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Perspectives of Modern Foreign Language Teachers on the Inclusion of Students with Dyslexia

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**HIBERNIA
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**Perspectives of Modern Foreign Language Teachers on the Inclusion of
Students with Dyslexia**

Niamh Callanan

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the award of
Profession Master of Education in Post-Primary Education.**

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Abstract

Modern foreign language teachers (MFL) are more mindful than ever of differentiating for students with dyslexia and other language processing difficulties. Despite this, there is a lack of research based in Ireland that examines dyslexia in the MFL classroom. Using a qualitative approach and convenience sampling, five MFL teachers were interviewed to gather data on MFL teachers' experiences of including students with dyslexia. This data was thematically analysed and interpreted with reference to extant studies on dyslexia in the MFL classroom. The findings identify that Irish MFL teachers view students with dyslexia positively but feel that there is a lack of support at an administrative and state level.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBA: Classroom Based Assessment

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DES: Department of Education and Science

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

MFL: Modern Foreign Language

SEN: Special Educational Need

SEPP: School Experience Professional Placement

SRD: Specific Reading Disability

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Origin of the Dissertation

According to the Task Force on Dyslexia (Ireland. Department of Education and Science [DES] 2001, pxii), dyslexia can be best understood as ‘a specific learning difficulty affecting reading, spelling, and writing’. In learning about differentiation for dyslexia and other special educational needs (SEN), the researcher became interested in how students with these SEN experience the learning within an MFL classroom, and the experiences of the teachers in differentiating for these students.

The aims that would guide this research evolved from this interest during the course of the researcher’s second School Experience Professional Placement (SEPP). Those aims are respectively, to assess the perceptions of teachers of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) regarding students with dyslexia, and to gain an understanding of the experiences of MFL teachers in accommodating students with dyslexia. The research was conducted at two schools during the course of the researcher’s Advanced SEPP placement.

1.2 Background to the Project

While dyslexia and other specific reading disabilities (SRDs) have increasingly come into the spotlight, much of the educational policy surrounding these SRDs has been concerned only with their impact on the study of the Irish language - hereafter referred to as Gaeilge (Ireland. DES 2022a; Ireland. DES 2022b). Therefore, for the purposes of this research, Gaeilge will not be considered as a modern foreign language, as there is already a considerable amount of Irish educational policy concerning the dyslexia in the Gaeilge classroom. The term modern foreign language (or MFL) will be used to refer to French, German, and Spanish. Despite this, the study of languages is prioritised for all students, particularly at Junior Cycle. The new Junior Cycle Framework (Ireland. DES 2015, p12) encapsulates this, counting familiarity with ‘L2 and one other language’ as one of its key outcomes.

1.3 Rationale

When examining the Scottish educational system, Crombie (2000) observed that some alleged benefits of language learning for students with dyslexia included giving students with dyslexia access to other cultures and building student confidence in their own capabilities. Crombie (2000) took a rather pessimistic view of the outcome of language learning for students with dyslexia. However, given that very little literature looking at dyslexia in the MFL classroom, based in an anglophone system as Crombie was, has emerged in the succeeding decades, it can be argued that this issue has not been studied to its fullest extent. Within the Irish educational system, the academic literature that has emerged based on the effects of dyslexia is not concerned with language teaching, with the exception of the teaching and learning of Gaeilge (Tiernan and Casserly 2018; Casserly and Gildea 2015). This research intends to take a step towards remedying the dearth of literature examining dyslexia in the anglophone MFL classroom, by examining and analysing the experiences of Irish teachers of Modern Foreign Languages.

1.4 Dissertation Layout

This dissertation will begin with a review of relevant literature on dyslexia and the language learning classroom. This review will demonstrate that there is a significant lack of research situated in the Irish context on the effects of dyslexia and language learning. Indeed, there is a lack of anglophone research in general, with the majority of research being based in continental Europe and South America, where the foreign language being taught is English. The review will also demonstrate that MFL teachers are often anxious about their own capabilities to differentiate for students with dyslexia, and unsure of where to start. There will then be an overview of the qualitative methodology used to carry out the research aspect of this dissertation, and an explanation of the research paradigm. The findings will be written out and explained, and a discussion of the possible implications of the findings will then follow.

1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the lack of research based on the impacts of dyslexia for both students and teachers in the anglophone modern language learning classroom renders this a valuable area of study. This research is particularly relevant in an Irish context, given that language learning is prioritised as one of the learning outcomes for students in the Junior Cert Specification (Ireland. DES 2015). The researcher intends to gain a sense of MFL teacher's perspectives on including students with dyslexia in the language learning classroom through conducting interviews. The findings from these interviews will be analysed and discussed with reference to pre-existing studies on dyslexia in international MFL contexts, in order to gauge their possible significance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Dyslexia is a complex disorder, with several different theories as to its origins being proposed. The two most prominent theories on origin are the neurological theory, focused on how language is processed in specific areas of the brain (Do Amaral and De Azevedo 2021; Nijakowska 2020) and the neurobiological theory, which focuses on difficulties with working memory and phonological processing (Nijakowska 2019). What the wider academic research does agree on are the various symptoms that accompany dyslexia, including a weak working memory, a poor mental lexicon, difficulties in phonological processing, and in associating phonemes with the graphemes used to write them (Do Amaral and De Azevedo 2021; Nijakowska 2020; Lundberg 2002; Crombie 1997). The definition that this research uses to frame its discussion of dyslexia follows thusly; dyslexia is a disorder impacting the processing of language, that can present with a multiplicity of indicators including a poor mental lexicon, difficulties in phonological processing, and in associating phonemes with the graphemes used to write them (Do Amaral and De Azevedo 2021; Nijakowska 2020; Lundberg 2002; Crombie 1997).

Some research has promoted the idea that dyslexia is best understood as ‘a continuum of needs’, rather than a static set of symptoms (Patton and Matthew 2020, p26). Dyslexia is not a common topic of discussion with language teaching circles, and the research that has been conducted demonstrates that language teachers often feel ill-prepared, and unconfident in their abilities to accommodate students with dyslexia in their classroom (Nijakowska 2020; Nijakowska et al 2018; Gallardo et al. 2017). This research seeks to examine the existing research surrounding the experiences of students with dyslexia in the language classroom, and the experiences of the language teachers at the head of those classrooms, reviewing research of the effects of dyslexia on second language acquisition and the importance of language choice, and examining Irish educational policy and the perspectives of educators.

2.2 The Effects of Dyslexia on Second Language Acquisition

Studying languages presents benefits and drawbacks for students with dyslexia. Difficulties include the stress of learning an additional language and trying to bridge the gap of phonological deficit in an unfamiliar language. Osipova (2016) notes that working memory is often impaired in individuals with dyslexia, an observation which is echoed by Capelli (2021) and Nijakowska (2020). This would ostensibly render learning methodologies rooted in memorisation less accessible, and therefore more difficult, for students with dyslexia. Indeed Capelli (2021, p284) notes that learning tasks that involve memorisation of vocabulary can be a source of ‘linguistic anxiety’, leading to students with dyslexia developing negative views of language learning in general. Given that these methodologies are still widespread within language education – and likely are effective for some learners - it can be inferred that students with dyslexia face significant barriers to learning in the modern foreign language (MFL) classroom, as through no fault of their own, they are prevented and discouraged from fully engaging with the learning methodologies. This is supported by studies of students with dyslexia in the MFL classroom where students have succeeded in achieving following the teachers differentiating tasks for them, and allowing them to work at their own pace, accommodating the slower working memory and weaker phonological awareness experienced by individuals with dyslexia (Kormos et al. 2009).

