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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DYSGRAPHIC LEARNERS IN BENIN EFL CLASSROOM: TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Dysgraphia is categorized among Specific Learning Disability (SLD). It is considered as a type of Specific Learning Disability that affects the ability of a child to output his/her ideas on paper. The current survey was conducted to identify EFL students with dysgraphia (students with writing problems) at secondary schools of Ouémé regions in Benin, a West Africa country. A sample of 240 students (N=240) were selected from four (04) different classes and four (04) schools of Ouémé region through a Purposive Sampling Technique. Data were collected through a self-developed tool, named 'Identification of EFL Learners with Dysgraphia', and followed by the class observation, and an interview with teachers. Findings indicated that about 37% of learners were facing problems in handwriting. It is then important that all stakeholders make a decision so as to assist these learners for a better support.

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is very demanding in low resources countries like Benin Republic. Due to the specific context, both EFL teachers and learners are confronted with many challenges such as limited access to qualified teachers, insufficient teaching materials, and overcrowded classrooms. Added to this, learners are rarelyexposed to theEnglish language outside the classroom, reducing opportunities for practice and immersion. Additionally, the lack of digital tools and the poorinternet access make it difficult to incorporate modern teaching methods, leaving educators reliant on outdated approaches. David Nunan (2015) *"emphasized learner-centered approaches and communicative competence, highlighting the need for practical strategies that empower students despite resource constraints"*. Moreover, becausethe official language is French, EFL challenges in Benin also include sociolinguistic barriers, as students often juggle multiple local languages alongside French. This multilingual environment can complicate vocabulary retention and pronunciation. Stephen Krashen's theories (1982) on second language acquisition highlight the importance of comprehensible input and low-anxiety learning environments. This means that learners' difficulties increase with teaching-learning conditions, characterized by underfunded schools where learners face exam pressure and limited exposure to authentic English contexts. Furthermore, these challenges increase with learners with specific needs such as Learners with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs) who have brain-based processing disorders that affect their ability to read, write, spell, or do math, despite having average or above-average intelligence. Studies differentiated dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. These impairments are distinct from global intellectual disabilities. These conditions create a gap between learners' motivation to master English and the resources available to support their progress.

Background and Problem Statement: According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs) refer to *"a group of specific lifelong cognitive impairments identified through the unexpected underachievement in a range of learning processes involving the skills of listening, speaking, spelling, written expression, mathematics, understanding, or reading including decoding and comprehension"*. Learners experiencing those disabilities are confronted with more challenges than others in a language class. Among those disabilities,dysgraphia is one that can affect English as a Foreign LanguageLearners' outcomes, mainly as far as writing is concerned. Dysgraphia is a specific learning disability affecting pupils' writing abilities, often leading to incomplete notes, poor handwriting, and low

academic performance. Elizabeth Aremu and Kehinde Lawal (2024) defined it as *"a prevalent specific learning disability (SLD) affecting children globally, presenting significant challenges in writing skills and socio-emotional well-being"*.

Table 1. Main Types of SLDs

Types of SLDs	Key Features
Dyslexia	Primarily impacts reading and language processing. Studentsstruggle with word recognition, Lack of accurate spelling, and reading fluency.
Dysgraphia	Affects written expression. Challenges with neat handwriting. Challenges in organizing thoughts on paper. Challenges in maintaining proper grammar and spelling.
Dyscalculia	Restrictions with mathematical capabilities. Difficulties to perform basic calculations, memorize math facts, or solve multi-step problems.
Auditory & Visual Processing Disorders (AVPB)	Normal vision and hearing. But difficulty making sense of information taken in through the eyes or ears, despite.
Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities (NVLD)	Strong verbal skills but weakness in visual-spatial, motor, and social skills.

Source: Mensah & Zinsouvi (2026)

In Benin EFL context learners are confronted with many challenges. Understanding the causes of those challenges may significantly help in overcoming them.

Purpose of the Study: The main objective of this study is to address the serious, yet habituallyignored, challenge of dysgraphia within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in Benin. This overall goal is split into three specific objectives. The current survey was conducted:

To identify EFL students with dysgraphia. To show the correlation between dysgraphia and students' writing problems. To suggest strategies for reducing dysgraphia learners' challenges in EFL writing classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the literature related to writing in EFL challenges with a specific regard to dysgraphia challenges in EFL.

