

SCALED Course

Increasing accessibility in language education



Module 7. Making language education accessible to students with ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia

Veerle Garrels

Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway grants



OSLOMET

SCALED Course – Increasing accessibility in language education

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Introduction to the SCALED Course

Joanna Nijakowska

Aims and rationale

The SCALED course aims to promote equity, anti-discrimination, and inclusion in language education through increasing accessibility and universal design in course planning, design and implementation. It focuses on diverse learners, including learners with special needs.

The course advocates the idea that student diversity is a norm, and it should be celebrated. We believe that designing educational environments and experiences with an average student in mind, following the one-size-fits-all approach is not effective. In contrast, when instructional design is more universal, it targets the broadest possible range of learners and proactively addresses the potential barriers to learning.

The SCALED course supports universal design – an approach where instructors and teachers provide options and choices available to all learners in a class because it helps to avoid stigmatising learners as being different. In many countries multi-tiered systems of learner support, which make use of both universal design and accommodations offered to individual learners, are in place. The course refers to instructional and assessment accommodations as well. Attention is given to meeting special needs that language learners may have, which may require a more

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individualised approach or the use of assistive technology. These needs may stem for instance from sensory and mobility impairments or specific learning difficulties.

Target audience

The course responds to the needs of the academic and school community and has been designed to be part of the initial training and continuing professional development of pre-service and in-service school teachers and academic teachers working in the context of foreign language teaching (FL) and education through language (Content and Language Integrated Learning – CLIL, English Medium Instruction – EMI). The course equips teachers with tools to eliminate barriers and effectively include the maximum number of students in language education.

Methodology and pedagogical strategies

The SCALED course follows recent trends in teacher education in terms of its structure and methodology by implementing task-based instruction and teacher reflection. Its pedagogical strategies are in line with inclusive teaching and universal design. The course integrates self-study, experiential learning, critical thinking, and professional enquiry and reflection. The course has been designed so as to enable implementation in online self-study, hybrid (face-to-face and online – synchronous and asynchronous) and face-to-face modes.

The course uses task-based instruction and teacher reflection in developing teacher knowledge and skills in equitable and accessible language education. The course incorporates the model of the teacher as a reflective practitioner (Wallace, 1991), according to which reflective teachers:

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- experiment with new ideas and methodologies promoting learner-centred teaching, critically evaluate the learning content,
- question and verify assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning,
- creatively adapt their teaching,
- reflect on the outcomes of the learning and teaching processes.

In this model, the trainer/instructor plays a role of a moderator and facilitator rather than a model and a controller.

Many features of reflective teaching embodied in the course are fundamental to inclusive teaching. The following instances of reflective teacher behaviour are inclusive and encouraged in the course:

- questioning and redefining personal beliefs and values concerning the learning needs of all students (not just those with special needs),
- giving careful consideration and thought to classroom situations and case studies,
- paying attention to what is to be taught and how it is to be taught so that all learners can benefit,
- taking initiative to trigger development and change,
- seeking out and trying new things to support all learners and to solve different dilemmas of the classroom,

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- consulting and discussing new ideas and initiatives with colleagues (Minott, 2019).

Inclusive pedagogy promoted by the course aims to provide appropriate equitable support to all learners and to extend what is available to everybody rather than to offer provision for most with additional or different experiences for some (Florian & Spratt, 2013). It responds to individual differences between learners but attempts to avoid the stigma of treating some learners as different and the marginalisation caused by designing the teaching process only with individual learners in mind (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian, 2014). Options and choices are offered to everybody in the class instead of differentiated supports available only for some students (CAST, 2018; Meyer et al., 2014; Novak, 2022; Torres & Rao, 2019).

Course content

The course modules have as their central goal effectively including diverse learners in language education through active presence, participation, and engagement. It is important to note that inclusion has many faces and is operationalised in different ways in different countries. The modules in the course cover different aspects of increasing accessibility in language education and offer ways of providing appropriate equitable support to diverse learners by overviewing a range of possible supports and accommodations.

Accommodations may be differently defined, categorised, and administered in different countries. Often what is defined as an accommodation (available to an individual learner) in one country or context in other countries or contexts is offered

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as a universal feature (available to all learners). We share the belief that responding to individual differences across learners should be done in an informed, sensitive, and respectful way which prevents the marginalisation that can occur either when some students in a class are treated differently or when some learners are deprived of access to experiences, contents, resources, or settings that other learners have access to.

The course is composed of ten modules that tackle several issues crucial for effective inclusion in language education, all of them linked by the concept of accessibility.

The course comprises ten modules:

- Module 1: Responding to diversity: Inclusion and accessibility – *Astrid Gillespie & Hege Knudsmoen*,
- Module 2: Accessible learning: Universal Design for Learning – *Joanna Nijakowska*,
- Module 3: Accessible learning: Instructional accommodations – *Joanna Nijakowska*,
- Module 4: Universal Design for Learning: Accessible and usable digital learning materials – documents – *Weiqin Chen & Norun Christine Sanderson*,

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- Module 5: Universal Design for Learning: Accessible and usable digital learning materials – multimedia – *Weiqin Chen & Norun Christine Sanderson*,
- Module 6: Universal Design for Learning: Accessible online learning platforms – *Dorota Sidor*,
- Module 7: Making language education accessible to students with ADHD, Autism, and Dyslexia – *Veerle Garrels*,
- Module 8: Making language education accessible to visually impaired and blind students – *Zbigniew Drzazga*,
- Module 9: Inclusive and accessible Language Assessment – *Dina Tsagari*,
- Module 10: Making language education accessible to students with diverse language and cultural background – *Agnieszka Kałdonek-Crnjaković*.