Ideally, exemption from language learning would be granted on a case-by-case basis, with differentiation and learning support via technology and methodology being implemented over a period of time in order to ascertain the necessity of exempting the student. However, while these difficulties are very real, many of them could be overcome through judicious use of differentiation and supportive technologies. Exemption from language learning is not a solution that can be applied across the board either, as Kormos et al. (2009) addressed the possible stress that accompanied exemption, which often stigmatised students with dyslexia and made them feel singled out. It is also worth keeping in mind Tomlinson’s (2014) assertion that in labelling students, we as educators risk pigeon-holing them into a narrow set of characteristics and capabilities, which completely disregards the individuality of the student. One paper by Łockiewicz and Jaskulska (2019), examining gifted students with dyslexia, demonstrated that the linguistic struggles experienced by gifted students with dyslexia in their first language were reflected in their study of a foreign language.

2.2.1 The Importance of Language Choice for Dyslexic Learners

Another recurring theme in the literature surrounding dyslexia and language learning is the impact of orthographic transparency, which Van Viersen et al. (2017, p1176) describe as ‘(the complexity of) sound-letter correspondences within a language’. This is mainly applied to languages with an alphabetic writing system, although it is worth noting that speakers of languages with logographic and syllabic writing systems can also have dyslexia (Tehrani 2007; Łockiewicz et al. 2020). Orthographic transparency is thought of as a spectrum, with English being considered an ‘opaque’ language, French lying in the middle of the spectrum, and Italian considered a ‘transparent’ language (Capelli 2021; Do Amaral and De Azevedo 2021; Van Viersen et al. 2017; Tehrani 2007; Lundberg 2002).

Transparent languages, where there is a closer correspondence between phonemes and graphemes, are theorised to be simpler for students with dyslexia to learn. Lundberg (2002, p179) notes a general perception - which is indeed supported in several studies - that ‘the more transparent orthographies are easier to handle for students with dyslexia’. Nijakowska (2020, p261) agrees with this, noting that for individuals with dyslexia that speak a transparent language (such as Italian) as their first language, their ‘reading difficulties tend to be less severe’ in their first language, when compared with the reading difficulties experienced by English speakers in their first language. This is purported to be due to the weakness in phonological perception experienced by individuals with dyslexia, as described by Nijakowska (2020), Lundberg (2002), and Gallardo et al. (2017). This may be linked to difficulties in learning a language with an opaque orthography, as described in later research by Łockiewicz et al. (2020), where they note that individuals who are taught to read in a transparent orthography develop strategies in reading non-words (reading non-words is often used in dyslexia research in order to assess phonological awareness) that were less effective in a language with an opaque orthography. Vaisman and Kahn-Horwitz (2020, p306) stress the importance of ‘explicit knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondence, phonics, and morphological structures’ in correctly and accurately writing English and note that students with a weak grasp of these linguistic ideas often struggle in writing English. From this, it could be said that students with dyslexia who learn to read in a transparent orthography are at a disadvantage when learning a new opaque orthography as part of a foreign language, since the strategies they have developed for parsing and reading unusual words and non-words are weaker. Less research has been carried out on the inverse situation, namely individuals with dyslexia that have learned to read in an opaque orthography, learning a transparent language. However, the research that has been

carried out seems to indicate that these individuals tend to have a weak understanding of language processes, as they are often taught using what Vaisman and Kahn-Horwitz (2020, p315) describe as ‘a whole language approach’, which prioritises memorisation and a thematic approach to learning language.

2.3 Comparative Review of Irish Educational Policy with International Initiatives

Irish linguistic policy surrounding language education has generally focused on the Irish language, with modern foreign languages taking a backseat. While modern foreign languages aren’t the priority of educational policy regarding students with dyslexia, these policies do provide a paradigm through which the general educational perspective on language learning for students with dyslexia can be inferred. It is worth noting that while parents of children with dyslexia often favour exemption, government policy encourages inclusion and differentiation, and stresses that a student cannot be exempted from the study of Irish solely due to a diagnosis of dyslexia (DES 2022; Patton and Matthews 2020). Additionally, the process of obtaining an exemption from the study of Irish requires that a significant period of intervention from the school fails, and that specialised educational plans for the student have not been effective in supporting the student in their study of Irish. According to the DES, an exemption from the study of Irish does not automatically guarantee that students with dyslexia are unable to study other languages. Dyslexia Ireland suggests that students with dyslexia may be able to study languages with more transparent orthographies, such as Italian or Latin, which reflects the research carried out by Toffalini et al. (2019), which demonstrated that Latin was a relatively accessible language for students with dyslexia. It is worth keeping in mind that the students in this study spoke Italian as their first language, which is a romance language directly descended from Latin. Considering the research by Łockiewicz and Jaskulska (2015) that demonstrates the significant influence of the learner’s first language, it is possible that anglophone students (that is students who speak English as their first language), would find Italian or Latin more difficult.

It is worth noting that much of the research from non-anglophone countries is focused on the effects of dyslexia on English as a Foreign Language (EFL), with some exceptions such as the research by De Amaral and De Azevedo (2021), which is focused on the effects of dyslexia on the development of bilingualism. This possibly reflects that language learning is simply more of a priority within the school systems of these countries, since learning a second language is a compulsory/core element of their curricula. This is particularly true in a European context, and several papers note that dyslexia research is a growing priority within EFL/language

teaching circles, as European educational policy now encourages the learning of at least one additional language within the educational system. In the case of research carried by Kormos et al. (2009), based in Hungary, some students with dyslexia were also learning third languages, as this is required in the Hungarian educational system. Within the broader European context, there are debates regarding what methodologies are the most beneficial for students with dyslexia, and what are the most feasible methods for teachers of language (be that EFL or a modern foreign language like French), to implement in order to support the students in their classes with dyslexia. The research supports the idea that it is possible for students with dyslexia to study a foreign language and achieve a level of success in this study, occasionally even surpassing their peers without a specific reading disability (SRD). The students will experience difficulties; however, these difficulties are not caused to exclude students with dyslexia from pursuing the study of languages, and indeed many of their peers without SRDs will also encounter difficulties in language learning (Trammell 2016). What is instead more productive, is to assess what aspects of language learning require support in students with dyslexia and ascertain what teaching methods are most efficacious to this end. Many of the articles propose that teacher education, particularly focusing on teachers of modern foreign languages, is essential to ensure that teachers are equipped to support students with dyslexia, and indeed many MFL teachers feel ill-prepared to support students with additional educational needs such as dyslexia. This is supported by the work carried out by Gallardo et al. (2017) and Nijakowska (2020).

2.4 Perspective on Current Educational Policies in the MFL Classroom

The perspective of educators on teaching students with dyslexia is generally one of inclusion and acceptance, tempered with hesitation and doubt of their own abilities to sufficiently differentiate information for these students. The majority of language teachers surveyed by Nijakowska et al. (2018) reported feeling ill-prepared to differentiate their lessons for students with dyslexia. Positive outlooks on students with dyslexia correlated with experience in teaching students with dyslexia, with teachers that had significant experience reporting more confidence in their own abilities to include students with dyslexia in the day-to-day goings on of the language classroom. Teachers expressed a need for practical solutions, and also reported that differentiation presented more work needed to be done in the already limited time available to them. This situation, found in many EU contexts, reflects the need to educate language teachers on the mechanics of dyslexia, and learning methodologies that can accommodate the unique needs of students with dyslexia. While less research has been done in an Irish context,

one study that surveyed principals of Irish language immersion schools demonstrated that the majority of principals expressed positive attitudes and were of the opinion that second-language education would be of benefit for students with dyslexia (Patton and Matthews 2020).