Writing Challenges in EFL Classes: Difficulties in a language learning are multiple. The ones related to writing seem to be more important. According to Alimohammadi and Nejadansari (2014); and Almasi and Tabrizi (2016), cited byAbdulattif Yusuf Aljoza and Issa Mohammed Almustafa (2024),*"Academic writing is probably counted as the hardest skill for English as a foreign language (EFL) learner and even for native speakers of English language"*. As a proof, during this research work, it is noticed that EFL learners usually abandon the writing tasks during the periodical summative assessments. Moreover, during the feedback session, the teachers also leave that part most of the time. In a typical EFL class learners face many challenges. Abdulattif Yusuf Aljoza and Issa Mohammed Almustafa (2024) mentioned: *"vocabulary constraints, idea generation struggles, coherence issues, and the lack of operative writing approaches"*.

This means that, EFLlearners faced with insufficient academic vocabulary, making precise expressions challenging. Furthermore, producingnew ideas and keeping coherence within essays writings.

Table 2. Identified challenges in writing

Types of Challenges	Language Aspects	Key Features
Linguistic and Mechanical Issues	Vocabulary Limitations	Lack of the academic vocabulary needed to express complex concepts. Relying on repetitive, simple word choices.
	Grammar & Syntax	Errors with verb tenses Subject-verb agreement mistakes. Frequent errors in words order due to direct translations from native or first languages.
	Mechanics	Punctuation errors. Spelling errors. Lack of flow and clarity of paragraphs.
Cognitive and Content Difficulties	Generating Ideas	Writer's block Lack of sufficient background knowledge on the given writing prompt.
	Organization	Lack of cohesion and coherency Lack of proper transitions.
Psychological and Affective Barriers	Writing Anxiety	Fear of making mistakes Fear of receiving poor grades Low self-confidence and procrastination.
	Lack of Motivation	Loss of interest (Because writing is a solitary and demanding task) Tasks are not perceived as meaningful or applicable to real-life situations

Source: Mensah & Zinsouvi (2026)

Added to those commonly mentioned challenges, dysgraphia comes as a double burden for LSD English as a Foreign Language Learners.

Dysgraphia in EFL Learners: Exploring the neurodiversity aspect of heterogenous language classes in Benin context, reveals the specific challenges of neurodiverse students in Beninese education.One of those challenges is an affection related to handwriting, fine motor skills, and orthographic processing.This disability is known as dysgraphia which is not just a poor penmanship, but also a cerebral disconnection between the retrieval of language from memory and the motor act of translating that language into written symbols. In Benin written exam-driven context, EFL learners suffering from dysgraphia experience a*'double burden'*: an orthographicdepth and the linguistic identification. This means that moving from the highly regular orthography of local languages or the distinct phonetic rules of French to the complex, non-phonetic spelling system of English (deep orthography) causes severe working memory overload. Moreover, teachers often mistake dysgraphia for a lack of motivation, laziness, or simple linguistic incompetence in English, leading to high anxiety and low academic self-esteem in EFL learners. Muktamath (2022) recognized that: *"A particular type of learning disorder known as dysgraphia is identified in children and affects fine motor skills and handwriting, causing children to develop inadequate handwriting, low for their age level, which affects their school*

development and learning". It means that this situation highly influences learners' outcomes, mainly in a written assessment. The different manifestations of dysgraphia and their impact on writing in an EFL class are summarized in the following table.

Table 3. Manifestations of Dysgraphia

Specific Manifestations	Impact on EFL Written Productions
Inconsistent Letter Formation	Mixing uppercase and lowercase letters.
Spatial Disorientation	Struggles with line alignment, word spacing, and margins. Unreadable words and text.
Phonemic vs. Orthographic Breakdown	Very good oral spelling of a word but wrong written forms.
Severe Writing Fatigue	Physical cramping and psychological exhaustion after writing only a few sentences. Extreme reduction in output during written composition tasks.

Source: Mensah & Zinsouvi (2026)

A close look at the table 3 help for understanding the poor quality or the quasi-drop-in writing tasks during evaluations in Benin secondary school. In fact, during the marking sessions of the national examinations (BEPC, BAC, …), it is noticeable that the large majority of the teachers complain about the fact that learners abandon writing task. Besides, they also recognize that learners' handwriting affects their final results.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sampling: To achieve its goals, this study uses a mixed-methods to gather data and the lived experiences of students and teachers in Oueme region, mainly in four secondary schools of Porto-Novo, Benin.A purposive sampling was used to identify students displaying chronic writing difficulties, followed by standard fine motor and writing speed tests to isolate dysgraphic profiles from general low-proficiency learners.

Table 4: Sampling and Population

Schools	Location	Teachers	Students
Lycée Technique et Professionel de Porto-Novo	Oueme	03	60
CEG Application	Oueme	03	60
CEG 1 Adjarra	Oueme	03	60
CEG 1 Bonou	Oueme	03	60
Total		**12**	**240**

Besides, the selected students run a test. This helps to identify learners with dysgraphia among the sample.