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SCALED course – formats

The SCALED course is available on an open license and can be accessed in different ways, namely in the book/file format and in the online course format for distance learning. The [course in the book/file format is available on the SCALED project website](#) for browsing and reading online as well as for download and print as pdf files. These files include links and QR codes to electronic resources used in the course. Users can choose to browse or download the whole course or individual modules.



[The course](#) is also available as a remote online course for self-study on the e-learning platform of the University of Warsaw – Kampus.



Course duration

The course consists of ten modules and is planned to afford maximum flexibility to instructors and participants, offering a choice of compulsory and optional tasks and steps within tasks as well as additional resources so that it can cover a period of from

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one to two semesters/terms. It should be noted that due to the complexity of the subject matter, the modules vary in length with some of them requiring a more intense and extensive time and effort investment. The course is designed so that the course takers and instructors have an opportunity to choose activities and plan their learning path throughout the course to meet both their individual needs and learning/course objectives.

The self-study version of the course is planned for one semester/term (from 10 to 15 weeks). Each module is planned to cover a minimum of 120-minute direct study time and to provide a minimum of 2-3 hours of outside-the-classroom study and preparation time. The course participants are expected to spend approximately 5-6 hours on completing a module. Completing the whole course requires about 30 hours of classwork and 30 hours of outside classroom study and preparation time. A considerably larger amount of time needs to be allocated if the materials are adapted to be used during interactive online classes (synchronous online classes, involving an instructor/trainer working with a group of online course participants) or during onsite face-to-face classes. In these settings group interaction involving pair and group activities, panels and discussions, role-playing, sharing experiences and reflection, which constitutes a crucial element that can considerably enhance learning outcomes, requires allocating sufficient time. In these settings the course can be taught over a minimum of 10 to 15 weeks (depending on the length of the semester/term) or a maximum of 20 to 30 weeks.

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Notes and suggestions for trainers/instructors

The modules in the course follow a template, with predefined elements and their sequence, including:

- an introduction,
- learning objectives,
- a list of compulsory and optional tasks and steps – which helps to navigate through the module,
- four to six tasks, each including detailed instructions to all steps, materials, resources and notes for the trainer,
- a list of references,
- extra resources and recommended reading,
- a module summary,
- a list of key points/lessons learned from the module and a quiz.

Each module provides notes for the trainers on classroom management offering suggestions on adapting the self-study tasks to group work context. Options for classroom management are greater when trainees have access to different devices (e.g., computers, smartphones, headphones) so that they can have individualised and customised access to digital materials. This allows them to work at their own pace, for instance to watch a video with closed captions and at slower playback

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speed. Course instructors should choose classroom management options most suitable to and feasible in their teaching context and note that the suggested time required to complete a given task is approximate time and it may depend on the group's dynamics.

When you work with a book/file version of the course (online or printed), please instruct the trainees to either click the link (if they browse the text online) or scan the QR code (if they work with printed materials) to access the materials (e.g., a website or a video). A smart phone camera can be used to scan the QR codes.

Trainees should be instructed that they can customise and individualise the experience of watching the YouTube videos by setting the options that will make the video more accessible to them such as the size of the screen, the playback speed and quality of the video, subtitles/closed captions, translation into a selected language, and transcript. Also, the videos are divided into short chapters, which allows trainees to watch selected fragments.

Trainees should be also instructed about how they can use the text-to-speech functions (read out loud and immersive readers) in pdf documents and on websites. If they prefer listening to the text or reading and listening at the same time, they may [activate the "Read out loud function" in the pdf document](#).



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If they read the text on the website, they may use the “Immersive reader on websites” extension in Chrome. To get started, they select the text on the website they want to read, right-click it, and choose “Help me read this!” function. In the course modules you will find more suggestions on how to use freely available technology, software and apps to increase accessibility of various resources and facilitate the learning process.

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Module 7. Making language education accessible to students with ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia

Veerle Garrels

Introduction

In this module, you will learn about some of the challenges that students with common disorders may experience in an educational setting. The tasks in the module will help you gain insight in special educational needs, think critically and creatively about accommodations, and improve your own teaching practice. The module focuses on autism spectrum disorder (ASD), ADHD and dyslexia. You will get a better understanding of how these challenges may affect students' learning and motivation for learning, and you will gain insight in how you may accommodate your teaching to the diversity of students that you will encounter in the classroom.

After having gone through the different tasks in this module, you should be able to describe the characteristics of ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia. This module will also enable you to identify typical challenges that students with such disorders encounter. Moreover, you should be able to describe useful accommodations for the disorders.

The module consists of five tasks. Most of the tasks include an optional step that you can do to develop your competence even further. Time to complete the entire module (excluding the optional steps in each task) is approximately 3 hours 15 minutes.

