

## SPORT EDUCATION

# Youth Athletes With Dyslexia and Their Experience Within Inclusive Sport: What is the Influence of the Coach?

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### Abstract

*This study examined the relationships between emotions, perceptions of coaches, motivational/emotional climates (emotional relationships and environment within a specific context), and personal/social growth (development of personal growth and social interactions through and within sporting experiences) from the viewpoint of youth athletes with dyslexia. A qualitative one-on-one interview approach, focusing on youth athletes with dyslexia (N=12) was used to explore these athletes' experiences when in sport. Qualitative analysis resulted in three major themes: (a) Hidden disabilities tend to stay hidden, (b) Caring is coaching, and (c) Social and emotional experiences matter. Findings showed that sporting experiences can have an impact on these athletes social, physical, and psychological growth. This study's findings also exposed that the psychological, emotional, and motivational aspects of youth-athletes' with dyslexia development can be encouraged*

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*through the motivational climate created by the coaches. The inter-relationship between skill ability, understanding performance, and emotional experiences for all youth athletes matters, but even more so for those who have hidden disabilities. The limitations and future research suggestions are embedded within the text.*

## **Introduction**

When considering youth sport activities, it is first important to note that the prevalence of those who qualify for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is estimated to be 15% of students in public school populations, or an estimated 7.5 million students who nationally require services (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). As a result, the likelihood of having students in a classroom or on a youth sports team who experience some form of disability is quite high. In addition, many organizations, teachers, and researchers have supported the push for a fully inclusive learning environment where all youth—with disabilities or without—are given opportunities for the same educational and/or sporting experiences (Vargas, 2019). For example, youth athletes with a range of physical/mental exceptionalities are participating inclusively in sport and physical education (PE) experiences alongside peers without exceptionalities. While this initiative is a positive one, many youth athletes participating inclusively may require unique and individual attention to assist in their success (Spaaij et al., 2014). Specifically, for this research, dyslexia is targeted as it estimated to account for over two million of the seven million requiring services and is often identified as a hidden disability where coaches and instructors may not be aware of the youth's disability.

In this case, a “one-size-fits-all” approach (Tomlinson et al., 2003) for coaching and personal/social/emotional development of these youth athletes is not ideal. This is primarily due to the evidence that students in differentiated learning environments (i.e., supporting individual needs) achieve better outcomes than those with a more uniform approach to instruction in learning, social interactions with peers, and general attitudes toward school, for example (Schuelka & Lapham, 2019). And, given that most youth sporting experiences are

fully inclusive, it is practically a prerequisite in the 21st century for coaches and instructors to be trained to meet students with varying needs and disabilities. Thus, specified instructional practices for teachers/coaches are needed to assist these students in reaching not only their physical potential, but also the critically important personal, emotional, and social development.

Sport and PE experiences can help youth develop important lifelong attributes such as confidence and positive attitudes toward being active and social when a positive and enjoyable experience is provided (Gaspar et al., 2021). Fostering positive youth experiences and promoting greater involvement and motivation for activities, such as sports, is commonly a result of the motivational climate (Sierra-Díaz et al., 2019). The motivational climate can foster a focus on individual improvement and effort to reach success or it can promote environments that prioritize comparison and winning, which may lead to more maladaptive experiences (Harwood et al., 2015).

These realities of sport may be particularly important to understand for youth athletes, who are still developing and participating for social reasons. Social and contextual factors that define the motivational climate are established by the different catalysts such as peers, family, or teachers/coaches (Cervelló et al., 2004). Furthermore, while motivational climates can vary, they typically have significant influence on the perceived success and/or failure for the young athlete (Ommundsen et al., 2005). In light of these findings, there is reason to believe that understanding the motivational climate is a necessary tool for all coaches, particularly coaches who work with students who have unique needs and mental, emotional, and intellectual disabilities.

