Provision of softwares	3	...there should have been deadlines to make sure that software has been put in... (ID-09)
	Provision of special equipment	3	I have all the good facilities to support me, NHS just supplied specialised equipment for me. (ID-07)
	Written guidelines	2	Bates, sort of, written up a little guide, I guess highlight how my dyslexia might affect me on placement. Then again, I was very honest is like this guide has been made... (ID-04)
02. Special consideration by the organization	Could work quite openly	2	We can work together to understand what you need and what helps you, and then that will help you. (ID-04)
	Preference for supervisor on placement	1	I would have preferred female to be honest only because, you know I'm not gonna ask you my culture plays a big part in it, my religion plays a big part that I'm Muslim, so naturally I am, you know, I, I felt comfortable. I feel more comfortable around women and that's just the way I am I'm not, it's not that I'm opposed to being around men that's what I'm

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
			not sure that's what's natural to me, I have a family full of girls as well, so it's just normal for me and I feel like women have more of a caring and nurturing sides than that men don't have. In places where he lacks sympathy or empathy, for me it made me more uncomfortable to talk to him about such a such a sore subject. (ID-12)
	Religion issues on placement	1	I would have preferred female to be honest only because, you know I'm not gonna ask you my culture plays a big part in it, my religion plays a big part that I'm Muslim. (ID-12).
	Gender issue in placement	3	I feel more comfortable around women and that's just the way I am I'm not, it's not that I'm opposed to being around men that's what I'm not sure that's what's natural to me, I have a family full of girls as well, so it's just normal for me and I feel like women have more of a caring and nurturing sides than that men don't have. In places where he lacks sympathy or empathy, for me it made me more uncomfortable to talk to him about such a such a sore subject. (ID-12).
	PE's responsibility to place social work students with dyslexia	1	I really think it's important for that discussion to carry on and to be held and the placement to be held accountable for it as well is, and I think it's joint accountability. It's... it's my responsibility...it's the PE responsibilities, the placements, responsibility to ensure that you know the placement runs smoothly and that I don't experience struggles on placement just because I'm dyslexic. (ID-13)
	Removing obstacles	1	the placement... is my dyslexia has had any hindrance on my

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
			placement. (ID-14)
	Sense of support	1	I was talking to, you know, my practice educator and my personal tutor about it. I felt supported. (ID-12)
	Supportive organizational system	7	really build strong relationships and feel confident and not embarrassed to talk about my dyslexia and things that I find hard, and so that was very supportive, (ID-03)
	Time for settlement	1	I was given time to settle in (ID-15)
03. Provision of learning opportunities	Hands on activities	2	...the positives...I would say the hands on and actually doing it (ID-10)
	Learning social work with confidence	1	I think a big part of learning social work is growing confidence and this was a very big knock for my confidence, (ID-12)
	Support in learning industry relevant skills	1	...oh, it helps in my verbal skills, it helps to record most of my erm... it helps my recording of most of my dictation, most of the presentation, it help me to because I have Grammarly premium, it helps me to correct my spelling, my grammar, most of these things even when I put it on the system is corrects it for me, because I have grammar professional individuals that record sometimes some of my presentations and correct it before I present it and the DSA glint, there experiment of their online learning and support platform so if I miss some of the uses of the software downloaded for me I can easily go there and refresh my memory using the software, so ideally it has really helped me positively in all what I've been doing. (ID-07)

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
	Teaching new skills	1	...learn the new skills for my placement. (ID-11)
	Trainings	6	Everyone is unique in their own ways and if the providers can go on training. Dyslexia training and how it effects students on placement or with any books because when you go online, there's not much. (ID-02)
04. Support from colleagues	Positive role of service user	3	It positively impacts on the service user because there are so many challenges. If you don't speak out and you go to a service user. (ID-05)
	Support from colleagues	9	There was much more support and understanding because my supervisor was a social worker (ID-02)
	Support from fellow dyslexic	1	Positive experiences was when I was able to identify with another student who was dyslexic. That enabled me to feel a bit more confident about... and, you know, my learning disability, and this enabled me to, kind of, reach out to... (ID-13)
	Supportive manager	4	...because my manager is very supportive although I've told him, the only thing is I don't think that he has registered it (ID-08)
	Sympathy of colleagues	4	But then I had to complete my work, and struggled to complete my reflections, and people would say may be you should take a break, but I said no, but I had to complete the work because I needed more time, and not having break. (ID-01)

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
05. Institutional support	Financial support from NHS	1	...so, NHS spent a lot of money, they spent up to at least £6000 on me alone, they provided me with specialised equipment like the laptop, the laptop they loaded a lot of software there, a software like global auto correct software so whenever I type the software correct it automatically, grammar professional individual, spellex, dictation gold, its detecting and the system will process it and record it... correct the grammar, text helps reads and write gold and there was equally aspere and online language support plans, that's if I wanted to review any of the software provided for me, how it works, if I mix or forget anything about how those software's work I can click on the ask page and just go through because it is customer friendly. (ID-07)
	Support from court	2	...supporting him to court... (ID-10)