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Learning objectives

After you have gone through this module, you should be able to:

- Describe the main characteristics of common disorders, such as ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia
- Identify some of the typical challenges that students with ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia may encounter during education
- Understand how individual impairments may be compensated for through environmental support, and how these impairments may be aggravated when such supports are absent or inadequate
- Develop and implement certain measures in your teaching to support students with ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia

Tasks you will do

The tasks in this module are the following:

- Task 1. Micro-writing task: Activating your prior knowledge
 - Step 1. Write down everything you know
 - Step 2. What you know and what you want to find out
 - Step 3. Mapping knowledge and knowledge needs for other disorders (*optional*)
- Task 2. Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - Step 1. Understanding ASD
 - Step 2. Sensory sensitivity and autism-friendly environments
 - Step 3. Strengths, challenges and diversity in ASD (*optional*)

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- Task 3. ADHD
 - Step 1. Diagnostic criteria for ADHD
 - Step 2. Executive functioning
 - Step 3. Classroom accommodations: A podcast (*optional*)
- Task 4. Dyslexia
 - Step 1. Understanding dyslexia
 - Step 2. Dyslexia and motivation for school
 - Step 3. Were humans designed to read and write?
 - Step 4. Accommodations for students with dyslexia
- Task 5. A case study: Understanding the experiences and support needs of students with special needs
 - Step 1. Supporting students with ASD through structure
 - Step 2. Supporting students who struggle in school
- Task 6. What have you learned?
 - Step 1. Podcast: Summarising your knowledge about ASD
 - Step 2. Mindmap: Summarising your knowledge about ADHD
 - Step 3. PowerPoint presentation: Summarising your knowledge about dyslexia

Task 1. Micro-writing task: Activating your prior knowledge

Task instructions

This task will help you activate your prior knowledge on common disorders. It will also help you identify any knowledge gaps that you may have, so that you can more

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readily find out what you already know and what you need to focus on learning about this topic.

Task duration

Time required to complete the task: 25 minutes (excluding the optional task)

Step 1. Write down everything you know

Some of the most common disorders that you will meet as a teacher are ADHD, ASD, and dyslexia. You may already have some knowledge about these disorders and maybe you yourself or someone you know has first-hand experience with them.

Knowing and understanding the typical challenges that characterise these disorders is important for how we meet students with special needs. Therefore, let's find out what you already know about these disorders!

For this task, you will need either a computer or a pencil and a sheet of paper and a stopwatch or timer (you can use your mobile phone for this). Choose one of the abovementioned disorders (ADHD, ASD, or dyslexia). Write down everything you know about this disorder. Write for three minutes and write complete sentences (not just bullet points). Do not stop to think, just write. Some questions to get you started:

- Where did you hear or learn about the disorder?
- Do you know anyone with the disorder?
- What are the main characteristics of the disorder?
- How do you think the disorder affects the person him/herself and those around?

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- How common is it (=prevalence)?
- What do you think causes the disorder?
- How can you tell if someone has this disorder?
- How can you help people with the disorder?
- Are there any advantages/disadvantages related to the disorder?

Step 2. What you know and what you want to find out

Now, read what you have written and decide which categories your ideas might go into in Table 1.

Table 1

What you know for certain and things you want to find out.

What I know for certain:	Things I need to check out further:

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Now that you have sorted your own ideas according to what you know for certain and what you need to check out further, you may think of three questions for yourself that you would like to be able to answer:

- Question 1:
- Question 2:
- Question 3:

This module should help you to find the answers to your questions. If not, the suggested resources at the end of the module may help you further.

Step 3. Mapping knowledge and knowledge needs for other disorders (optional)

Repeat the task for another disorder. For instance, if you chose ASD in Step 1 and 2, you may now repeat the task for ADHD or dyslexia.

Notes for the trainer

Trainees can perform this task individually or in pairs. Let trainees write for three minutes first, after which they can read what they have written aloud to a fellow student. Let trainees highlight key concepts in what they have written. You could also draw a table on the whiteboard and ask students to provide input for the different columns. Additionally, you may write trainees' questions on the whiteboard and answer their questions during your teaching. As an accommodation for trainees with reading and writing difficulties, the micro-writing task may be replaced with an audio-recording.

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Task 2. Autism Spectrum Disorder

Task instructions

This task will provide you with some more insight about ASD. In the first step, you will read a brief text that explains the main characteristics of ASD. You will also get the opportunity to reflect upon a couple of questions about your own teaching practice at this point. During the second step, you will watch a short video about sensory sensitivity in ASD.

Task duration

Time required to complete the task: 40 minutes (excluding the optional task)

Step 1. Understanding ASD

ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterised by impairments in social communication and interaction. This means that people with ASD experience difficulties with initiating and maintaining social relations with other people, but it does not automatically mean that they prefer being alone. Instead, they may need some help with social interaction and they may get stressed if the social demands of a situation exceed their capacity. People with ASD usually also experience deficits in nonverbal communication; they may struggle with understanding facial expressions and body language. Eye contact may be disturbing for people with ASD and they should not be forced to establish eye contact with others.

People with ASD also display stereotypical, restricted and repetitive behaviour, and they often have special interests that they like to spend a lot of time on, such as e.g.,

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the planetary system, dinosaurs, specific historical events, etc. When talking with others, they may frequently deviate from the topic of conversation and talk about their special interest instead.

Many people with ASD are oversensitive (hypersensitive) or undersensitive (hyposensitive) to sensory stimuli. When they are hypersensitive, this means that they may react strongly to certain sensory stimuli, such as bright light, high sounds, strong smells, tight clothes, etc. Hyposensitivity may sometimes result in not reacting adequately to pain, cold, or other discomfort.