## **Youth Athletes and Hidden Disabilities**

Although there is a plethora of research that examines instructional strategies for several learning disabilities (Kohli et al., 2018; Sherrill & Pyfer, 1985; Wong et al., 2003), there continues to be a need for research and training as it relates to those with disabilities participating in physical dominant environments like youth sport. Youth sporting environments are highly related to the youth PE inclusive experiences, and it is likely that strategies and considerations for coaches can be learned from training techniques offered to PE

teachers (and to adapted PE/physical activity specialists; Bertills et al., 2019). In particular, hidden disabilities are often considered learning and intellectual differences that coaches and teachers can not overtly see, and thus may not even realize they are present and need consideration (Vargas et al., 2019; 2015). Without consideration, it is likely that coaches cannot help these youth athletes improve and cannot promote positive personal social growth.

One of the hidden disabilities that is not easily observed, yet highly prevalent, includes dyslexia. There is a strong need for understanding athletes and students in this area as dyslexia affects about 30% of the population in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021), and it comprises the majority of all learning disability conditions (Cortiella et al., 2014). Existing literature is limited when investigating everyday learning experiences of students with dyslexia, although it is the most common learning disability, and usually involves improving educational understanding and performance. Previous research shows that students with dyslexia experience difficulties with social stigma and access to reasonable adjustments (MacCullagh et al., 2016; Stoeber & Rountree, 2020). In other words, dyslexia is much more common than other hidden learning disabilities, and it is extremely likely that coaches will be working with students who are dyslexic multiple times in their careers. Dyslexia is an understudied area of need for youth development, and it can impact youth athletes' physical and mental/social development in sport (Vargas et al., 2019). If coaches are unaware of these special needs and they implement a highly direct and ego-performance climate, it is likely that these athletes may experience sport burnout, limited physical development, and ultimately experience negative personal and social connections to the sport/team.

The importance and influence of peer relationships and positive personal development for student-athletes with dyslexia cannot be overstated because they tend to develop lower levels of self-esteem and have negative emotions/experiences when it comes to social relations (Terras et al., 2009), self-perception (Burden, 2008), and peer and family relationships (Ghisi et al., 2016). Unambiguously, students with dyslexia experience problems with having the ability to adapt to different situations, behaviors, and personalities which may result in low self-confidence. In other words, youth sport and

all of its benefits can help youth grow and advance, and potentially, could also be a great opportunity for students with disabilities to reap the same benefits as the general student population. Therefore, it appears that building stronger and inclusive climates as suggested by Beyer and colleagues (2009), will create environments which will not only reduce problem behaviors, but would also offer more choices and opportunities for success and challenge, instead of competition as the main source of fulfillment.

The influence of a coach can play an important role in the life of athletes with dyslexia, particularly as it relates to offering specified multi-dimensional instruction, meeting individual needs, and in prioritizing the person as well as the athlete. This experience involves the role of a coach and their relationship with a student athlete with dyslexia. The coach's impact appears to be a significant one and needs to be taken into consideration. A compelling question arises to coaching practices when instructing those with dyslexia, as to the degree those practices are motivating and supporting, and does the coach-created climate influence personal/social development of student athletes with dyslexia? Therefore, it is important to explore athletes with dyslexia and their experience within the inclusive sport as they may require unique and important strategies to thrive. The motivational climate seems to align with many inclusive and individually driven strategies that likely support those with hidden disabilities like dyslexia.

### **Motivational Climates for Youth Athletes**

To address the potential concerns of supporting youth athletes with mental, emotional, and intellectual disabilities, the motivational climate seems to be an important area of consideration given its connection to helping athletes achieve a positive and enjoyable sporting experience. Often, climates are described by major categories, including the task-mastery and ego-performance involved environments (Ames, 1992). The motivational climate is grounded in the Achievement Goal Theory (AGT; Ames, 1992) as the learning environment is determined to inform and dictate the individual goal orientations. Within AGT, participant motivation is determined by their goal orientation characteristics. Goal orientations typically include a mastery orientation of persistence, effort, and individual self-improvement and/or the performance orientation, which is centered

on outperforming and comparing to others which maladaptive persistence and motivation in many cases (Harwood et al., 2015; Into et al., 2019; Ommundsen et al., 2005). Accordingly, perceived motivational climate (dictated by the instructor/coach) and achievement goals (embedded within the perception of the participant/athlete) are significant paradigms used to interpret individual experiences.