Identifying Dysgraphia: Using a simplified grid, learners were tested to checkwhether they are experiencing dysgraphia conditions.

Presentation of the Results and Discussions of the Findings

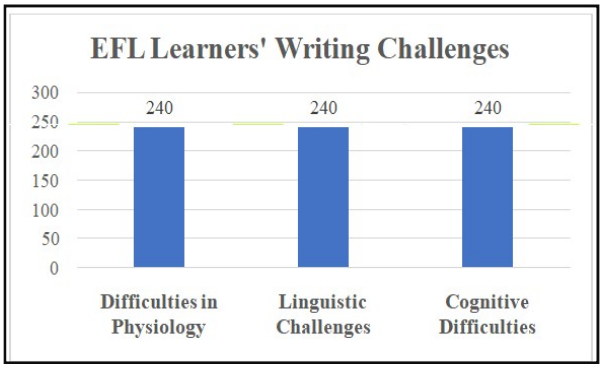


Figure 1. EFL Learners' writing challenges

The identified problems of writing consist of three categories. All the EFL learners have difficulties in Physiology (content aspect), Linguistics (language use, grammar and vocabulary), and Cognitive difficulties (organization and mechanics). The next pie chart discloses the existence of students with dysgraphia problem in Benin EFL context.

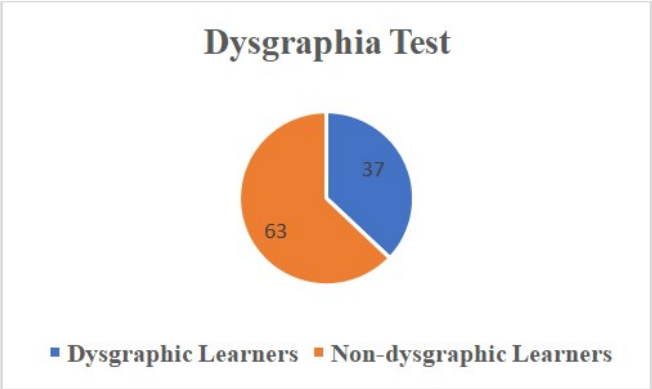


Figure 2. Dysgraphia test results

Figure 2 shows that thirty-seven percent (37 %) of the students who run the test are experiencing dysgraphia conditions. This confirms the existence of the problem among Beninese students. The next figure displays the specific problems encounter by those students with dysgraphia disability.

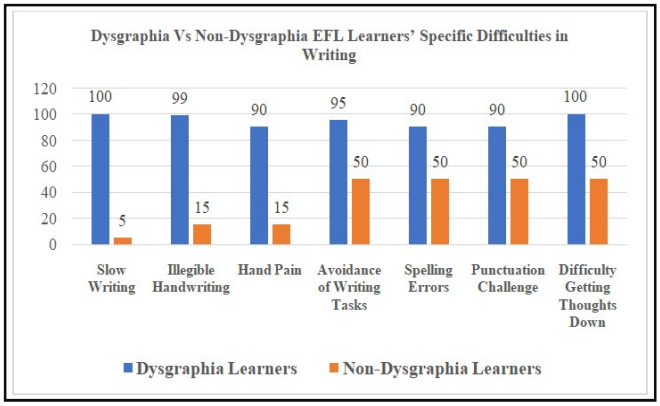


Figure 3. Dysgraphia Vs Non-Dysgraphia EFL Learners' Specific Difficulties in Writing

Figure 3 confirms dysgraphia learners' challenges. Slownote taking, illegible handwriting, hand pain, avoidance of writing tasks, spelling errors, punctuation challenge and difficulty getting thoughts down are theirspecific challenges. And it is noticeable that dysgraphia learners feel and face those challenges more than others students. This can be seen in all the specific aspects of writing productions. As demonstrated by this study and displayed in figure 3, there is a correlation between dysgraphia and learners written performances. For example, hundred percent (100 %) of the dysgraphia learners are slow writers against five percent (5 %) for other learners. Moreover, a large majority of them have illegible handwriting (99 %) and they avoid writing tasks (95 %). This corroborates the study ofPokrivčáková (2018) who found that *"Writing is a key skill in second language acquisition for EFL learners. However, some students face quite strong problems in this area due to dysgraphia, as it affects the ability to transfer spoken language into written form"*. The students' difficulties varied as indicated by scores or criteria of writing test. From the results, it can be said that the dysgraphia learners' difficulties

are more important in organizational and mechanical aspects, than content, when compared to others students. It means that the most difficult aspects that were found in the students with dysgraphia's writing were related to cognitive challenges.