Table 5: RQ 2 – Impact of dyslexia on daily placement tasks

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
01.Learning difficulty	Effect on learning ability	1	...it affect my level of learning ability, (ID-07)
	Hampered reading skills	2	...it affect my level of on non-viable reading skills and sometime I forgot things easily... (ID-07)
	Hampered written ability	6	...erm I've struggled with the writing so much, erm (ID-10)
	Loosing attention	1	...because I think people with dyslexia its easy to lose attention like I need someone who's going to ask me questions, make sure that I am constantly engaged in what they are saying or I just wont you know, it will just go over my head. (ID-09)

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
	Low concentration level	2	...apart from that my concentration level is still low, my ability to remember verbal instruction and information, such as planning and organising my work is still affecting me. (ID-07)
	Relearning processes is challenging	1	It's hard and it would be I think it for me is that I can learn it and then suddenly if I don't use it for a day or two or a week, you know or I do something differently and I do it wrong. It's really hard to relearn it again, so learning those processes can be challenging. (ID-03)
	Slow learning	1	I asked repeated questions because my dyslexia and specific learning disability is still impacting on my ability to process words, to concentrate most of the time, so whenever I asked questions she understands, and she normally comes back and repeats herself. And most of the time to my ability to process information... is still low. (ID-07)
02. Bad impression	Colleagues' impression of making up	1	...people think you're making it up that's another thing. Sometime people think that I am making it up, and they say what do you mean, it's a simple thing. (ID-01)
	Colleagues' views of being lazy	2	...some people feel you're just being lazy and it just kills you. (ID-01)
	Constantly explaining my needs	1	...so the issue was having to explain your needs constantly... (ID-09)
	Labelled as slow	1	...being called slow on placement, which was a bit hard, it's like I was doing it, but it's just not at their pace and I understand that, but it was hard to hear. (ID-15)
03. Low performance	challenges in doing tasks	2	I think also changing dynamic of work... (ID-09)

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
	Couldn't use any software	2	It was my own software like I would have. I've always, you know, I had my own things I could, but they still would have to have bought something to run it and they refused. Yeah, they refused. (ID-03)
	Difficulty in conversation in meetings	3	In meeting I don't like to talk, I just feel because even though I know what to say, it might take longer time to process it to say what I want to say. Even if I say it might not be making sense (ID-01)
	Longer time to do the work	7	...it takes me time to write, writing is my problem, it takes longer time to process information, it take me longer time to write, (ID-01)
	Needing extra time	4	...but I really struggle with time keeping, which is why I have to be busy. (ID-04)
	Reduced working memory	2	...but I still have the impact because it affected my working memory, it affects my phonological processing (ID-07)
	Spending time on taking notes	8	Every day I do like some bullet points of what I've done that day. I'll put like, yeah, the date and then what happened to each point? Just So what I'm doing, reflective work University, I can tell I did. (ID-04)
04. Stress	Anxiety	2	...just gave me a lot of anxiety... (ID-12)
	exhausting in attempting to meet expectation	7	With PE, we will discuss about my work, but we end the discussion, that's where the whole thing will stop, and nothing is done about it., and go you back to the expectation, and then you go back to the struggle to catch up. (ID-01)
	Feeling frustration	7	I have so many things in my head but to organise it becomes a problem, and I become so

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
			frustrated. (ID-01)
	Feeling of being incapable	6	Feelings of your not capable, it takes me time to write, writing is my problem, it takes longer time to process information, it take me longer time to write. (ID-01)
	Feeling of Inequality at work	2	...don't feel on the course the course doesn't give you that. So yeah, they talk about equality and everything, but then they don't practice that when it comes to a learning disability, (ID-14)
	overstretching oneself	2	I overwork myself to catch up (ID-01)
	Psychological problems	1	...it affects my phonological processing, that is, the way that I process information. It took me some time before I could process information, it affected my phonological awareness, visual processing... (ID-07)
	Shaming by others	1	I think being in the placement and people just people saying things like, oh, that was silly, or you should have read over that, or you shouldn't have been making that mistake, you're a third-year student, but there's a lot of things that get to you, 'cause you think I've made it to year 3 for a reason, I'm doing something right, So if you just put all of that hard work done it helps. (ID-12)
	Stress of work	2	...when I see reading, everything just jumps at me, and I said, oh my goodness, I tried to find the simplest way. (ID-01)