People with ASD form a very heterogeneous group, meaning that each person with ASD is unique, despite common challenges with social interaction and communication. Some people with ASD have cognitive impairments, while others may be functioning intellectually at an above-average level. Some people with ASD may have a delay or deficit in their language development, while others have a typical language development (but they may still experience difficulties with pragmatic communication, i.e., using language appropriately in a social context)

If you want to learn more about the typical signs and symptoms of ASD, you can read it on [the ASD website prepared by Centers of Disease Control and Prevention](#).



People with ASD benefit from a predictable daily routine and structure in everyday life. Sudden changes may cause them to get stressed and upset. In an educational

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context, it is therefore important to provide a clear outline for what will happen during a classroom course. Students with ASD need to know the answers to each of the following questions when being given a task:

- What is the task that I am supposed to do right now?
- Where and how should I start?
- Who can I ask if I need help?
- How much time will I be spending on this task/When is it finished?
- Where will I be doing the task?
- What will I do afterwards?

Knowing the answers to these questions may make life a lot easier for students with ASD and it may prevent psychological stress. It is also important to keep in mind that students with ASD often have a relative strength in processing visual information, while auditory information may be harder for them to access.

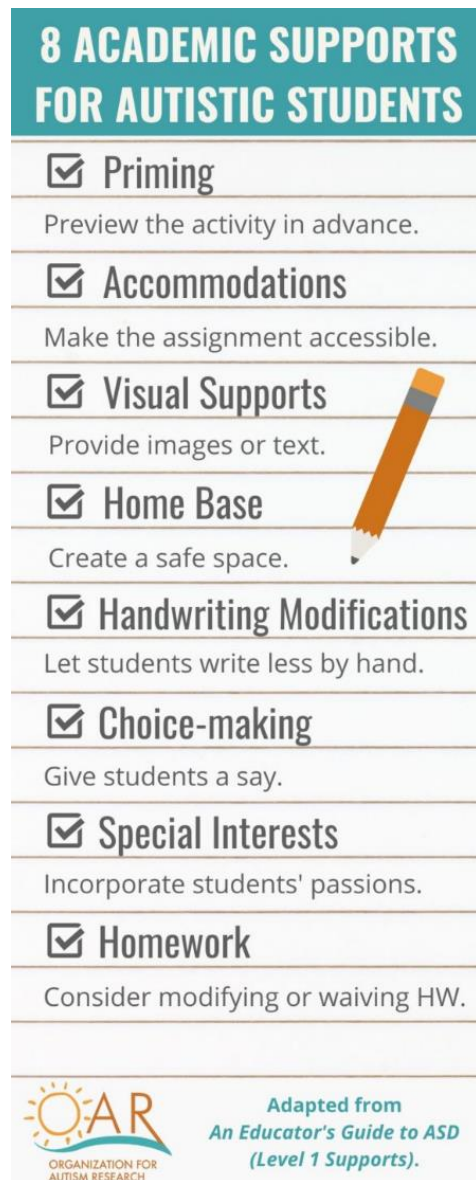
Figure 1, retrieved from the Organization for Autism Research, gives further information about useful accommodations that educators may implement in order to support students with ASD:

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Figure 1

Useful accommodations for students with ASD.



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Now reflect upon the following questions and take notes of your main ideas:

- Do you know anyone with ASD? How does the disorder manifest itself in their behaviour?
- In your teaching, can you identify some ways in which you could provide more structure for students with ASD? How would you go about in order to create a more predictable course and learning environment for them?
- Think about the eight recommendations for academic support that are listed in the figure. In your own teaching practice, can you find concrete examples of how you could integrate these supports in your lectures?

Step 2. Sensory sensitivity and autism-friendly environments

Now watch [the video about sensory sensitivity in ASD](#) (1:08).



After you have watched the video, reflect upon the following questions:

- In your classroom, which sensory stimuli can you identify?
- Which of these stimuli do you think could be stressful for a student with ASD?
- Identify three or four suggestions for how you could create a more autism-friendly sensory environment.

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The following [overview of sensory issues](#) may help you to reflect about the questions above and to identify some classroom accommodations for students with sensory sensitivity.



Step 3. Strengths, challenges and diversity in ASD (*optional*)

Watch the following [video documentary about life on the spectrum](#) (20:03).



This video clearly illustrates the heterogeneity of the autism spectrum, and how the life of people with ASD varies, not only depending on their autism, but also on other factors, such as interests and personality. Make a list of strengths and challenges that you see in the different people starring in the video. How could you use some of these strengths in your teaching? And how could you accommodate for some of the challenges that you identified? You may discuss these questions in pairs or in small groups, or you can reflect on your own.

Sample answer: Examples of strengths and challenges are provided in Table 2 (notice how the list of strengths can be much longer than the list of challenges):

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Table 2

Examples of strengths and challenges.

Strengths	Challenges
Persistent	Verbal language
Curious about the world	Gross motor skills
Caring, loving and kind	Difficulties with getting employment
Open	
Able to accept help	
Several interests; talented (music, swimming, mechanics,...)	
Ambitious	
Accepting	
Energetic	
Problem-solver	

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Notes for the trainer

Allow trainees sufficient time to read the text and watch the videos in each of the steps. Then, use a “Think – pair – share” approach to let trainees go through the questions for reflection. First, allow a couple of minutes for individual reflection, before letting trainees discuss the questions for reflection in pairs. Then, go through each of the questions in a plenary session with the entire class. Make sure to write down good suggestions for possible accommodations on the whiteboard.