The perspective of Irish educators is mostly positive regarding the idea of inclusion, but in practice, the plight of students with dyslexia in the language classroom is largely unnoticed. Whether this is due to low uptake of modern foreign languages by students with dyslexia is unknown, as it is difficult to find precise statistics on how many students decide to study languages, and among those how many have a diagnosis of dyslexia. Irish educators express much of the same opinions as their international counterparts, namely that more education is required in the teacher training phase, and that there ought to be more support on a systemic level, so that students with dyslexia can better participate (Patton and Matthews 2020; Vaisman and Kahn-Horowitz 2018). Irish teachers also express many of the same worries, namely not possessing adequate knowledge to address the diverse needs of students with dyslexia, and not having enough time to implement differentiation in the classroom (Nijakowska et al 2018; Leons et al 2009). The second complaint demonstrates an idea that differentiation is an additional learning strategy, rather than an integral teaching methodology in itself. The first complaint demonstrates that, despite increasing awareness of the importance of differentiation, and the growing understanding of different types of intelligence and learning difficulties such as dyslexia, teacher training programmes, and indeed continual professional development programmes, are still not adequately addressing the gap in teacher knowledge surrounding learning difficulties. There is clearly a deficit, real or imagined, in the knowledge of teachers, which is likely leading to the lack of confidence many teachers profess relating to their capabilities to differentiate for these students.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the literature research conducted, the following research questions have emerged; is the modern foreign language (MFL) classroom an inherently stressful environment for students with dyslexia, and is explicit instruction in language mechanics (such as phonetics) in the MFL classroom more beneficial for students with dyslexia? The literature demonstrates that the majority of the research surrounding students with dyslexia is carried out in non-Anglophone countries, with students that are learning EFL. The research that does take place in Anglophone (that is to say English-speaking) countries focuses on students learning romance languages (French, Spanish, and Latin), and Germanic languages (Dutch and German). Several studies also contrast the experiences of students with dyslexia practicing literary skills in their respective native languages. This included native speakers of Hungarian, Farsi, Finnish, Polish and Portuguese (Capelli 2021; Łockiewicz and Jaskulska 2019; Kormos et al 2009; Tehrani 2007; Lundberg 2002). These studies were still useful in the context of examining how dyslexia impacts language learning, as there is considerable evidence within the research to demonstrate that one's first language has a considerable influence on second language learning.

This links to the second research question, which concerns the effects of one's first language on the second language learning experience. This aspect of the literature focuses on the influence of a learner's first language on cognitive mechanisms concerned with phonetic recognition and decoding (particularly of unfamiliar phonemes do not present in the learner's first language), and grapheme matching (matching a language's graphemes, or written forms of sounds, with its phonemes). There is significant evidence to suggest that a learner's first language has a major influence on these mechanisms, as learners of opaque languages tend to have more advanced grapheme decoding techniques compared to learners of transparent languages. It is supposed that learners develop these techniques due to the necessity of cultivating these kinds of techniques when learning to read an opaque language.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The chosen research questions emerged during the course of researcher's teaching placements, specifically during the second School Experience Professional Placement (SEPP) block. The literature review demonstrates the relevance of these questions to the Irish educational context, as there is a paucity of literature discussing the intersection of dyslexia and language learning set within the Irish educational system. The topic of the research was the primary influence on the choice of methodology. Given that the research was seeking to examine the experiences and opinions of language teachers, it was decided that a qualitative methodology would be the most advantageous choice. The choice of qualitative methodology led the researcher to consider what paradigms would best frame qualitative research. This section will discuss and justify the chosen research paradigm and methodology in greater detail. The limitations associated with qualitative methodologies will be addressed. The specific method of data collection will also be discussed, along with an examination of the sampling process and data analysis. Lastly, the possible ethical concerns associated with the research will be reviewed, as well as the steps taken by the researcher to ensure that these ethical concerns were adequately addressed and accounted for.

3.2 Research Paradigm

When deciding on the research paradigm for this research project, the researcher kept in mind the intended subject of the research, and the methodology that would be used to collect data on the subject. It was important to select a research paradigm that allowed for a thematic analysis of long-form data gathered through interviews, and that permitted the presence of multiple perspectives within the data. That is to say, that a level of subjectivity is expected, given that the interviewees would be discussing their personal experiences, and their perspective on these experiences.

With this in mind, it was decided that a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm was best suited for the purpose of structuring the collection and analysis of data. A combined constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is commonly utilised in studies that make use of qualitative methodologies and interview-based data collection methods (Coulter et al. 2022; Moore et al. 2017). Constructivism posits that, 'knowledge is experience based; [and] learning is social' (Kosnik et al. 2018, p108). The interpretivist model, as described by Evangelinou-Yiannakis (2017, p271), encourages the inclusion of communication and interactions to the data

considered, as one of the central ideas of the interpretivist paradigm is the notion that ‘meaning is acquired from one’s experience of the world’. This high value attributed to social interactions and personal experiences infers that this model is arguably best positioned to conduct and structure the intended research, as the research questions are focused on the experiences of both language teachers, and of students in the modern foreign language classroom.

The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm also accounted for some of the possible negative consequences of placing the researcher at the centre of collecting the data. An example of a possible negative outcome of this close proximity is a distortion of the data collection in favour of the researcher’s own views. This is an issue cited in the literature surrounding interview-based research programmes (Atkins and Wallace 2012; Mosselson 2010; Pinnegar and Hamilton 2009; Mishler 1986). Within the chosen paradigm, reflection on the place of the researcher plays a role in the collection and interpretation of the data, being ‘the prime source of coming to know through acting and being in relation to others in practice’ (Pinnegar and Hamilton 2009, p71). It is hoped that prioritising reflectivity will lessen the influence of the researcher’s own inherent biases, by promoting a consistent process of critical self-reflection.

3.3 Choice of Method and Research Instrumentation

The subject of research also played a role in deciding of methodology that would be used. A qualitative methodology was utilised, permitting the prioritisation of ‘presenting or interpreting people’s views, interactions or values’ (Atkins and Wallace 2012, p22). This best aligns with the intended goal of the research project. The specific data collection method that was chosen was the semi-structured interview. This method is often considered most efficacious for studies seeking to examine personal experiences, as it allows the participant to have some agency, to ‘express themselves in their own terms’, while permitting the introduction of topics that they deem relevant to the interview (Mosselson 2010, p481). It was hoped that this would help the participants to feel at ease, thereby increasing the quality of responses given during the interviews. Additionally, it was expected that, given their experience, the participants could bring up salient points that the researcher had not considered, which could possibly further the scope of research. Five semi-structured interviews were carried out over the course of several weeks, beginning during the researcher’s Advanced SEPP placement and finishing in the following weeks. The researcher utilised a set of ten research questions to ensure that all interviews followed the same structure.