The task-mastery climate typically includes an environment in which athletes have autonomy to make choices, progress and develop at their own pace, and develop strengths. At the same time, an ego-performance climate typically includes a teacher or coach regulating a great deal of the environment rewarding more athletically skilled students, fostering social and personal competition/comparison between peers, and providing public judgement. As an alternative, a task-mastery-involved learning environment is comprised of the teacher urging and supporting independence, individual problem solving, and mastery of the task progression that is self-paced, self-guided, and involved (Cervelló & Santos Rosa, 2001; Nicholls, 1989; Roberts, 2001). The task-mastery climate approach is meaningful because it provides coaches the opportunity to support youth athletes at the individual level, at their own pace, while developing an overall inclusive environment for all participants, as opposed to being comparative (Harwood et al., 2015; Into et al., 2019; Ommundsen et al., 2005). Research on the motivational climate in youth sport provides evidence to this point, suggesting that youth will have a more holistic and meaningful experience if they are afforded more task-mastery-involved climates created by teachers and peers (Ames, 1992; Cervelló & Santos Rosa 2001; Nicholls, 1989; Roberts, 2001).

Previous research on the relationship between the perceived motivational climate, achievement goals, and peer relationships in young soccer players demonstrated a systematic relationship with peer acceptance and friendship (Ommundsen et al., 2005). Furthermore, existing literature rationalizes how enjoyment is believed to be one of the most significant motivational elements in youth sports because it has been positively associated with adaptive motivation and continued involvement (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Wall & Cote, 2008) and inversely with dropout and burnout (Strachan et al., 2009). Emotional growth and considerations for personal and social development of athletes are important, but the positive impact

of sport on students with disabilities may be even more meaningful as it relates to building confidence and self-esteem. However, there is limited work overall on youth athletes with disabilities in fully inclusive sports and the impact these experiences can have on their personal, social, emotional, and physical development. In addition, the “hidden” nature of many mental, emotional, and intellectual disabilities of students in inclusive sporting environments may be overlooked by coaches and the climates they create, which may have maladaptive effects. Consequently, this research underlined the need for humanistic approaches to coaching, specifically when working with youth athletes with dyslexia. Therefore, exploring relationships between youth coaches and athletes with dyslexia from the athletes perspective may improve our understanding of their experiences.

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between youth athletes’ with dyslexia emotions, perceptions of their coaches, motivational/emotional climates (emotional relationships and environment within a specific context), and their personal/social growth (development of emotional intelligence and psychological resilience). Explicitly, these athletes were asked about their perceptions of their coaches, climates, and their personal/social development. They were also asked about their emotional experiences when in sport and the coaching behaviors they perceived to accommodate (or failed to do so) their disability and their personal development. This investigation included athletes in fully inclusive sport teams. The following research questions guided this study:

**RQ 1.** How do youth athlete’s with dyslexia perceive their inclusive sporting experience?

**RQ 2.** What type of support do youth athletes with dyslexia receive from their coaches?

**RQ 3.** How do coaches support their learning disability when it comes to stimulating self- confidence, motivational/emotional climates (emotional relationships and environment within a specific context), and enjoyment?

**RQ 4.** What strategies did athletes perceive as the most influential coaching reinforcements for support and growth?

## **Methods**

This research utilized a qualitative approach to explore how youth athletes perceive their inclusive sporting experience and how coaches support them when it comes to strengthening self-confidence and physical skills, as well as the motivation and physical activity enjoyment. At the same time, this study exploits epistemological approaches in an attempt to address the shortcomings of these student-athletes' ability to have accurate and reliable knowledge and awareness about their dyslexia emotions, perceptions of their coaches, motivational/emotional climates (emotional relationships and environment within a specific context), and their personal/social growth (development of emotional intelligence and psychological resilience).