Task 3. ADHD

Task instructions

During this task, you will watch a video about attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, also known as ADHD. You will answer some questions about the diagnostic criteria of ADHD and how these can manifest themselves amongst students with ADHD in the classroom. You will learn about executive functioning, and you will be encouraged to see the typical challenges that people with ADHD encounter from a relational perspective rather than from a medical point of view.

Task duration

Time required to complete the task: 40 minutes (excluding the optional task)

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Step 1. Diagnostic criteria for ADHD

Watch [the video about ADHD](#) (4:29) carefully.



Then, answer the following questions:

- What are the three main diagnostic criteria ADHD?
- For each of the criteria, write down a couple of examples of the typical challenges that may result from them, with a particular focus on classroom functioning.

Step 2. Executive functioning

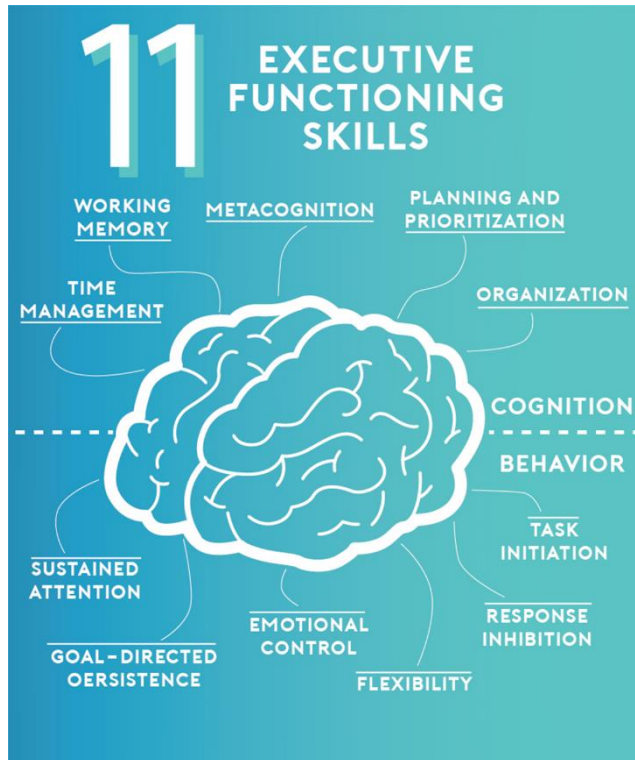
Students with ADHD struggle with executive functioning. Executive functioning encompasses a number of skills that are vital for managing one's own learning processes, such as planning, organising time, working memory, inhibiting responses, and sustaining attention over time (see an illustration of executive skills in figure 2 further down). Yet, with the right support, students with ADHD can do well at school. In general, students with ADHD will benefit from support strategies that compensate for weak executive functioning. For instance, using a daily schedule may compensate for poor planning skills, and using a timer can help students who struggle with time management.

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Figure 2

Illustration of executive skills. Retrieved from Creating Space Counseling and Wellness, Mosaic Haven.



Now, read the following excerpt from a research article by Moore et al. (2015, p. 222):

“A central finding from both [literature] reviews is the tendency by educational staff to focus either on biological factors as an explanation for ADHD, or to reject the validity of the syndrome

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of ADHD and attribute ADHD symptoms to difficulties in the pupil's home such as "poor parenting". Either attribution might neglect other potentially important factors that may be present at the pupil, classroom, school, and socio-political levels that could aggravate ADHD symptoms. This can confine the focus of interventions to the individual with ADHD, and exclude consideration of change at school, such as teaching staff, peer relationships, and the school environment."

Next, reflect upon the following questions:

- What is the main message that the authors try to convey here?
- What kind of change at school do you think the authors could be referring to?

The following text fragment by DuPaul et al. (2014, p.150) also provides some food for thought:

"From a theoretical or conceptual standpoint, it would be hard to design a more problematic setting for individuals with ADHD than the typical elementary school classroom. Students are expected to sit still, listen to academic instruction, follow multistep directions, complete independent work, wait their turn, and behave appropriately with peers and teachers. In particular, they are expected to delay responding and think before acting."

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For each of the problematic aspects of the school classroom that the authors mention for students with ADHD (i.e., sitting still, listening to academic instruction, follow multistep directions, complete independent work, wait for their turn, and behave appropriately with peers and teachers), identify two strategies that could help students with ADHD. You may consult [the following internet resource about classroom accommodations for students with ADHD](#) to help you find suitable strategies. Make an overview of all the useful strategies that you find, for instance in a table.



Step 3. Classroom accommodations: A podcast (*optional*)

If you want to learn more about how you may provide useful accommodations for students with ADHD in your classroom, you can listen to [the following podcast](#) (62:00)



Notes for the trainer

Allow trainees sufficient time to go through the first step of the task. Make sure to highlight the three diagnostic criteria for ADHD (hyperactivity, impulsivity,

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inattentiveness) to the trainees. Have a brainstorming session in the classroom where trainees may come with suggestions for possible accommodations for each of these challenges. During Step 2, allow time for a classroom discussion to get to the essence of the selected text fragments. You might want to spark a debate about the significant increase in the number of people that get diagnosed with ADHD and what this means in an educational context.