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
	Stress to prove oneself	5	I don't want to fail, I don't want people to judge me, by being dyslexic, so, and including university work. That was playing on my mind every single time I am going to work, how am I going to write things? (ID-01)
05. Social Isolation	Feeling alone	1	...at times I felt very alone because although you can easily say I can relate you don't have this like, so you don't know how it feels. You don't. You're not seeing things that I am seeing it, so you don't understand my struggle. So, I did feel alone that time as well. (ID-12)
	Feeling of being isolated	1	I think I think for me; I just feel like I'm in my own bubble. I'm isolated, I feel isolated even though people don't isolate me. I feel isolated and then some things I do. I see some reaction and that even makes me feel bad. (ID-01)
	Isolated	1	you know sometime if you have a disability, it can give you social economic isolation, you won't be able to mingle with your pairs. (ID-07)

Table 6: RQ 3 – Reasonable accommodations by the placement providers

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
01. Dedicated placement office	Establish dedicated office for placement	2	...the placement have created room to accommodate me. She has been ok... she's been ok. (ID-07)
	One on one sessions for placement	1	...more one to one sessions to see if I'm going alright on my placement because I don't believe that we got enough with our tutors and so, and I would say that they need to make tutors aware of their role to be honest. (ID-15)

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
	Resolve issues in induction week	2	I would want things to be addressed within the first, my induction week, so you know through induction, giving me a thorough induction, it is very important (ID-12)
02. Provide necessary resource	Accessible software	4	Really accessible is to be able to offer the software that, generally, the students will always already have just to be able to incorporate it into their own systems to have things in place to support this texting student. (ID-03)
	Assistance in writing	1	...if there was report writing, giving more allowance or giving more notice... (ID-14)
	Awareness about resources before placement	1	I think before getting into placement, you know you people should be more aware of the resources around them... (ID-12)
	Provide language resources	1	...obviously, you've got things like Grammarly that can help you with you know grammar and spelling and things like that. (ID-14)
03. Foster a conducive culture	Awareness regarding how to cope with dyslexia	3	Want it to be in, you know, an ascribed in, greeted in the placement process, maybe four press educators and practicing providers to have an understanding of dyslexia that their cost or reading, or something that can be. (ID-03)
	Culture to meet the needs of dyslexic people	1	one of the requirements should be how they meet the need of social work students with dyslexia with additional needs, the place we should have to answer to that before they take any students on placement because... there are some placements which just accept students, but then they don't

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
			really know how to manage this next year, they're not very, they're not fully versed on it, and they genuinely don't know... (ID-13)
	Empower people to help social work students with dyslexia	1	...it was definitely a positive way and the fact that I can help to empower other young people who have dyslexia by going and having those assessments, she made that clear, my PE made that so clear for me, like if you get your support and your help you can help somebody else (ID-10)
	Practice rights of social work students with dyslexia	2	From my experience, they have that written awareness that there are people and they don't seem to discriminate against them. But in practice that's just where the issue is in practice. (ID-01)
	Repetition and writing notes	8	Creating a diary or do inflective practice. Show a question. (ID-02)
	Sensitization at workplace to be supportive to dyslexic people	2	There's just the understanding that, yeah, we know you will do it in the best time you can and then at supervision like very early on with my learning styles, good. (ID-04)
	Spread awareness among people about dyslexia	8	I think that when it's like I said awareness is there, but in practice you know there's not so much. You could do and. (ID-01)
	Supervisor understands learning styles	1	...you know supervisors to understand their different learning styles. (ID-14)
04. Trainings	Learning disability training	1	...there needs to be a learning disability training, maybe there needs to be something like that that recognises, or maybe placement agencies need to have this screening test done. (ID-14)

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
	Metal health training	1	...there is needed some form of training the same way there would be safeguarding training, mental health training. (ID-14)
	Training on using the system	1	I would say training on how to like to use their systems. (ID-15)
	Trainings for placement providers	1	...any placement provider too must go on training about, because if you don't have the skills how will you be able to support the students in the... erm learning environment. So, it should mandatory, be part of the policy that all placement providers should have specific training in that field. But having all those three things in place I think it will have a positive impact on students learning ability. (ID-07)
05. Supportive system at placement	Adjust workload and time	2	If we have a student that is keeping women, if they've accepted me, that means I'm capable, but they have this challenge. They should look at this. If it's 10, give them eight and follow up, and sometimes you feel like you. (ID-01)
	Better communication by on-site supervisor	1	...that's really important and communicating better with your onsite supervisors that really important as well... (ID-12)
	Duties with on-site supervisor	1	...the reasonable adjustment was just to, kind of, carry out your duties on site supervisor. (ID-11)
	Flexibility for work	1	The flexibility. Yeah, do work your way. (ID-04)
06. Understanding	Audio learning	1	...and I'm audio. (ID-14)