3.3.1 Method: Semi-Structured Interview

As previously stated, the semi-structured interview was selected as the method of data collection. It was decided to record the interviews in audio form, utilising the Voice Memo app on the researcher's mobile phone. Atkins and Wallace (2012, p90) cite several advantages to utilising audio over other recording methods such as taking written notes, including the high degree of accuracy associated with 'complete transcriptions', allowing the researcher to conduct 'careful review[s] of the data' and facilitating the inclusion of direct quotations from the interview. It is worth acknowledging that there are some disadvantages to the audio recording method. Vaughn and Turner (2016) note that there are difficulties associated with 'managing data in those [audio or visual] forms', including storage of the audio or visual files. Blaxter et al. (2010) also note that certain recording devices may fail, leading to data from the interview being lost. However, it was decided that the accuracy associated with recording was highly desirable for the project, and therefore the researcher decided to proceed utilising the audio method. To overcome the possible disadvantages of audio recordings, the researcher created a dedicated folder on a password protected OneDrive account. This would allow the researcher to maintain the confidentiality of the participants and keep all of the data in one place for the sake of ease of access.

The interview questions were designed to be as clear as possible, while still allowing for the researcher to build on them or link them to topics raised by the participant as necessary. Topics brought up by the interviewees were often related to the questions being asked, and therefore the researcher was for the most part able to weave these new topics into the existing questioning framework. The list of questions was kept the same for every interviewee to ensure a level of consistency, and to avoid the issue of meaning vs intention described by Mishler (1986, p54), who states that it is vital that both researcher and participant agree on the 'frameworks of meanings'. The first interview, also served as the pilot interview. The idea of utilising the first interview as a pilot interview is put forward by Atkins and Wallace (2012) and allows the researcher to maintain the data from the pilot interview. Topics brought up by the interviewees were often related to the questions being asked, and therefore the researcher was for the most part able to weave these new topics into the existing questioning framework.

3.4 Sample Population and Convenience Sampling

The researcher utilised convenience-based sampling to find participants for the research. Convenience sampling is described by Blaxter et al. (2010) as a kind of sampling that involves

selecting participants that are easily accessible to the researcher. A total of five language teachers from two schools within a 30 km radius of the researcher consented to be interviewed. School A is an all-girls voluntary Catholic school with a population of approximately 500 pupils. School A was recently awarded DEIS status. School B is an all-boys voluntary Catholic school with a population of approximately 1200 pupils. The researcher was able to interview all language teachers from School A, and two of five language teachers from School B.

There are some limitations associated with convenience sampling. The chief concern for the researcher was the representativeness of the sample, given its small size. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p109) define representativeness as degree to which the chosen sample of is 'representative of the...[studied] group as a whole'. As the researcher only interviewed five language teachers, it is worth being cautious in applying the results garnered from the data to all language teachers in Ireland. The potential unrepresentativeness of a convenience-based sample is an issue cited by Pilonieta et al. (2017) and Mosselson (2010). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) state that for researchers working with smaller samples, applying strict conditions to who can participate is one way in which the data garnered from a small sample can still be considered academically sound. Within the confines of the research project, it is hoped that by restricting the sample to MFL teachers that have taught in Ireland for at least three consecutive years, within the last ten years, the sample will be able to represent the general mood of Irish MFL teachers.

3.5 Data Analysis

For this research project, the data gathered is qualitative, and therefore the research data was analysed through a thematic analysis. The method of analysis was chosen because of the stated goal of the research, and the chosen research questions, all of which seek to gauge the experiences and opinions of MFL teachers in Ireland. This aligns with Hitchcock and Hughes' (1995, p140) assertion that, for researcher's utilising qualitative research, the intention of analysis is to '[generate] ideas from the data'. Thematic coding was utilised in order to organise the findings, with each theme being highlighted in its own unique colour. A table of the themes and corresponding colours can be found in Appendix I.

The interviews were recorded on the premises of the school utilising an app on the researcher's personal password-protected mobile phone, and the recordings were then stored on a secure OneDrive account belonging to the researcher, which is also password protected. The interviews were transcribed utilising Microsoft Word's built in transcription tool (Appendices

II through VII), which the researcher then read over while listening to the interviews in order to correct any errors. The transcripts were stored on the same OneDrive account. The teachers and schools have all been given pseudonyms in order to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Any identifying information has also been redacted from the transcripts.

3.6 Ethical Issues, Validity and Academic Rigour

The research questions and instrumentation were designed to comply with the ethical guidelines set out by Hibernia College and BERA (2018). Ethical approval (Appendix II) was granted by the Ethics Board of Hibernia College following the submission of the research proposal. All participants were given a consent form (Appendix III) to fill out prior to taking part in the interview, and principal's letters (Appendix IV) detailing the research questions were sent out to the participating schools. Copies of the interview questions (Appendix V) were also provided to participants prior to the recorded interviews. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions they had about the research and interviewing process.

The positionality of the researcher was also kept in mind throughout the research process as a matter of ethical concern since the researcher is a past pupil of one of the schools where interviews took place. With this in mind, it was decided that a continuous process of reflection and reflexivity was necessary in order to ensure the collection and analysis of data was as impartial as possible, so that any conclusions drawn can be useful for future practice and research – as far as is possible considering the limited scope of this research. This aligns with Mosselson's (2010, p480) observation that once the researcher is cognisant of their own emotions and reactions to the subjects studied, the researcher can then be 'reflexive about why and how [she comes] to feel that way'.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the findings generated from the data gathered during the research process. The data will be presented and organised based on the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the thematic coding process, utilising the colour-code that can be found in the Appendices (Appendix I). Quotations from the interviews will be included where relevant, to further illuminate the experiences of the teachers that participated in the interviews. Firstly, a short background of Schools A and B will be presented, to contextualise the data that was collected.

School A is an all-female secondary school with DEIS status. Both French and German are offered as subjects up to Leaving Cert, with a foreign language being compulsory up to Junior Cycle. Introductory courses in other languages are offered at Transition Year. School B is an all-male secondary school. French and German are offered as subjects up to Leaving Cert, however, the study of a foreign language is not compulsory. All teachers that agreed to be interviewed were female, with an average teaching experience of approximately twenty-two years.

4.2 Impact of Assessments (CBA) on Dyslexic Learners.

One topic that emerged was the impact and efficacy of Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs). The overall view on CBAs was mixed; all teachers have interviewed expressing that there were positives associated with the process. The main benefits noted were an increased confidence in speaking the target language, and an improved vocabulary stemming from the research conducted on the topic that the student decided to present. These positives extended to students with dyslexia, with Teacher B noting it as something which gave students with dyslexia more faith in their own ability to achieve within the language classroom. However, some reservations were also noted. In particular, the idea that writing and presenting a CBA was a daunting prospect for students with dyslexia, that could require significant help from a teacher. Teachers A and C expressed this view, with Teacher C noting that large class sizes often made it more difficult to ensure that weaker students did not slip through the net. Teacher C also expressed

doubt as to how motivated students were to complete the CBAs, as they are currently not weighted towards a student's final grade at Junior Cycle. Teacher B expressed a similar sentiment, stating that even if it was only 5% of a student's final grade, it may still inspire more effort from students, and a greater engagement with the CBA process. Teacher E was unfamiliar with the CBA process, having only recently returned from medical leave, and expressed doubt as to the efficacy of CBAs, stating that 'I don't think it has enough of a positive effect to merit them really'. Teacher E did temper this with an admission that this was her first experience of CBAs, and that it was possible that more experience could lead to a change in perspective.