Task 4. Dyslexia

Task instructions

In this task, you will learn what dyslexia is, and you will watch a video film that illustrates how this particular learning difficulty may impact students' self-esteem and motivation for school and learning. You will also get the chance to reflect critically upon what society considers to be deficits within people, and you will learn about accommodations in your teaching that may help students with dyslexia at school.

Task duration

Time required to complete the task: 60 minutes.

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Step 1. Understanding dyslexia

Learn more about what dyslexia is by reading the information that is available on [the website from the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity](#).



You can also read the following definition of dyslexia (Lyon, Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2003, p. 2):

“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

According to the British National Health Services (2022), a person with dyslexia may:

- read and write very slowly;
- confuse the order of letters in words;
- be confused by letters that look similar and write letters the wrong way round (such as "b" and "d");

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- have poor or inconsistent spelling;
- understand information when told verbally, but have difficulty with information that's written down;
- find it hard to carry out a sequence of directions;
- struggle with planning and organization.

Now, with your own words, try to explain what dyslexia is and what the typical signs of dyslexia are. You may write one or two short paragraphs about dyslexia, or you may explain the condition orally to a fellow course participant or colleague.

Step 2. Dyslexia and motivation for school

Now watch [the following animated film about the emotional struggles of a student with dyslexia](#) (6:22).



First, reflect upon the following questions:

- What kind of experiences does the person with dyslexia have in the video?
- Are they mostly positive or negative? Give some examples.
- What is the situation of people with dyslexia in your school?

Then, have a group discussion with your fellow course participants about how and why dyslexia may impact students' motivation for school. Reflect upon the images used in the video film and what they may represent in the school system.

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Step 3. Were humans designed to read and write?

Now, you will read a short text taken from an article by Protopapas and Parrila (2018). The text tells us about little Johnny, who has his own personal struggles:

Little Johnny was in distress. He had been taking singing lessons for a few years already, but obviously, this wasn't working for him. Every time he tried to sing, he could see others cringe. He could hear the choir sound better when he remained silent and only opened and closed his mouth, but he didn't know what else he could do about it. His highly musical family was gravely concerned: Everyone else was an accomplished singer or on the way to becoming one, but for the life of him, Johnny just couldn't sing in tune. He was taken to a specialist who ran a whole load of tests, asked him to sing various notes and melodies, tap rhythms, and read some music; overall, quite an ordeal. Then the specialist said Johnny should not worry because it was not his fault. His brain was just miswired because something had gone wrong when it was put together, before he was born. Johnny was diagnosed with a disorder and was prescribed intervention to tackle his disability. After a few years of arduous daily training sessions, he could sing along the Christmas carols barely in tune with the rest of the family as long as he kept the volume low. Quite an accomplishment, relatively speaking. But as he was growing up, nagging questions remained: How did the specialist know there

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was something wrong with his brain, if she never looked inside it? And how could there be something wrong with his brain, without affecting anything else? After all, he was a perfectly normal, well-adjusted boy, with lots of friends and interests, doing fine at school, participating in all family and community activities (save the choir). Had it not been for the singing lessons, nobody would have ever come up with the idea that anything might be wrong with him.

Maybe you find the story about Johnny somewhat far-fetched. But if you substitute “reading” for “singing”, the story becomes quite commonplace.

In Step 1, you could read that dyslexia is considered a neurobiological disorder. However, did you know that humans invented the first full writing-systems only around 5,500 years ago in Mesopotamia (*Homo Sapiens* has been around for roughly 300,000 years)? Some might say that the human brain was never originally designed for reading or writing.

Discuss with a fellow trainee or a colleague whether you agree or disagree that dyslexia should be considered as a neurobiological disorder.

Step 4. Accommodations for students with dyslexia

As a teacher, you are quite certain to encounter students with dyslexia in your classroom. Therefore, it is important that you have some knowledge about how to accommodate their needs, so that their reading and writing difficulties do not lead to additional academic difficulties.

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Check the following online resources to find out about suitable accommodations:

- [International Dyslexia Association website](#)



- [Yale University website](#)



Now, fill in Table 3 with ten suggestions for how you may help students with dyslexia to succeed at school:

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Table 3

Suggestions for how to help students with dyslexia succeed at school.

Suggestions for how to help students with dyslexia succeed at school	
1.	6.
2.	7.
3.	8.
4.	9.
5.	10.

Notes for the trainer

For each step of this task, trainees can first work individually, before engaging in group or classroom discussions.

Step 2 and 3 may lead to vibrant classroom discussions that may help trainees think aloud and reconsider stereotypical attitudes. Allow trainees time to experiment with new thoughts and ideas.

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Sample answers: Suggestions for how to help students with dyslexia succeed at school are provided in Table 4:

Table 4

Suggestions for how to help students with dyslexia succeed at school.

Suggestions for how to help students with dyslexia succeed at school	
Encourage students to follow their strengths and interests.	Gather knowledge about dyslexia.
Hold high expectations for all students.	Provide accommodations throughout the entire learning situation, not just during assessment.
Allow reasonable alternatives for text-heavy materials so that dyslexic students can demonstrate their knowledge.	Provide visual aids, technology and creativity.
Do not focus on spelling errors when content is more important.	Do not assume that all students learn in the same way as you do.