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
the preferred learning styles	Learning by practice	1	I think you know just practicing. I have to do more practice. (ID-01)
	Learning from instructors	1	Yeah, learning from people but letting visually. (ID-01)
	Personalized care plan	5	Having a plan in place. Personalize. A plan tailored to me how that's going to help me on placement that really helps me. (ID-02)
	Reflective Theories	4	I've forgotten the word of character. Yeah reflector. We have activists, reflector theories. (ID-04)
	Understand challenges in reading	1	...the challenge was in terms of my understanding of my comprehension in terms of what I was reading... (ID-13)
	Visual learning	2	I with my study alike visual. (ID-01)

Table 7: Experience as social work students with dyslexia

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
01. Sense of contribution	Being Hopeful in Placement	3	Yeah, that's fine. It means that there's light at the end of the tunnel. That I can get through, but with support. With a little bit of support, I don't think I need a major amount of support, but just with a little bit of extra guidance and a little bit more compassion and understanding. And just maybe things explained a bit more because the lectures are quite fast paced and we're expected to just know and understand a lot. And I think that pressure from me. Uhm, it doesn't feel relieved, but from personally it feels relieved, not from the uni, it doesn't feel like a relief. I still feel like I've gotta be fast paced, but personally I feel relieved like my own personal judgment on myself is a relief. (ID-11)
	Advocacy for others	2	And being able to advocate for others. (ID-11)

Theme	Initial codes	Frequency	Quotes from Interviews
	Being there for children	2	...being there for children and giving them that support, but... (ID-12)
	Enjoy being a social worker	2	I studied criminology, I wasn't satisfied, but when the opps came to do social work, I was happy to take it up, "oh I talk too much". (ID-01)
	Supporting others	3	I feel like it accompanies to a lot of my interests and I like the idea of you know helping and working to support families and... (ID-09)
	To create change	5	So I thought if I become a social worker, maybe I can also add and do something and do and create a change. (ID-05)
	To help people in community	4	...and also focus of the community because I feel like a lot of stuff without the community focus or element it doesn't really change. (ID-09)
	Work for local authority	1	...studying social work will allow me to work for a local authority. (ID-13)
02. Challenging task	Challenging	4	I think that's very challenging, it's very challenging, it's the little things that should be so simple it seems challenging. (ID-08)
	Lot of pressure	1	...so there's a lot of pressure to know this stuff because it's a requirement you know, and as much as I want to know it law, I've got law model this year, my biggest worry, it makes me really worried like I'm putting it off to the last assignment to do. (ID-11)
	Nerve wracking	1	...was really nerve wracking. As a dyslexic student you don't know what to expect and when you go on to the placement. (ID-02)