Thus, this study's ontological stance, and what these athletes see as "real" within the context, helped in determining whether they view reality as objective and unique, or as constructed and multiple depending on individual viewpoints. Furthermore, it ameliorated a rigorous process of reflection and data interpretation, which supported researchers' approach, positionality, and reflexivity, which are widely acknowledged to be important considerations when planning and conducting research (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

## **Procedures and Participants**

A local elementary school that specializes in teaching students with dyslexia was purposely selected to recruit upper elementary student participants for this study. Specifically, the sample of students included those who have dyslexia who also participated in fully inclusive recreational sports outside of school. Following administration, parental, and IRB approval, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with the athletes who volunteered to participate via consent and assent. In particular, youth athletes with dyslexia were interviewed to share their experiences as they relate to their coaches' ability to support, accommodate, and modify for their needs. Interview questions centered around how their coach

and teammates make them feel, what things their coaches do that have the most positive and negative impact on how they feel when participating in their sport, and their perceptions of sports through their emotions, goal orientations, perceptions of social relationships, and feelings of being capable.

Participants in this study were youth student-athletes with dyslexia ( $N= 12$ ; six males and six females in upper elementary school) who participate in fully inclusive youth sport outside of school. Sampling method was based on convenience and accessibility; thus, purposeful sampling was used. The average age of the participants was 12.5 years old ( $SD=0.52$ ). Sport participation varied from soccer, basketball, baseball, football, and cheer. The participants reported the average number of years they participated in their sport as 2.91 years ( $SD= 0.90$ ).

### **Data Collection and Data Analysis**

Interview data was collected using one-on-one interviews with each of the 12 participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim then analyzed using a thematic approach evaluating both the perceptions and the emotional experience of the athletes. Each of the interviews was conducted by the corresponding author of this research, and it lasted 30 minutes, adding up to 360 minutes across all 12 participants. Each interview took place in each of the participants' homeroom classroom, during which the researcher not only followed preset questions, but also included additional questions in response to participant comments and reactions. The interviewer relied upon an interview protocol, asking questions and covering topics as scheduled, but also probed discussion, and followed ideas. Both inductive and deductive analysis techniques were used. First, all data was coded line by line and given labels developed into a codebook. From there, data was read again, and codes were compared to explore common themes both within each individual and across groups. Codes that share relationships were linked using constant comparison techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and were used to create themes and subthemes to represent the key findings (Patton, 2015). Main themes were those that emerged most often from connecting subthemes and those of which that provided detailed explanation to the various patterns from the quantitative analysis and the theoretical backgrounds of the variables of interest (Creswell, 2015).

Reliability and trustworthiness of the data were demonstrated by the multiple reviews of the interview data and comparison methods used for creating the codebook, which further supports the conviction in the findings by demonstrating reliability and diligence in the analysis process. Having more than one researcher analyze the interview data, this study established trustworthiness and warranted that the interpretations are not exclusively grounded on one participant's standpoint or researchers perspective.

## **Findings**

Qualitative analysis resulted in three major themes reported by the student athletes with dyslexia, which included: (a) hidden disabilities tend to stay hidden, (b) caring is coaching, and (c) social and emotional experiences matter. Following analysis, these three reoccurring themes were suggested to have the most impact on the athletes' involvement.

### **Theme 1: Hidden Disabilities Tend to Stay Hidden**

While participants were reluctant to discuss their dyslexia in relation to their sporting experience, the two main subthemes that we heard from students were (a) they tried to keep their dyslexia anonymous, and (b) they really feel like they are playing catch-up all the time. To address the first subtheme, these students explained how keeping their dyslexia undisclosed was extremely important because they felt embarrassed, anxious, or they did not want to feel any different from any other athletes on the team. Hailey mentioned how she feels “embarrassed when having to explain what dyslexia is and how it feels different to have it.” Therefore, Hailey chooses purposefully to hide her disability, because she does not want to stand out or, she does not want to be known in the negative context as a “special athlete.” Hailey says that “It is easier to not talk about it, and to go with the flow with everyone else. If I don't do that, I feel like I am standing out, and I don't like to stand out. I don't like to be embarrassed, and I don't like to be called out in front of everyone.”

Nathaniel explained that he did not want to be treated differently from others on his team and he did not want to take away everyone's time, “because we are a team, and we are all even, and there is not time to deal with more problems from players.” In other words, this student felt like he was placing unnecessary burden on his team by

discussing his disability. Nathaniel mentioned also that his learning difference “should not be judged” and that he “does not like when his teammates feel sorry for him.” The sense of fitting in with the others on a team tends to be critical, and these student athletes were no exception as they did not want their disability to become an issue. Also, the sense of potential embarrassment and shame was very strong and tended to overshadow their potential needs.