4.3 Irish language Exemptions for Dyslexic Learners

The impact of Irish language exemptions on students with dyslexia was also a prominent theme discussed in the interviews. All teachers interviewed mentioned how having an Irish language exemption can often discourage a student with dyslexia from choosing to study a modern foreign language, even when they could feasibly achieve competency in the subject with educational support and adjustments to assessment. This idea was primarily expressed by the teachers from School A, where the study of a foreign language is mandatory up to Junior Cert level, with Teacher C stating that 'they [students with dyslexia] tend to want to give up quite quickly, which is understandable and coming from the language that they had [being] Irish', and confirming that in her experience, students with dyslexia lacked confidence in their abilities to learn a foreign language. In School B, there appeared to be a slightly different perspective, with Teachers D and E noting that while some students were discouraged, students with dyslexia often chose to study a foreign language to at least Junior Cert level. Teacher D stated that an exemption to mandatorily study Gaelige can give students the impression that they will automatically 'have the same difficulties taking on a modern language', however the educator continued by stating that there are also students with dyslexia that decide to study a foreign language, and that these students usually go on to 'succeed well enough'.

A subtheme that emerged when discussing the influence of Irish language exemptions was the focus on attainment of points at Leaving Cert, and the requirements of certain colleges. Teacher B stated that since the study of a language was removed from the criteria set out by certain universities, less students with dyslexia have decided to choose a foreign language for Leaving Cert. However, Teachers B and C note that positive experiences of languages at Junior Cycle and in Transition Year can influence students with dyslexia to choose foreign languages, as

they have a better idea of what is required to complete the course, and what they themselves can achieve.

4.4 Dyslexic Learner Achievement in the Language Classroom

All teachers interviewed agreed that it was possible for students with dyslexia to participate and achieve in the modern foreign language classroom. Additionally, all teachers had some experience of teaching students with dyslexia, however it was acknowledged that it was relatively limited. Teacher D spoke of the importance of recognising the spectrum of dyslexia, noting that depending on a student's needs, they could easily achieve well in the language classroom. Teacher C held a similar view, stating that students perceived as academically weak could still learn and progress. It is worth noting that in the beginning of the interview, when asked about differentiation, Teacher C discussed how in her practice, she believed it was important for students to view the language not just as an academic subject, but as a practical thing they could use in their everyday lives, and to support their interest in the culture of the countries where the language is spoken. Teacher E held that all students were capable of achievement in the language classroom, and that speaking in the target language was beneficial for all. Teacher B suggested that a short oral exam at Junior Cert level could be effective. Teachers E and D agreed with this viewpoint. There was some concern as to possible nervousness on the part of students, however all teachers put this down to the age of the students, and general anxiety associated with that age. There was a general consensus that despite the changes made to the new Junior Cert specification, there was still an over-reliance on written production for examination. Teacher B in particular noted that even according a 5% value to the CBA could help to accommodate students with dyslexia in achieving while studying language.

4.5 Importance of speaking the target language in the modern foreign language classroom

A prominent theme that emerged in all interviews was the importance of the speaking the target language (i.e., French, German, etc.,) in the classroom for all students, both with and without dyslexia. The new Junior Cert curriculum was praised for allowing greater creative freedom on the part of students, and for providing an incentive to utilise the target language aloud through presenting a topic they're interested in, or creating a dialogue based on a common situation. All teachers had some positive feelings on this. Teacher B stated that it would allow students to become more confident in their use of the language at Senior Cycle level, and even opined that there should be an oral examination at Junior Cert, similar to the one conducted for the

Leaving Cert. Teacher, which would motivate students to improve their use of the target language. Teacher C noted that proficiency in oral language could surpass and even make up for difficulties with written language, relaying an experience in teaching an introductory course in Spanish to a group of Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) students. Since she was new to the language herself, she was able to see in real time how the students became more comfortable using spoken Spanish and stated that even though these students struggled with literacy, by the end of the course they could communicate using the Spanish that they had learned. Teacher A expressed that students were often more motivated to utilise spoken language at Leaving Cert level. Teacher E expressed the positive influence this had on the students' command of language, noting that the students have a better understanding of key verb tenses and grammar points.

A subtheme that emerged when discussing the role of giving instruction through the target language was the importance of explaining grammatical elements of the target language through English. All teachers interviewed acknowledged the importance of teaching in the target language, and all expressed that there were positives to this approach, chief among them increasing the students' familiarity with key vocabulary. Despite this, it was also stated that some students found this approach intimidating, and that weaker students could easily become lost. Teacher A expressed that, along with time constraints, student comprehension was the chief reason that she would alternate teaching in French and in English. Teacher B concurred and noted that in some situations it was necessary to speak in English in order to bring the class to attention. Teacher C stated that it was possible to teach entirely through the target language, and that during a teaching exchange in France, she had done so to great success. However, in her current practice she alternated English and French, particularly on points concerning grammar. Teacher D also discussed the importance of explaining certain concepts in English, viewing it as part of the process of differentiation, by allowing weaker students to ask questions in a language that they are comfortable in speaking. Teacher C stated that in the past, parents had expressed to her that their children found learning entirely through French difficult and intimidating.

4.6 Constraints on Teacher Investment in Differentiation

All teachers expressed that there were significant constraints impacting their investment in differentiation. Within this theme two subthemes emerged, one concerning the busy timetables of both teachers and SEN co-ordinators, and the other concerning the difficulties of covering the Junior Cert specification within the allotted time.

Teachers A, C, and D stated that time constraints were the most prominent factor, due to teachers and the SEN department having full timetables. This made co-ordinating meetings with the SEN department, and among their own subject departments more difficult. Teacher D suggested dedicated meetings at the beginning of the year to co-ordinate plans for students with SEN. Teacher B stated that the SEN department were very accessible, and pointed to the school's Google Drive, where there was a dedicated folder for SEN documents. Teacher E was unfamiliar with the SEN department, stating that they had not approached her since her return to the school, and that she had not considered it as a possibility. However, she also stated that this could be due to the size of the school, as Teacher E teaches in School B, which currently has a student population of over 1,200. Class sizes were also cited as a factor impeding investment in differentiation, with Teachers A, C, and E stating that it was difficult to consistently differentiate for a class of 30 students. Teacher B expressed a similar sentiment, stating that she was not always able to differentiate as much as she would like to, given the significant time and material that would be required to do so – in terms of creating and then photocopying alternate tests and resources alongside those required for the majority of the class.

4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the MFL teachers that participated in the interviews expressed that their experiences of teaching students with dyslexia were mostly positive. All teachers stated that with the proper support, it is possible for students with dyslexia to take part in learning activities in the language classroom, and to achieve. The negative aspects of teaching students with dyslexia appear to stem not from the actual inclusion of the students, but the lack of time available to teachers to properly invest in differentiation.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings from the previous chapter, with reference to extant studies surrounding dyslexia in the modern foreign language classroom – that is to say the experiences of students with dyslexia in the MFL classroom, and the experiences of MFL teachers in teaching students with dyslexia. This discussion will aim to assess the two research questions which have guided this research, those being, is the modern foreign language classroom an inherently stressful environment for students with dyslexia, and is explicit instruction in language mechanics (such as phonetics and grammar) more beneficial for students with dyslexia? It is hoped that referring to extant studies on dyslexia in the modern foreign language classroom will help to situate the findings of the research in a wider context, so that these pre-existing studies can act as a prism through which analysis can be focused.