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Task 5. A case study: Understanding the experiences and support needs of students with special needs

Task instructions

In the first step of this task, you will learn about some personal experiences of people with ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia through text and video. You will hear about some of the challenges and experiences that they met at school or in higher education. You will be encouraged to think about possible accommodations that could improve their experiences at school.

Task duration

Time required to complete the task: 30 minutes

Step 1. Supporting students with ASD through structure

Read the following interview excerpts from students with ASD in higher education (Van Hees et al., 2015, pp.1678, 1680):

“Yesterday a lesson was cancelled. First the lesson was supposed to happen, and then it was not, and finally it was cancelled. I was really confused during the entire day. I could not cope with the change. I got a bit stuck. I tried to do something different instead, but at that moment I became so upset by the loss of structure that I could not do anything else for the rest of the day. So that’s the disadvantage in higher

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education. It is often last-minute.” (Joyce, aged 21, university college)

“For me it is especially difficult to filter stimuli when there are many people present. They simply create too much noise. There is a lot of movement so that visually, you see a lot of things happening simultaneously. As a consequence, I cannot concentrate on anything else. I cannot filter it out. It takes up all the space in my mind. During the first year of university, I could not stand classes in auditoria. I only went to a lecture once or twice if subjects were taught in a large auditorium.” (Linda, aged 23, university)

Now try to answer the following questions:

- Why are the challenges described by the students typical for people with ASD? Which diagnostic characteristics are they related to?
- As a teacher, how could you support students with ASD in these situations?

Step 2. Supporting students who struggle in school

Watch the following [video about Jonathan Mooney](#) (5:35), who has ADHD and dyslexia, and who talks about his experiences at school:



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Now reflect upon the following:

- How did teachers contribute to Jonathan's positive and negative beliefs about himself?
- In your own practice, what could you do to support students who struggle in school?

Notes for the trainer

Allow trainees individual time to go through Step 1 and. Then, open up for a plenary discussion with the entire class.

Sample answers for Step 1:

Joyce may be sensitive for a sudden change in her daily program. This can be related to the core symptom of rigidity in ASD, sometimes described as "desire for sameness". When there occurs an unexpected change in Joyce's daily schedule, this may cause stress and anxiety for her. As a teacher, you could help Joyce by explaining why this sudden change occurred, and by acknowledging that it may be difficult to deal with unexpected events. Furthermore, you could suggest some activities and tasks that she could do instead of the class that got cancelled, and you could help her find out where she could do these tasks.

Linda seems to react strongly to the noise and visual stimuli in the auditorium. This can be related to the sensory sensitivity that many people with ASD experience. As a teacher, you could help Linda by assessing together which stimuli that she is sensitive to, and experiment with different accommodations, such as using ear plugs

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during class, using a different kind of lighting in the auditorium, preferential seating in the front row so as not to be disturbed by other students, etc.

Sample answers for Step 2:

Jonathan describes how some teachers supported him by believing in him and by seeing his strengths before his challenges. Other teachers damaged his self-esteem by calling him dumb or by assuming that he could not go to college because of his dyslexia. In your own practice, you could support students who struggle at school by engaging in conversation with these students and by asking them which kind of support would be helpful to them. When you believe in your students, they will be more likely to believe in themselves too. Hold high expectations for all students!

Task 6. What have you learned?

Task instructions

During this module, you have learned about the core symptoms of ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia. You have also learned about some accommodations that may be useful for students with such challenges. Now it is time for you to summarise your knowledge about these conditions and how you can help students that are affected by them. You will do this by drawing a mind map, making a PowerPoint presentation and a podcast for the different conditions.

Task duration

Time required to complete the task: 60 minutes

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Step 1. Podcast: Summarising your knowledge about ASD

Record a brief podcast (approximately three to four minutes) that summarises everything you know about ASD. Focus on the particular strengths and challenges that people with the condition may encounter in an educational context. Make sure to include examples of practical supports and accommodations that may compensate for the challenges that you identify. Check out the resources in the module whenever you need. You may share your podcast with fellow course participants or colleagues.

Step 2. Mind map: Summarising your knowledge about ADHD

Draw a mind map that illustrates everything you know about ADHD. Focus on the particular strengths and challenges that people with this condition may encounter in an educational context. Make sure to include examples of practical supports and accommodations that may compensate for the challenges that you identify. Check out the resources in the module whenever you need.

Step 3. PowerPoint presentation: Summarising your knowledge about dyslexia

Make a brief PowerPoint presentation (approximately 4- 5 slides) that summarises everything you know about dyslexia. Make sure to include examples of practical supports and accommodations that may compensate for the challenges that you identify. Check out the resources in the module whenever you need.

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Notes for the trainer

Allow individual time for course participants to go through one of the steps (free choice). Then, arrange a plenary session where participants can present their creations. Participants can go through the other steps on their own, but they may also make individual arrangements to provide feedback on each other's work.

List of resources

Task 2

CDC. (2022, March 28). *Signs and symptoms of autism spectrum disorders*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/signs.html>

National Autistic Society. (2014). *Autism and sensory sensitivity*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycCN3qTYVyo>

Autism Speaks Canada (2022). *Life on the spectrum – Episode 2*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycCN3qTYVyo>

Task 3

Psych Hub (2020). *What is ADHD?* [YouTube Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/5l2RIOhDXvU>

DuPaul, G.J., Gormley, M.J., & Laracy S.D. (2014). School-based interventions for elementary school students with ADHD. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 23(4), 687–697. *Attention Disorders*, 23(3), 220-233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054715573994>

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Morin, A. (n.d.). *Classroom accommodations for ADHD*. Understood.