Suggestions and Implications: Based on the findings, the following suggestions are made to help dysgraphia EFL learners in overcoming the different challenges.

Inclusive Teaching-Learning: One of the main challenges in EFL classes raises from their heterogenous aspect. To solve this problem, this study suggests inclusive teaching-learning strategies. These involve designing pedagogy, curricula, and assessment in ways that engage students meaningfully, making learning accessible and relevant to all. These strategies emphasize equity, diversity, and student-centered approaches, ensuring that differences in culture, language, ability, or identity are seen as assets rather than barriers.

As reveals by this study, Hockings (2010) said that:

Inclusive teaching, learning and assessment are the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the course of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others.

And the works of Dewsbury (2017) confirmed that *"Inclusive teaching is a philosophy of teaching that provides equal opportunities for all students to have a successful learning experience"*. This means that diversity in an EFL class can be handled through inclusive teaching-learning and assessment strategies.

Then, integrating cognitive, structural scaffolding and low-tech activities in Benin EFL context is essential to meet dysgraphia learners' needs. These include activities such as:

Graphic Organizers: Instead of asking dysgraphia students to write an essay from a blank page, teachers may provide structured visual outlines in order to organize their arguments without worrying about spatial arrangement first.

Gaps fillings or Finding information: For vocabulary or grammar practice, teachers can reduce the hand writing loadfor the students to focus on the target linguistic structure rather than copying whole sentences, paragraphs or text from the board.

Collaborative works: EFL teachers should encourage peer and group tasks. For a discussion or debate preparation, for example, they should allow a student with strong motor skills to serve as the team scribe while the dysgraphia student acts as the primary speaker.

Keyboarding and Voice Typing: Where digital tools likesmartphones or computers are accessible, EFL teachers should encourage students to use speech-to-text tools or word processors. These tools reduce cognitive fatigue and allow the student's true language proficiency to shine through.
This means transforming the classroom and moving away from traditional 'drill-and-copy'practices to innovative strategies and activities taking into account diverse students' needs in teaching-learning and assessment.

Innovative Assessment in EFL: Holistic Vs Criteria

A shift from exams-oriented curricula to competences-based teaching is essential. Added to this moving from holistic assessments to criteria assessments is also advisable. Then, one of the keysto create an inclusive teaching and learning environment is rethinking assessment. As written by Michael J. Thompson, Alicia R. Hernandez, David L. Morgan and Rebecca S Palmer (2025) *"An inclusive approach demands that assessment practices measure communicative competence, not handwriting speed or neatness"*. This study finds that assessment highly influences teaching-methods and strategies. That is why it suggests a change from holistic to criteria assessments, using appropriate rubrics. Instead of appreciating learners' productions as a whole, and giving aglobal score based on the general impression of performance, criteria or analytic assessment breaks performance into specific components, using rubrics to score each separately for detailed feedback.

Implication: Training and building capacity

Succeeding in creating an inclusive EFL classroom in Benin requires a shift in educational policies followed by training to empower teachers who are the real actors for any implementation. Then, educational stakeholders should collaborate to demystify and understand learners' disability by organizing workshops to help teachers recognize that poor handwriting and some written mistakes are often a neurological issue, not an intellectual or behavioral deficit. They should redefine rubrics with less focus on neatness as a criterion for grading written English exams unless it directly impedes comprehension. Moreover, educators ought to encourage oral fluency by prioritizing oral communications, debates, and listening comprehension in the curriculum, theexams and assessmentsover heavy written transcriptions.

CONCLUSION

This study outlines the main challenges, the pedagogical implications, and the transformative strategies required to create an inclusive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classroom taking into accountdysgraphia learners in Benin.Using a mixed method, the researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data from students of four (04) secondary schools of Oueme region. Classroom observations and interviews were used as data collection tools. An identification test was also run tofind EFL learners with Dysgraphia. Data confirmed the heterogenous aspect of EFL classes and the following challenges were categorized with extra complications for dysgraphia learners in writing: vocabulary constraints, idea generation struggles, coherence issues, and lack of effective writing strategies. Practical suggestions for both EFL teachers and learnersare made to enhance writing skills in academic contexts. Then, the study reveals that outlining and valuing feedback can significantly reduce those burdens and improved writing outcomes. It also emphasizes moving away from traditional copying routines to multisensory and accommodative methodologies. This necessitates a deep change in the curriculum, the assessment methods, the educational policy and EFL teachers' training, in order to prioritize oral interaction, debates, and listening comprehension in the curriculum over heavy written transcription.

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