Sense of contribution

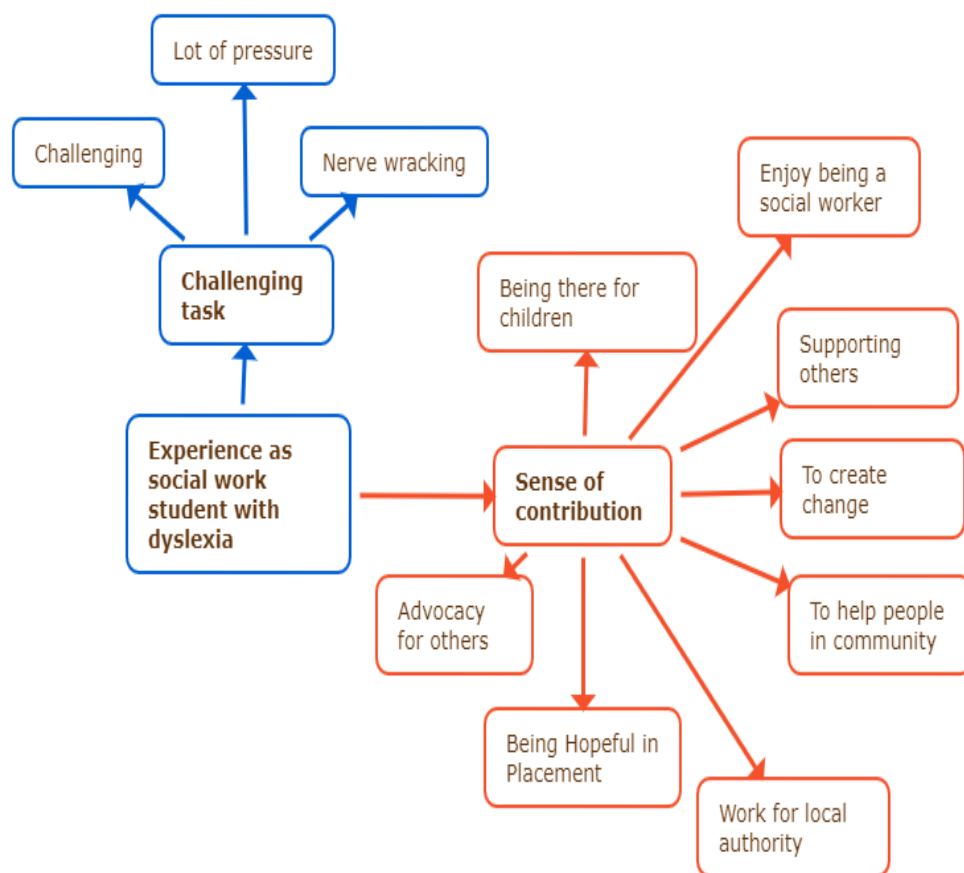


Figure 6: Thematic Map 1 of participant themes

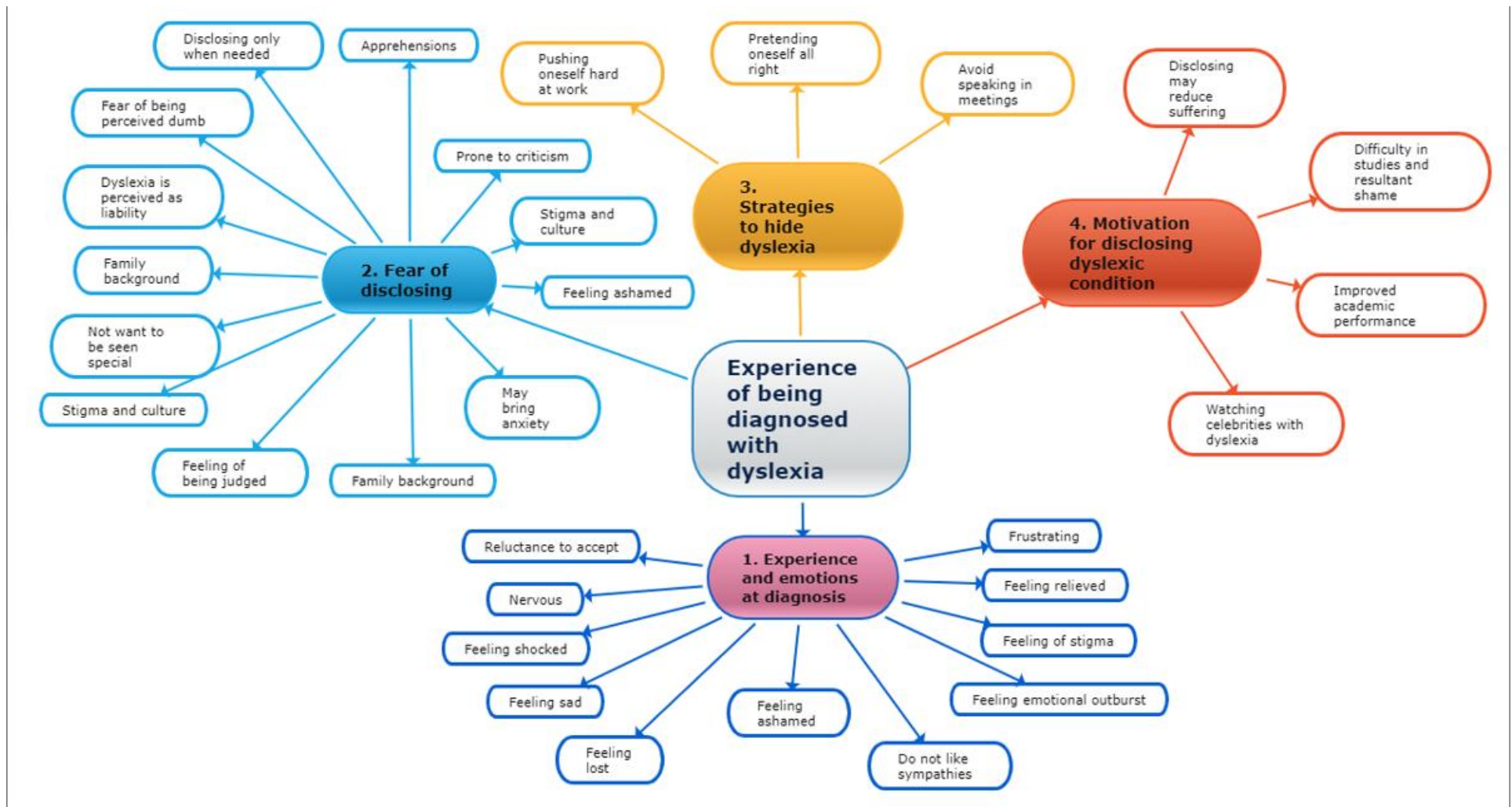


Figure 7: Thematic Map 2 of participants themes

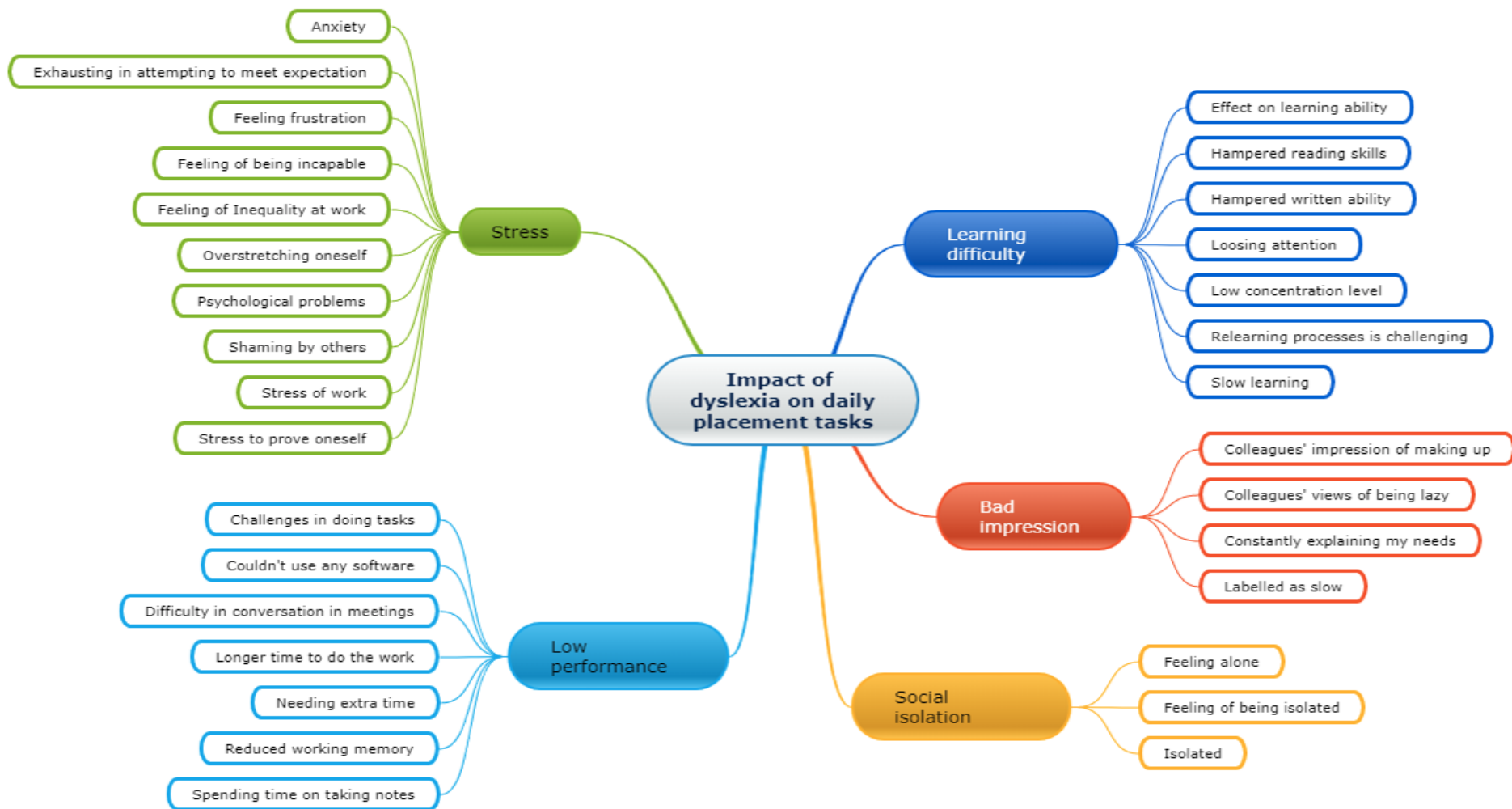


Figure 8: Thematic Map 3 of participant themes

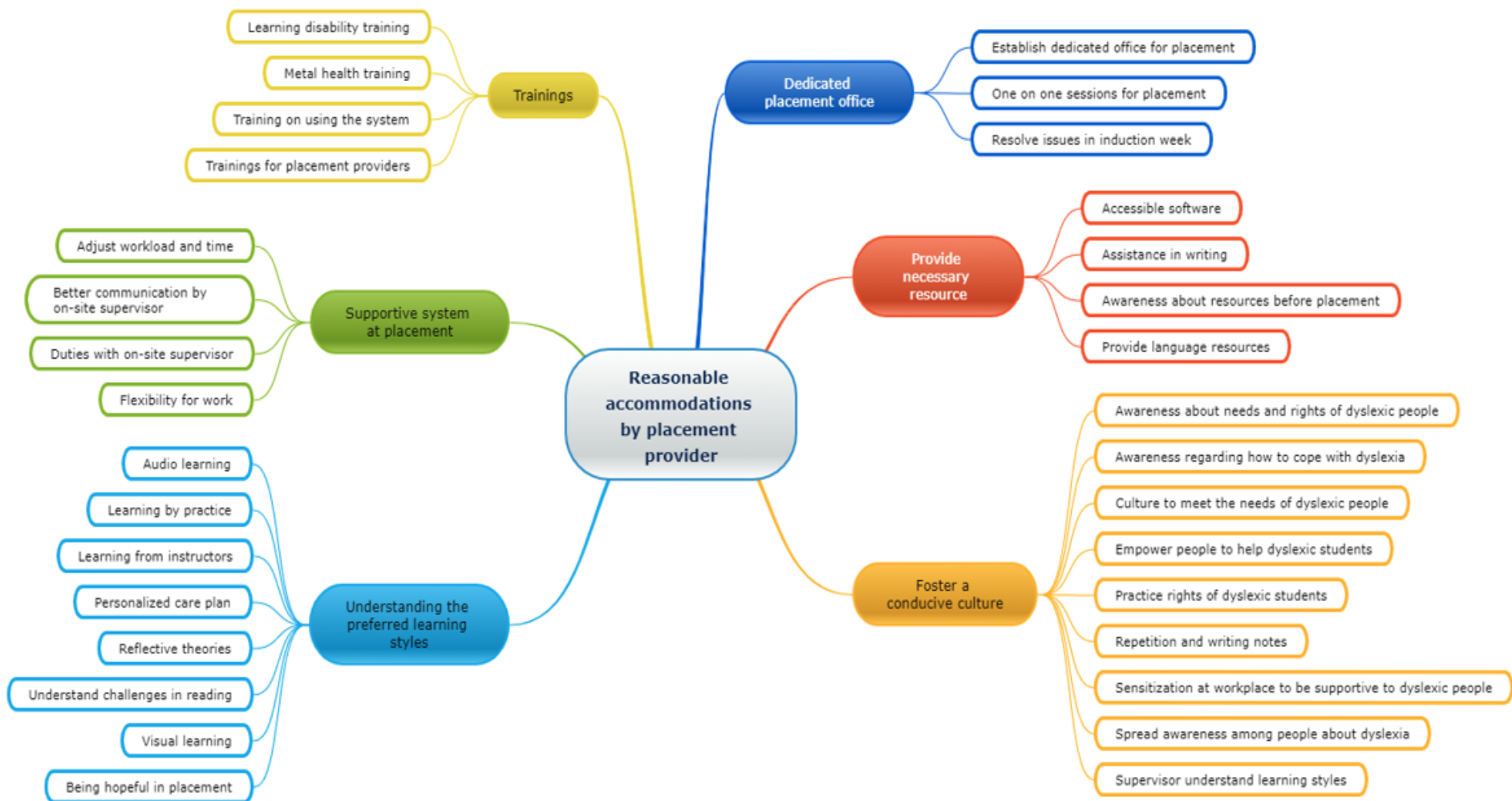


Figure 9: Thematic Map 4 of participant themes

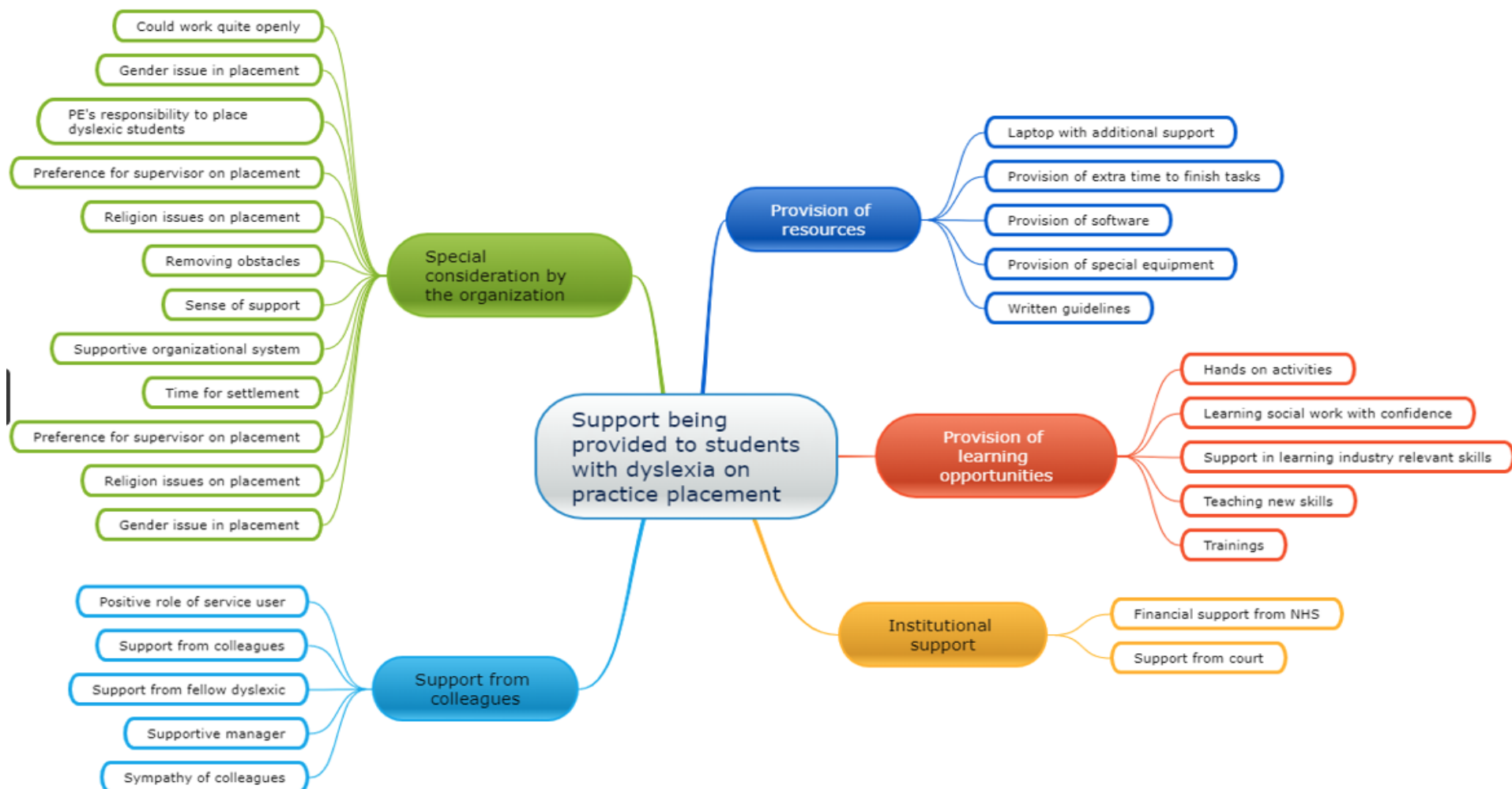


Figure 10: Thematic Map 5 of participant themes

Appendix I: A personal journal of reflection

First Interview Experience (April 7, 2021)

In my first interview, I experienced a profound interaction with a participant whose eagerness to share her experiences enriched our conversation. This encounter reminded me of Kvale's (1996) emphasis on the interview as a co-creation of knowledge, where the participant and researcher engage in a meaningful exchange.