<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/classroom-accommodations-for-adhd>

ADHD Experts Podcast (2023, January 26). *New year, new strategies: helping students with ADHD plan, persist and achieve their goals*. [Audio podcast]. Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/44rpfdosbXzPdxFmLFCKwx>

Task 4

The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity (n.d.). What is dyslexia?

<https://dyslexia.yale.edu/dyslexia/dyslexia-friendly-environment/>

Lyon, G.R., Shaywitz, S.E., & Shaywitz, B.A. (2003). A definition of dyslexia. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 53, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11881-003-0001-9>

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Øgaard, M.J. (2017, December 11). *I am dyslexic – Short animated student film*.

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Protopapas, A., & Parrila, R. (2018). Is dyslexia a brain disorder? *Brain Science*, 8(4), 61. <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci8040061>

International Dyslexia Association. (2020). *Accommodations for students with dyslexia*. <https://dyslexiaida.org/accommodations-for-students-with-dyslexia/>

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Task 5

Van Hees, V., Moyson, T. & Roeyers, H. (2015). Higher education experiences of students with autism spectrum disorder: Challenges, benefits and support needs. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 45(6), 1673–1688. Mooney, J. (2018, August 1). *How to prove others wrong | Jonathan Mooney inspirational speech | Goalcast*. [Video]. In YouTube. <https://youtu.be/6nmXrSvewRA>

Extra resources and recommended reading

PsychCentral (2022, September 29). *How can you accommodate autistic students in the classroom) 9 tips*. <https://psychcentral.com/autism/accommodations-for-children-with-autism#sensory-differences>

This website provides teachers with hands-on tips about classroom accommodations for students with ASD, so that they can embrace their differences and succeed in their education.

Spina Horan, K. (2023, February 6th). *10 essential classroom accommodations for ADHD*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-reality-gen-z/202109/10-essential-classroom-accommodations-adhd>

This website offers practical suggestions for how to support students with ADHD in several areas, such as time management, working memory, anxiety, social interaction, etc.

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Key points/lessons from the Module

- The main characteristics of ASD are deficits in social communication and interaction and repetitive and restricted behaviours.
- Students with ASD benefit from visual supports, sensory accommodations, structure and predictability in everyday life.
- The main characteristics of ADHD are impulsivity, hyperactivity and inattentiveness.
- Students with ADHD may benefit from clear and short messages, daily planners, preferential classroom seating, help in organising time, etc.
- Students with dyslexia struggle with accurate and fluent reading and writing, which in turn may affect their motivation for such tasks.
- Students with dyslexia may benefit from reading and writing aids, such as text processing software. They may also appreciate learning materials and evaluation formats that are other than written, such as auditory.
- Even though students have similar challenges, supports should always be individualised. Ask your students which kind of accommodations may be helpful for them!

Module summary

Congratulations on completing this module! In this module, you have become familiar with three common disorders that you may encounter in the classroom, namely autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, and dyslexia. You have learned that ASD is characterised by impairments in social communication and social interaction and that

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sensory sensitivity is common in people with this disorder. You have also discovered that ADHD is characterised by impulsivity, hyperactivity and inattentiveness, and that executive functioning is challenged in people with ADHD. Furthermore, you have learned that dyslexia is a specific learning disability that affects word recognition, spelling and decoding abilities. In this module, you have gained some insight in the everyday struggles that students with these disorders encounter in the classroom. Also, you have received information about how you may accommodate your teaching for the special needs of these students, so that they can reach their potential. Now, in the next module, you will learn about how to make language education accessible to visually impaired and blind students.

Quiz

1. Describe the diagnostic criteria of ASD and how these may manifest themselves.
2. Identify three ways of supporting students with ASD at school.
3. Describe the three main characteristics of ADHD and how these may manifest themselves in students.
4. Imagine that you will get a student with ADHD and dyslexia in your classroom after the summer holidays. Describe how you will prepare yourself to be able to meet this student in the best possible way. Which accommodations do you think you will be able to make and what may be more difficult to do for you? Which kind of knowledge do you need and where will you find it?

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Notes for the trainer:

Sample answer for question 1:

The diagnostic criteria are impairments in social communication and restrictive behaviours. Sensory sensitivity is also common in ASD. Students with ASD usually have difficulties initiating and maintaining conversations with others. They may struggle with understanding body language and facial expressions. In a classroom, students with ASD may be sensitive to sound, visual stimuli, strong odours, and crowded places. Students with ASD depend on structure and predictability.

Sample answer for question 2:

i) use a daily schedule so that students know what will happen where and when; ii) ask your students which sensory stimuli that they find disturbing and be creative in your problem-solving; iii) provide students with social support and clear guidelines for social interaction, so that they can be successful in group work.

Sample answer for question 3:

i) impulsivity (e.g., students may be too eager to wait out the entire task instruction, or they may not raise their hand before asking a question); ii) hyperactivity (e.g., students may struggle with sitting still in the classroom); iii) inattentiveness (e.g., students may not pay attention to detail while doing a task, or they may daydream during a lecture).

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