5.2 Differentiation as An Additional Workload for Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages

Patton and Matthews (2022) assert that differentiation is often seen in the Irish educational system as an added workload for teachers to contend with alongside their regular teaching schedule, rather than an integral part of their educational practice. This is somewhat supported in the findings, with all teachers making reference to busy timetables and large class sizes as factors which impede their investment in differentiation for students with dyslexia and other SEN. A particular concern in this area was the amount of paperwork that arose from creating alternate resources, with Teacher B stating that ‘it can prove difficult to keep this [differentiation] up’ for every class, while also ensuring that the curriculum is also sufficiently covered. While this attitude could be taken as a negative attitude towards the presence of students with dyslexia in the modern foreign language classroom, this is arguably an unfair assessment. Brennan and King’s (2022) observation that time constraints have ‘been well documented as a barrier to inclusion’ is well worth considering in this regard, as it demonstrates that this is a long-standing issue. While all teachers mentioned a lack of time to invest in differentiation, these time constraints were not attributed to the presence of students with dyslexia. These time constraints were instead attributed to administrative decisions, with the decision to decrease the number of language classes to three in second and third year being a particularly contentious one. It is worth noting that these decisions were not solely referenced as inconveniences to teachers, but also as detriments to the learning of students, particularly students with dyslexia, as it limits the time available to practice listening and speaking skills in the target language. The value assigned to listening and speaking skills for students with dyslexia is supported by Osipova (2016, p97), who asserts that students with dyslexia should be given the opportunity to learn through a variety of methodologies, including ‘orally, [and] through speech and listening’. This demonstrates that MFL teachers do not view the foreign language classroom as inherently stressful for students with dyslexia, but that there is a lack of time to allow instruction in language mechanics if the curriculum is also to be covered, which ultimately has a detrimental effect on students with language difficulties.

5.3 Teachers' Perspectives on the Role of the Target Language in the MFL Classroom

A prominent theme which emerged from the interviews was the role that the target language (i.e., French, German, Spanish, etc.) ought to play in instruction in the MFL classroom. All teachers interviewed agreed that instruction should at least be partly through the target language, as it allowed all students, but particularly students with dyslexia, to become familiar with the sounds of the target language through repetition. This, however, was accompanied with the idea that it was sometimes necessary to switch to English in order to clarify instruction. Teacher D in particular considered that it was important to transition into English when teaching the grammar of the target language. From her perspective it gave students that struggled to follow instruction in French, due to dyslexia or other factors, the opportunity to fully engage the lesson and ask questions in the language that they are most comfortable with. This aligns with Crombie's (1997, p41) assertion that for students with dyslexia, language is best learned 'in a systematic way' that allows for an individual focus on key language components. It can be argued that this demonstrates that, at least according to the experiences of the language teachers interviewed, explicit instruction in language mechanics is beneficial for students with dyslexia, and that this can contribute to making the language classroom a less stressful environment for these students. However, Teacher A identified a possible difficulty associated with assuming that students are proficient in English grammar, stating that in her experience students are increasingly unaware of grammar structures and components in English. This renders instruction in French grammar difficult, as students are not only contending with a foreign language, but also with ideas of grammar they are unfamiliar with. This aligns with the observation of Łockiewicz and Jaskulska (2019), who note a correlation between the literacy of students with dyslexia in a foreign language, and the awareness of students with dyslexia of the grammar conventions of their native language. When considering data from the Central Statistics Office (2017) that indicates that an increasing number of students in Irish schools do not have English as their first language, combined with the prevalence of dyslexia, it is perhaps unwise to rely on student proficiency in English grammar to facilitate or ease the teaching of French or German grammar.

5.4 Teachers' Perspectives on Assessing Students with Dyslexia Under the New Junior Cert Specification

Nijakowska (2020, p264) states that for teachers of foreign languages, their perception of their teaching is based in part on their ability to balance 'differentiate[d] instruction..., assessment and feedback techniques'. From this it could be construed that MFL teachers may be less confident in their ability to effectively teach students with dyslexia if they feel that a core aspect of their educational practice, such as assessment, was being carried out in a way that was ineffective or unbalanced. This sentiment was expressed in part by all teachers that were interviewed regarding the recent reforms to the Junior Cycle specification, particularly the addition of the CBAs. The CBA process was regarded as something which took up valuable class time, as expressed by Teacher E, and something which caused undue stress to students with dyslexia, as expressed by Teachers A and C. This discontent can arguably be traced back to Nijakowska's (2020, p264) concept of 'self-efficacy', as the primary issues identified by the teachers regarding the CBA process are rooted in its infringement on their practice. The issue regarding the amount of time needed to adequately carry out the CBA process, including

allowing the students time to research and present their projects, can be linked to the issue of time constraints discussed in section 5.2. All teachers reported spending at least two weeks on CBAs, if not more. When this is considered alongside the decreased number of language hours for second- and third-year students, it is not unreasonable for teachers of modern foreign languages to feel that the CBA process is ineffective, particularly when it has no effect on a student's final grade at Junior Cycle. The second issue, that it presents a source of stress for students with dyslexia, can be understood through Sach's (2015, p234) observation that methods of assessment which seem 'antithetical to their [educational] values' presented a source of significant anxiety for teachers. It can be argued that this demonstrates that, at least for the teachers interviewed as part of this research, CBAs contribute to creating a stressful environment in the MFL classroom for students with dyslexia.

5.5 Teacher's Perspectives on the Experiences of Students with Dyslexia in the MFL Classroom

In research conducted by Gallardo et al. (2017, p521), it was reported that the general opinion regarding the presence of students with dyslexia in MFL classrooms was that the experience of 'studying languages [is] beneficial for students with dyslexia'. This view was also expressed by the teachers interviewed as part of this research, as all teachers expressed that not only was it possible for students with dyslexia to participate in the day-to-day learning of an MFL classroom, but that with the proper accommodation these students could achieve well. When discussing the experiences of students with dyslexia in the MFL classroom, there was a general consensus that what Cappelli (2021 p284) terms 'linguistic anxiety' generally stemmed from two interconnected sources: exemptions from the study of the Irish language, and students' self-perception of their capabilities.

5.5.1 The Impact of Irish Language Exemptions on the Manner in Which Students with Dyslexia View Studying Modern Foreign Languages

Teacher C in particular expressed that Irish exemptions often caused students to want 'to give up quite quickly' on the study of a foreign language, as it negatively impacted their confidence in their ability to learn another language. This negative impact of language exemptions on students is supported by the research of Kormos et al. (2009, p121), which found that language exemptions often presented 'an emotional burden' to students with dyslexia, as it served to other them from their peers, and led them to doubt their own academic capabilities. The general lack of confidence of students with dyslexia in their abilities to learn a language is possibly based in parental attitudes towards dyslexia, as Teacher D noted that in her experience, parents of students with dyslexia may encourage their children in a direction that they believe will allow them to achieve higher grades. This parental suspicion towards language learning is supported by Patton and Matthews (2022, p27) who note that parental objections to including students with dyslexia in modern foreign language classrooms were primarily focused on 'wellbeing and educational attainment'. It can be argued that negative experiences associated with Irish exemptions, combined with this view of language learning could, and perhaps does, serve to discourage students with dyslexia from pursuing the study of a foreign language.