Reflecting on the Interview Schedule Reflecting on the interview process, I comprehended the criticality of creating a comfortable environment for participants, aligning with Rubin and Rubin's (2012) perspective on the importance of building trust in qualitative interviews. Developing unbiased questions was challenging but essential to avoid leading the participant, as emphasised by Patton (2015), in his discussion on open-ended questioning in qualitative research. With guidance and persistence, questions were formulated for this study that encouraged uninfluenced and authentic responses, crucial to its integrity.

Research Journey: A Reflective Account During my doctoral research, I found immense value in maintaining a personal log alongside my academic work, as Schön (1983) advocates in his work on reflective practice. This practice helped me navigate challenges and track my progress, fostering both personal and professional growth.

The initial phase of research was demanding, echoing the sentiments of Aitchison and Lee (2006) regarding the complexities and stressors of academic research. However, I persevered, drawing inspiration from the resilience and dedication often required in doctoral pursuits (Wellington, 2010)

As I approached the final stages of my thesis, I encountered the daunting task of integrating all aspects of my research, a common challenge noted by Kamler and Thomson (2006) in their guide for doctoral students. Despite the intensity of this phase, I remained committed, recalling Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow in maintaining focus and motivation.

Presently, challenges with motivation and time management persist, yet setting intentions, as recommended by Locke and Latham (2002) in their goal-setting theory, proves effective. Reflecting on the journey, the laborious writing

process, though often burdensome, has culminated in a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Appendix J: Participant profiles

ID Number	Gender	University	Degree	Diagnosed with dyslexia
ID-01	Female	A	Undergraduate	In receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)
ID-02	Female	B	Postgraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-03	Female	A	Postgraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-04	Female	B	Undergraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-05	Female	A	Postgraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-06	Female	B	Undergraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-07	Male	B	Postgraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-08	Female	C	Postgraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-09	Female	B	Postgraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-10	Female	B	Postgraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-11	Female	A	Undergraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-12	Female	B	Undergraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-13	Female	B	Postgraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-14	Female	A	Undergraduate	In receipt of DSA
ID-15	Female	A	Undergraduate	In receipt of DSA