

# Utilizing KIDS: What do Pre-Service Teachers Know About Dyslexia?



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## Background

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability in reading that includes difficulties with decoding, word recognition, and spelling.\* Dyslexia is often misunderstood, and as a result, those with the disability do not receive appropriate, evidence based instruction.\*

- Approximately 20% of the population (1 out of 5), is affected by dyslexia\*
- 85% of students in special education have dyslexia\*
- 57% of students with disabilities are educated in the gen ed. class for most of the day
- Only 36% of fourth grade students demonstrated proficient reading skills on a national reading assessment\*

Therefore, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on providing all teachers with the necessary knowledge and essential skills to instruct students with dyslexia.\*

## Purpose

In an effort to gain an understanding of the preparedness of teachers to instruct students with dyslexia the following questions were addressed:

- 1) What do preservice teachers know about the origins, prevalence, characteristics, and instruction of dyslexia?
- 2) Do preservice teachers majoring in special education have more knowledge about dyslexia than those majoring in general education?
- 3) Do preservice teachers feel educators are prepared to teach students with dyslexia?

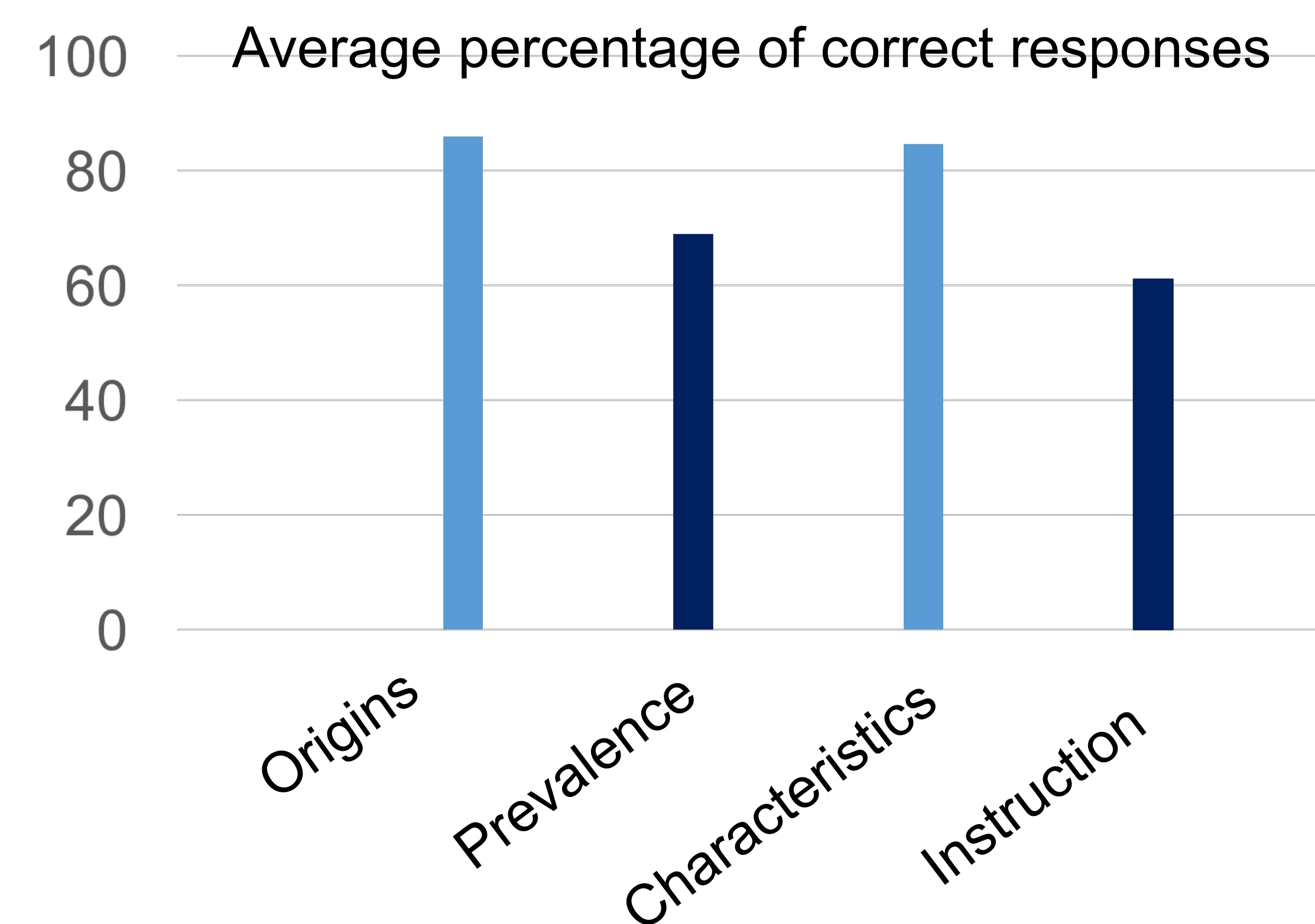
## Method

Forty-four preservice teachers from a western university participated in the study. All participants were enrolled in one of two separate teacher preparation programs: special education and general education. Although some participants had prior teaching experience, all participants were seeking teaching degrees and thus, were identified as preservice teachers for this study.

Preservice teachers were administered the Knowledge and Insights of Dyslexia Survey (KIDS) to measure knowledge specific to the origins, prevalence, characteristics, and instruction of dyslexia. The development of KIDS was grounded in research and consists of 25 True/False questions as well as three open ended questions.

## RQ 1) Knowledge of Dyslexia

Preservice teachers missed the most questions pertaining to the instruction of students with dyslexia



### ORIGINS:

84.5% of teachers understood that dyslexia is neurobiological, cannot be outgrown, and is not the result of poor instruction. However, for the statement “dyslexia is hereditary,” 41.8% answered incorrectly.