5.5.2 Positive Impacts of Studying Modern Foreign Languages on Students with Dyslexia

It is worth noting that, in spite of factors mentioned above, all teachers surveyed had at least some experience of teaching students with dyslexia, indicating that at least some students with dyslexia were choosing to pursue MFL. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the majority of teachers expressed that, in their experience, students with dyslexia often flourished within the language classroom, when enabled to do so through differentiated learning methodologies and other accommodations – Teacher E was the exception in this regard but stated that she believed her lack of experience with differentiation due to her career break was influencing her perspective. The idea that students with dyslexia can flourish within the MFL classroom is supported by the research of Osipova (2016) and Cappelli (2021), which demonstrates that not only are there numerous methodologies which can be utilised to accommodate students with dyslexia - as well as students with other SEN -, but that when these methodologies are implemented, students with dyslexia can participate and achieve well, demonstrating that the MFL classroom need not be a stressful environment for students with dyslexia.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, when the findings of this research are considered alongside extant studies on the impact of dyslexia on language learning, and dyslexia in the MFL classroom, they demonstrate that the experiences of Irish teachers of MFL tend to align with those of their colleagues working abroad. The impact of Irish exemptions on student and parent confidence is arguably an exception to this, as the Irish exemption is a circumstance unique to the Irish educational system. It can be argued from this, albeit limited data, that Irish teachers of MFL generally believe that the classroom environment does not have to be a stressful environment for dyslexia students, similarly to their colleagues abroad. Additionally, the perspective that explicit teaching in language mechanics, such as phonetics, would be of benefit to students with dyslexia, is also supported by the extant research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin with a summary of the findings of the research, and how these findings relate to the chosen research questions. There will then be an examination of the limitations associated with the study, followed by possible recommendations for future educational research and practice, followed by concluding remarks. The aims of the research were to gain an understanding of the experiences of MFL teachers regarding the inclusion of students with dyslexia, and to examine the opinions MFL teachers held regarding students with dyslexia. The research questions were, is the MFL classroom an inherently stressful environment for students with dyslexia, and is explicit instruction in language mechanics (such as phonemics) more beneficial for students with dyslexia?

6.2 Summary of Findings

All MFL teachers that participated in the interviews had experience of teaching students with dyslexia, reflecting the status of dyslexia as an SRD that teachers of language are likely to encounter due to its relative commonality (Loumbourdi and Karacic 2013). The opinions of Irish MFL teachers regarding students of dyslexia were mostly positive, with all teachers expressing the belief that students with dyslexia could participate in the language classroom. In terms of the research questions, the perspectives of the teachers interviewed generally conform to the idea that the language classroom is not necessarily inherently stressful, but that negative self-perception on the part of students, and the stress engendered by certain forms of assessment, can contribute to creating a stressful environment in the MFL classroom. In particular, while teachers acknowledged that the CBA had benefits in terms of increasing student motivation, students with dyslexia who required extra ‘support to become more autonomous’ in their learning often found the CBA process to be stressful (Lamb and Little 2016, p186). The teachers surveyed were uncertain as to whether explicit instruction in language mechanics, such as phonetics, would be beneficial for students with dyslexia, however there was a general agreement that it was sometimes necessary to explain grammatical concepts of the target language through English. This aligns with the findings of Robertson (2000, p65) that ‘specific teaching’ of language mechanics is beneficial for students with SEN.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations associated with the research, chief of which is its scope. The research was conducted on a very small scale, utilising convenience sampling, meaning that it is worth being cautious when applying the findings of the study to language teachers in Ireland as a whole. Additionally, only one interview was conducted with each participant, meaning that information gathered was limited. A second interview with each participant could possibly have allowed for an expansion on certain themes that emerged during the interviews. Thirdly, only one of teachers interviewed (Teacher C), had experience of working abroad in a different educational system, something which Medina et al. (2015) note can increase teacher empathy towards language learners. Lastly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and several successive lockdowns on students cannot be underestimated, as the teachers interviewed spoke of how it negatively impacted student confidence. This is supported by Tsagari et al.’s (2023, p39) observation that during lockdowns, ‘[student] communication and collaboration was

compromised'. However, given the scope of the research, it was simply not possible to further explore this theme to its fullest extent.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Pedagogical Research and Practice

Based on the conclusions of this research, it can be argued that further research into the impacts of dyslexia in the anglophone MFL classroom is required, in order to expand the current understanding of how dyslexia influences the teaching and learning of a foreign language. Longitudinal studies could be of particular value in this case, as language learning by its nature is a lifelong endeavour that all students, including those with dyslexia, will hopefully continue throughout their lives (Kormos et al 2009; Tehrani 2007). It would also arguably be of interest to examine the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on language learning, and how this impacted students with SEN, such as dyslexia. In terms of future educational practice, it can be argued that time should be set aside for explicit instruction in language mechanics, as this would benefit students with dyslexia, as well as their peers.

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued Irish teachers of MFL view the language classroom as a place that can and should be supportive of all students. This is demonstrated through the generally positive attitudes towards the presence of students with dyslexia in the language classroom. Where negative attitudes are expressed, they are aimed at institutional and administrative issues, such as busy timetables preventing co-ordination with subject departments or SEN departments. This is undoubtedly a topic that merits further research, given the prevalence of dyslexia, and the importance of language learning in a globalised world.

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Appendices

Appendix I–Table of Thematic Analysis (Colour Coding)

The Colour Code of text adopted within the transcript in the thematic analysis is illustrated within the Table AF-1 below:

| Colour Code | Dominant Theme | Co-Emerging Sub Themes |
|---|---|--|
| Theme 1 (Green Highlight) | Self-directed learning, like that required for the CBA, presents a source of stress for students with dyslexia and other SEN (special educational needs). | |
| Theme 2 (Pink Highlight) | Irish exemptions tend to discourage students with dyslexia from pursuing languages. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An emphasis on success leads Senior Cycle students with dyslexia to avoid MFL |
| Theme 3 (Red Highlight) | With the proper support, it is possible for students with dyslexia to participate and achieve in an MFL setting. | |
| Theme 4 (Turquoise Highlight) | Greater emphasis on spoken language at both Junior and Senior Cycle to build student confidence. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grammar is easier explained in English, for all students (with and without SEN). |
| Theme 5 (Yellow Highlight) | Lack of time to invest in differentiation for students with dyslexia. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Junior Cert Specification encourages a focus on vocabulary over grammar, which negatively impacts students with dyslexia. Difficulty in co-ordinating meetings with subject and SEN departments due to demanding timetables |
| Sub-Theme 1 (Light Gray Highlight) | An emphasis on success leads Senior Cycle students with dyslexia to avoid MFL | |
| Sub-Theme 2 (Purple Highlight) | Grammar is easier explained in English, for all students (with and without SEN). | |
| Sub-Theme 3 (Light Blue Highlight) | Junior Cert Specification encourages a focus on vocabulary over grammar, which negatively impacts students with dyslexia. | |
| Sub-Theme 4 (Orange Highlight) | Difficulty in co-ordinating meetings with subject and SEN departments | |

Appendix II–Thematic Analysis -Extract from Transcripts

Extract from Interview with Teacher C, utilising the colour-coding from Appendix I

Researcher: Can I ask, in your experience, do students with dyslexia tend to avoid Modern Foreign Languages?

Teacher C: Yes, they have done, but there is more to help them now, particularly lately in this school. But not all students want to give up. I teach students with dyslexia because they like the sound of the language. They like participating and I don't tend to put pressure on them if their spelling isn't good. So, I think when I say yes, more so in the past, but at the same time we try to encourage them not give up, because they tend to want to give up quite quickly, which is understandable and coming from the language that they had [being] Irish. They may have dropped Irish as well because of dyslexia, so there is a way around it by just encouraging them to speak and to hear and to listen and then you've got to be fair with them, when it comes to their misspellings.

Researcher: So, do you think the avoidance of language learning perhaps comes from a lack of confidence?