Subsequently, the second significant subtheme is that these students felt like they were trying to catch up all the time. They reported several instances when they did not know what was going on and they did not tell anyone about it. Their sense of being lost, late, or confused was something that all of them explained was an ongoing feeling. For example, John said that,

when coach is explaining the basketball tactics, he uses these “big words” and he talks fast, and I don’t want to tell him that I don’t understand him because he will yell, and I don’t like when he yells at players.

Moreover, Alex said that,

I like when we are at our locker room, and our coach draws little x’s and y’s at the board, in which he explains who stands where, and who does what. Because of that, I can picture myself on the field and imagine in my head what I need to be doing out there.

In addition, Mary says that when her coach shows tactics on a coaching board, “She sounds like she speaks gibberish, and I really don’t understand her and just kind of follow everyone else.”

This previous subtheme and these quotes have multiple connotations. The first is that the athletes reported that conveying their needs would make their coach mad, suggesting the negative potential social outcomes possible as a result of their disability needs. Secondly, they reported that visual spatial learning might be preferred learning style, because they learn better when their individual needs are recognized, or when they can create a more vibrant and clearer picture of knowledge through visual imagery. Lastly, they reported that this situation was uncomfortable for these particular athletes, thus they tried to avoid conflict with their coaches (avoid yelling) and

make self-improvisations that likely limit their performance growth. Furthermore, Kira said that “I don’t want to tell anyone that I am confused, because half of the time I don’t understand what is going on, and I just follow what everyone else is doing on a team and get by.” She does not want to stand out for “my friends to think that I am stupid and that we will lose our game because of me.” In other words, these athletes reported that it was important for them that their disability stays hidden due to feelings of shame, embarrassment, or simply because they did not want to be labeled as different or to stand out in a negative way. Implications of such attitudes for student athletes with dyslexia can potentially be psychologically and socially harmful.

## **Theme 2: Caring is Coaching**

Another reported theme was that of the team/coach relationship. In all of the reports, regardless of the type of sport, it was evident that the coaches’ character and behavior can impact athletes’ perceptions of personal and social development. These students emphasized the importance of a positive coaching climate and enjoyable feelings when they participate and play. Phoebe noted that her coach is “so supportive and welcoming, and because he is nice to all the girls, we all want to play for him, and we all want to win.” She further explains how,

he never gives up on us, he always encourages us and speaks calmly, and we just love his calm voice. When he talks, he looks at me and he is direct, and it is easy for me to understand him.

This participant also mentioned that their coach understood the impact of dyslexia because his daughter was also diagnosed with it, and so he knew how to instruct and guide in a positive way. Compartmentalizing instruction, guiding prompts, and using simple language and terminology, generated an encouraging coaching climate that produced positive feelings and a sense of belonging to this particular athlete. On the other hand, Eli described how his baseball coach was almost always angry and did not show patience during misunderstandings, which is why “his players are scared of him, especially when he gets super competitive, which then makes

us very nervous.” A negative coaching climate in this instance creates a sense of frustration and anxiety, and like this athlete explained, “half of the team is looking for other teams to play ball.” When asked if their coach knew about this student’s learning disability, the student explained that he just “does not want to tell him because he will not understand.” Unenthusiastic relationships and lack of knowledge and understanding led to a negative coaching climate that was usually followed by bad experiences for all participants.

### **Theme 3: Social and Emotional Experiences Matter**

The third theme was the importance of social and emotional experiences as they interpret the sporting experience. In this case, positive emotional experiences in practices and games proved to be the biggest predictor of social connection. For example, Avery said,

I love soccer and to play on a same team with my friends, and I love when we score a goal and then celebrate. We came up with our own goal celebration when we all dance kind of funny and we just laugh. That is my most favorite thing ever!

Therefore, being active in sport and playing on a same team with friends was enjoyable due to special moments of celebration that she drew upon to explain her motivation for remaining involved. This is another powerful example that shows how these students report identical reasons for wanting to be involved in youth sport as their non-dyslexic counterparts.