## RQ 1) Continued

### PREVALENCE:

Of all of the items on KIDS, preservice teachers showed the least understanding of the frequency of dyslexia amongst genders and 76.4% incorrectly thought dyslexia is more common in males than females. Yet all of the participants were aware that dyslexia occurs in other languages besides English.

### CHARACTERISTICS:

Every preservice teacher understood that comorbidity exists between dyslexia and ADHD, as well as dyslexia and giftedness. On the other hand, more than half (56.8%) incorrectly identified a main characteristic of dyslexia as a comprehension deficit.

### INSTRUCTION:

Performing the worst in this category, preservice teachers demonstrated a lack of understanding of the type of instruction evidenced to support reading disabilities. 57.1% believed colored overlays improved dyslexia and 68.1% did not understand the concept of phonemic awareness. 50% incorrectly believed that a student with dyslexia could not be diagnosed until the third grade. However, teachers understood that dyslexia could not be cured with medication (100%).

## RQ 2) Special vs. Gen Ed. Teachers

Results indicated a significant difference between general education and special education teachers' knowledge of dyslexia

	n	Mean	SD
Special Ed.	13	19.23	3.02
General Ed.	24	17.70	6.87

## RQ 3) Perception of Preparedness

88.6% of participants felt teachers were not prepared to teach students with dyslexia

“I have learned little to nothing about [dyslexia] in my teacher program.”

“Teachers are still trying to gain the tools needed to work with students with dyslexia”

“I am a fourth year student about to begin student teaching and I know very little about dyslexia.”

“Most general education teachers expect special education teachers to teach students with disabilities.”

“I have never come across the topic [of dyslexia] in an educational setting until now. It does not seem to be a large priority.”

“Teachers need more training to be able to support students with dyslexia.”

## Discussion

Preservice teachers are confused about many of the key components of dyslexia. If teachers do not know how to provide direct, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, letter sound correspondence, and language constructs, then students struggling to read will not be develop the skills evidenced to support success. Moreover, believing that students cannot be diagnosed until third grade inhibits early identification & intervention. The fact that special educators had greater knowledge of dyslexia is alarming, given that those with dyslexia spend the greatest amount of time in the general education classroom. Overall, most preservice teachers did not feel prepared to work with those with dyslexia, demonstrating a need for more in-depth instruction in teacher preparation programs.