Teacher C: Yes absolutely, especially in Ireland. Yeah.

Researcher: So, what does the term differentiation mean for you?

Teacher C: Well, when I look at a class of 30, I have to, I have to look at all of their abilities. I have to be able to pick up- pick on, pick up on what child is taking the lesson very quickly or what child is really struggling. So, then I have to look at my own plans and see how I can make it easy for each- both the gifted child and the child that may find it very difficult. And that takes a lot of work and it's very difficult to work in a class of 30. Differentiation works easier with students that are 15 in a room which has happened to me very seldom really to be honest with you. I often, often say to students who are weak if they can manage to get 10 words when the rest of the class are getting 20, I will mark them different. That's important.

Researcher: So, is that how you would relate it to your current practice as a teacher?

Teacher C: How I would relate the?

Researcher: The kind of the concept of differentiation you kind of relate it to, I suppose, uh setting different goals.

Teacher C: Setting different goals for, for, for the children in the class, but literally there may be the child that has dyslexia, the child that is that is bored because she can do a lot more, the child that is very weak and sometimes weak because they're not encouraged. Differentiation can be- when you think of differentiation, it can also be the child that doesn't put the effort in and gives up very quickly and is bright enough. So, you have to find ways of stimulating the child and you have to find ways of making your class extremely interesting. And never drop the ball with them all. And that's the thing that that is, it's quite exhausting for 30 [students] in a classroom, but it has to be done.

Researcher: So how would you currently describe your experiences in implementing differentiation?

Teacher C: In my classroom, I think group work is very important. And how I layout the tables can be very important, and I change them around all of the time so that some students can work differently with others. I have to think of my plan, my lesson plan that gives enough information to the stronger student and can gather more [sic], but then keywords make sure that the whole class has the keywords to a lesson. I have to then encourage them, if they don't do, if they weaker children don't do well in an exam and sometimes give them the opportunity to repeat that exam again, because the last thing I want them to do is to be disheartened in the classroom of 30. So, my experience is difficult with a full lesson plan insofar as I would love to do more, but I just work with what I've got and the time that it allows me to do so. but my ideal world would be for a smaller group of girls learning a language because I can't get around to 30 and see how they are all doing individually every day in 40 minutes, you know.

Researcher: And do you think the fact that they go from having four classes a week in 1st year to three classes a week in 2nd and 3rd year, do you think that kind of contributes to the difficulty in differentiating?

Teacher C: Yeah, I do. Yeah. I don't know what you mean by four classes to, three in first year. When you go from, from- you're talking about in the four classes of French to the three classes they've that they've reduced because of the SPHE hours? The well-being hours?

Researcher: Yes, that's as far as I understand it.

Teacher C: I do. I do because I found with my four classes in first year, I've got uh, uh great communication with them and a great rapport with them because I have four classes. I see them more regularly. It gets harder in second and third year because I only see them. Three times a week. And I think it has put a strain on my relationship with the students as well and not just the amount that they're learning. But I know that's something we can't change.

Researcher: So, in your practice, do you currently feel that you're able to liaise with the SEN department regarding differentiation for students with dyslexia or other language processing difficulties?

Teacher C: I can liaise with them. They're very approachable. But they have a very full timetable as well. And so, the times I liaise with them is that if one or two students have been taken out for extra help, they will come to me sometimes and ask me 'what am I doing?' and I'll give them sheets to work on, but I'm not always in communication with them. But yes, they're very approachable.

Researcher: And in your practice, do you currently feel able to liaise with your subject department regarding differentiation for students with dyslexia?

Teacher C: Yes, we would like to meet a lot more often when we can, we will discuss what are we doing with each classes [sic]. We have put this up in our [Google] drive as to what we focus on for differentiation. Having a French language assistant in the school helps with differentiation because she- having a second teacher in the classroom to help and to zone in on the girls that need the help is just priceless. It's extremely important and it's a great help to us, so I would strongly recommend a French language assistant. Which is offered to many schools if we apply for it on time.

Researcher: So, kind of our recurring theme seems to be that these are all things that we would like to achieve, but that the time constraints of-

Teacher C: There are time constraints. And I understand there are time constraints in every school, not just my school but that is, that is the biggest obstacle in my job and always has been.

Appendix III–Consent Form

| Sample Consent Form | |
|---|---|
| Researcher | [40023501] |
| Organisation | Hibernia College |
| Title of Study | Teachers' Perspectives on Including Students with Dyslexia in the MFL Classroom |
| <p>Consent (To be completed by participant):</p> <p>Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study? Yes/No</p> <p>Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No</p> <p>Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No</p> <p>Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without your withdrawal having an adverse effect for you? Yes/No</p> <p>Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference? Yes/No</p> <p>Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher? Yes/No</p> <p>Are you satisfied that any information you give to the researcher will be kept confidential? Your name and the name of the school will not appear in the research report. Yes/No</p> | |
| <p>Participant's name (printed): _____</p> <p>(signature): _____</p> <p>Date: _____</p> | |
| <p>Researcher's signature: _____</p> <p>Date: _____</p> | |

Appendix IV– Principals Letter

[Principal's name & school address]

[Date]

Dear [Principal's Name],

As part of my Professional Masters in Post-Primary Education with Hibernia College, I am investigating the experiences of Modern Foreign Language teachers (i.e., teachers of either Spanish, French, or German) in teaching the language to students with dyslexia. The title of the research project is 'Teachers' Perspectives on Including Students with Dyslexia in the MFL Classroom'.

Classroom teachers play a vital role in assessing whether students with additional educational needs are meeting their educational goals, and implementing differentiation in order to ensure students can participate fully in lessons. This letter aims to provide you with an introduction to the research project and to seek consent from you for the project to move forward in order to inform my future professional practice as a teacher.

With your permission, I would like to interview two classroom teachers. The staff will be asked to partake in semi-structured interviews to gain an insight into the aims of the project. Please find enclosed for your perusal, a copy of the information and consent forms. Only those respondents who return a signed copy of the consent form will be purposely selected to take part in the study. Any data gathering will strictly be underpinned by the school's ethical code of conduct. No students will be interviewed. Information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. The school's name will not appear on any research findings. Interviews will be recorded, and the data will be securely held under Hibernia College Research Ethics guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time. The results from this research study will be reported in my research project and may be disseminated through professional publication.

I would appreciate your cooperation in providing access to the staff at the school over the coming weeks. If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Researcher:

Mobile:

Tel. No:

Email:

This research study has received Ethics approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact: School of Education, Hibernia College Dublin.

Tel

Researcher's Print Name:

Researcher's Signature:

Date:

Appendix V–Interview Questions

1. In general, how would you describe your experiences in teaching Modern Foreign Languages?
2. In your experience, do students with dyslexia tend to avoid Modern Foreign Languages? If so, why do you think this is?
3. What does the term “differentiation” mean for you? How do you relate it to your current practice as a teacher?

4. In general, how would you currently describe your experiences in implementing differentiation in the classroom?
5. In your practice, do you currently feel able to liaise with the SEN department regarding differentiation for students with dyslexia?
6. In your practice, do you currently feel able to liaise with your subject department regarding differentiation for students with dyslexia?
7. Do you think the current Junior Cycle specification for Early Modern Languages adequately addresses the needs of students with language processing difficulties like dyslexia?
8. Are you familiar with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)?
9. Do you think teaching through the target language is more beneficial for the general student population? Can you explain why/why not?
10. Do you think teaching through the target language is more beneficial for students with dyslexia? Can you explain why/why not?