The same could be said about negative emotional experiences. For instance, Alice stated that her best friends family “had to move out of town, and my friend is not there anymore, and I do not feel like playing for the same team, because I don’t have friends there anymore.” Moreover, Bob reported that “baseball is boring, and my dad is making me play, and I just don’t like standing there doing nothing,” while Beth explained how her “coach sometimes yells at us if we don’t stay in our offensive shape [formation] on the field.” All of these reports are examples of negative social emotional experiences that can be detrimental, and these athletes recognize whether or not they want to stay active and play. In other words, Bob wanted to play, but negative coaching (coach making practices monotonous), led to boredom and a lack of motivation or desire to play. Beth’s negative

experience comes from high coaching demands, which led to her not performing like the others. Dyslexia is frequently described as a language-based learning disability that comes with discrepancy in spelling, word recognition, and decoding skills (Adlof & Hogan, 2018). Due to Beth's dyslexia and her inability to process coded information, this interrupts "normality," uncovering otherwise hidden experience, imposing the difficult task of her adjusting to the coaches tactics. Research shows that dyslexia and low self-concept are interconnected (Riddick, 2009), so students with dyslexia are at a higher risk for lower academic success and general self-concept (McArthur et al., 2016). These theoretical and clinical findings encourage careful consideration when working with students with dyslexia in cognitive development settings.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to systematically explore aspects of the environmental, personal, and emotional experiences of youth athletes with dyslexia to uncover and identify coaching techniques that impact the athletes climate. The study used a qualitative methodology with purposeful sampling across 12 student athletes with dyslexia to unlock common themes across several domains regarding inclusive sporting environments. In addition, this research highlights nuanced implications of coaching those with dyslexia and consequently its impact on positive personal and social development in the sport. Caring for athletes, rather than caring about athletes and taking time to interact and using conversation to develop a relationship (Jones 2009), would be of tremendous importance, especially for student athletes with dyslexia.

The first outcome found in this research was that hidden disabilities tend to stay hidden. For various reasons, student athletes with dyslexia tend to keep their disability private. These athletes choose not to be open about their struggles and do not come forward with their difficulties and setbacks. They reported being likely to try to suppress their dyslexia characteristics because they feel embarrassed, anxious, or they did not want to feel any different from any other athletes on the team. In other words, reports suggest that student athletes do not want to stand out and be known in the negative context as a "special athlete." These are examples of negative social-emotional experiences in children with dyslexia as a result of

connections between low self-esteem and social relations (and vice versa) (Shehu et al., 2015).

Similarly, there is a significant connection between reading/writing/language disability, interpersonal relationships, and socio-emotional disability (Habib & Naz, 2015). Ultimately, the athletes' feelings of insecurity may be due to dyslexia and poor social skills that hinder the development of close friendships. Therefore, it is recommended that coaches develop and enhance knowledge, attentiveness, and awareness about dyslexia among young athletes, which might be the first steps in making adjustments that are subtle to where the teammates would not notice. Perhaps being aware and understanding what dyslexia is, and how it affects youth athletes, will allow coaches to diversify their coaching. By doing so, they can best meet the needs of athletes with dyslexia while also meeting the needs of others.

In addition, previous literature unveils that nearly 90% of individuals with dyslexia describe their thinking as looking beyond information to achieve a strategic (big-picture) perspective of the subject/problem (Casanova et al., 2009). For that reason, coaches who work with athletes with dyslexia should know that they have unique neurological pathways that make it easier for them to understand big-picture ideas and skills. This means that it is likely they will progress on details more slowly. Coaches need to weigh which details are actually needed or take smaller steps to the larger picture by breaking the big picture down.

The second major outcome of this research is that caring is coaching. This study showed that it is also important not to force student athletes with dyslexia to move on if they have not mastered some of the refinements of a skill or task, as this may cause overload for these athletes. Clearly, this can have a major impact on performing tasks, accomplishing goals, or completing obligations as externally determined by the coach's goals. However, even for neurotypical athletes, it is often not wise to force them to move beyond a skill set until they are fluent in the present skill. Consequently, preparation, pre-planning, understanding, and organization are cornerstones of supporting the needs of student athletes with dyslexia in an inclusive setting. These athletes prefer a positive, supporting, and welcoming coach, one who speaks directly and is easy to understand. This

includes simple and clear terminology without unnecessary details or jargon that tend to be overwhelming. Shortening instruction and scaffolding will produce the positive coaching climate desired, which furthermore will develop positive feelings and a sense of belonging for student athletes with dyslexia. This means that although the coach still provides information and direct instruction, it is the athlete's rate of understanding and skill mastery that dictate the speed of progression. Once progression to more advanced skills comes into play, revisiting earlier skills is key to ensuring that the athlete has maintained the prerequisites. Learner-centered or player-centered approaches like this improve skill development, game-playing ability, motivation, and provide positive affective experiences of learning (Kirk, 2005; Pope, 2005). In addition, it is essential to understand that modifications will be needed to meet some players where they are to get them where they need to be. In other words, caring for athletes as individual learners and taking the time to know them and interact with them, would be of tremendous positive importance for student athletes with dyslexia.

The third outcome of this research relates to positive social-emotional experiences. For instance, emotional experiences in practices and games proved to be the biggest predictor of positive personal-social experience for athletes with dyslexia. The athletes enjoyed being active in sports and playing on a team with their friends. This experience develops elevated levels of self-esteem and healthy social relations, great motivation, and willingness to play. On another hand, negative social-emotional experiences tend to develop negative relationships and emotional states of mind for athletes with dyslexia. Such negative environments only increase their frustration, and feelings of being overwhelmed often links to students' perceptions of being "less than." Therefore, emotional aspects of uncertainty and overload resulting from dyslexia are extremely important. Coaches and coaching training needs to take into account the fact that athletes with dyslexia could potentially be very sensitive. Hence, in the current study, results showed that positive coaching and peer relationships (i.e., friendships) can assist in raising confidence in the students with dyslexia. Other considerations for boosting social-emotional experiences include celebrating small wins, progressions, and concentrating more on positive social interactions than on cor-

recting mental task errors. Such approaches will undoubtedly enhance the development of self-esteem and lead to positive learning outcomes.

## **Limitations and Future Studies**

There are several limitations of this study. For instance, participants were predominantly Caucasian students from a small, private, independent school and were purposefully selected based on characteristics needed to answer the research questions. Sample size was small, and further exploration requires diverse participant groups (experience, demographics, size, etc.) to further align findings. This study only focused on these dyslexic students participating in sport in one region of the U.S., thus generalizability of their experiences is limited. Further investigation is needed regarding differing age groups and competition levels as well. Furthermore, there are significant gaps in the literature that present the need for further development in the area of study. At the same time, there is a great deal of information gathered from this study that paves the way for more coaches to view sport as an inclusive setting and as opportunity to include some experiences of student athletes with dyslexia into practices. The research can also better inform teacher education programs and other physical activity community programs about the potential impact of the motivational climate and the importance of cultivating a positive emotional experience for student athletes with dyslexia, other hidden disabilities, and the general population. The influence of a coach or a teacher can play an important role in the lives of athletes with dyslexia, especially as it relates to offering specified multidimensional instruction, meeting individual needs, and in prioritizing the person as well as the athlete.

## **Conclusion**

This research suggests that sporting experiences can have tremendous impact on student athletes with dyslexia social, physical, and psychological growth. This research also suggests perceived shame and burdens that students reported feeling as a finding of their dyslexia in their sport. At the same time, this research recognizes that the psychological, emotional, and motivational aspects of dyslexic youth athletes' development can be encouraged through the motivational climate created by coaches. Furthermore, this study

acknowledge that dyslexic youth athletes' emotional experiences are influenced by coaching behaviors (accommodating or otherwise), and their personal development. This included exploring aspects of the environmental, personal, and emotional experiences of youth athletes with dyslexia in hopes of identifying help for coaches who work with these students to integrate psychological skills (leadership, positive aspirations, goal setting, self-awareness, visualization, etc.) into their coaching practice. This research also unveiled that the participant student athletes with dyslexia, generally speaking, did not understand what was going on, and that they would rather not speak up and look incompetent in front of their friends and coaches, instead of asking for help or clarification. Lastly, this study distinguishes the importance of utilizing a humanistic approach to coaching in addition to developing task-mastery climate as an intentional way to influence non-sport-related youth outcomes.

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