

Spotlight on Dyslexia in World Cinema

Mr. Nitin Raj*

Abstract

The portrayal of dyslexia in cinema can either reinforce stereotypes or promote understanding and acceptance. This study of dyslexia in 21st century international films will examine how dyslexia is represented and interpreted across diverse cultural contexts and to assess whether these portrayals in contemporary world cinema promote understanding in contexts where dyslexia remain under-recognised or misunderstood. The study tries to understand how world cinema raises awareness and challenges misconceptions about dyslexia and contribute to ongoing discussions on inclusive educational practices, cultural narratives of disability, and the role of film in reshaping societal attitudes. The foundation of this study is qualitative research and secondary sources such as books, journals, and movies from timeframe between 2006 and 2022, this study analyses 14 movies in total. These selected films portray dyslexic individuals with remarkable compassion and complexity, emphasising their abilities and the challenges they encounter in society. A look at particular movies demonstrates both improvements and challenges in how this specific learning disability is represented. Despite the success of movies in raising awareness and fostering empathy, they sometimes fall victim to the tropes of exceptionalism or sentimentality. Importantly, this research examines how different cultures interpret and frame dyslexia—whether as a deficit, a learning difference, or an unrecognised strength and ability. Because these films have such varied cultural contexts and effects, it is crucial to create authentic and nuanced portrayals of the disability that find a balance between realism and empowerment. In countries where public understanding of dyslexia remains limited, cinema has played a critical role in raising awareness, sparking dialogue, and influencing educational discourse, as seen in impactful works like *Taare Zameen Par* (India). World Cinema offers not only diverse representations, but also varied aesthetic and narrative strategies that reflect dyslexic experience. This study claims that cinema can function as a powerful tool of social inclusion by challenging normative ideas of intelligence and achievement, and by expanding the cultural imagination of what it means to learn differently.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Community Education and Disability Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Keywords: Culture, Dyslexia, Films, World Cinema

Introduction

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that primarily affects reading and writing skills. However, it does not only affect these skills. Dyslexia is actually about information processing. Dyslexic people may have difficulty processing and remembering information they see and hear, which can affect learning and the acquisition of literacy skills. This can influence various aspects of life, including memory, attention, and organisational skills.

The term dyslexia originates from the Greek words $\delta\upsilon\varsigma$ – dys (impaired) and $\lambda\epsilon\chi\iota\kappa\acute{o}$ lexis (word), and it has long been viewed through a deficit-based lens. Most simply, it is defined as a neurological condition that results in difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition, poor decoding, and spelling challenges (Vellutino & Fletcher, 2007). Dyslexia is rooted in neurobiological differences in the brain's language processing systems, and despite popular misconceptions, it is not associated with low intelligence (Shastry, 2007). Individuals with dyslexia span all levels of intellectual ability, and many possess unique strengths in creativity, problem-solving, and visual thinking—skills that often lie outside traditional academic frameworks.

Estimates suggest that between 5% and 17.5% of children may be affected by dyslexia, though numbers vary depending on definitions and diagnostic criteria. There is no “cure” for dyslexia, but individuals can develop coping mechanisms, and with the right support, they can thrive both academically and professionally. Importantly, growing research and advocacy have helped shift public understanding from viewing dyslexia as a disorder to recognising it as a form of neurodiversity—a natural variation in how human brains function.

This historical shift in perception is mirrored in the world of cinema. For much of the 20th century, dyslexia remained either invisible or misrepresented in film. Characters with learning disabilities were rare, often reduced to stereotypes or shown only as problems to be solved. In recent decades, however, World Cinema—a term encompassing film traditions outside the dominant Hollywood system—has begun to offer more nuanced, culturally grounded

portrayals of dyslexic individuals. These films reflect the growing awareness of dyslexia as a learning difference, not a deficit.

Moreover, in regions where public understanding of dyslexia is still emerging, cinema has played an unexpectedly powerful role in shaping awareness, even more than formal education or policy. Films like *Taare Zameen Par* (India, 2007) not only depict dyslexia with emotional and psychological realism, but have also contributed to national conversations about education, inclusion, and empathy.

This paper explores how World Cinema has contributed to the evolving narrative of dyslexia—from silence to visibility, from stigma to strength. By analysing films across cultures, this study aims to show how cinema has become a space for reimagining what it means to learn, to struggle, and to be differently wired in a world that often privileges uniformity.

Definition of Dyslexia

According to the International Dyslexia Association (2002), “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 gross and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

According to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) (2013), “Dyslexia is described as a pattern of learning difficulties characterised by problems with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor decoding, and poor spelling abilities.” The term “dyslexia” is included as an alternative term used to refer to these specific reading difficulties.

According to Miles Dyslexia Centre, Bangor University (2012), “Dyslexia is best described as a combination of abilities and difficulties which affect the learning process in one or more of reading, spelling, writing and sometimes numeracy. Accompanying weaknesses may be identified in the area of speed of processing, short-term memory, sequencing, auditory perception, visual perception, spoken language and fine or motor skills. Some dyslexic people have outstanding creative skills. Others have strong oral skills, whilst others have no outstanding

talents, they can still have dyslexia. Dyslexia occurs despite normal intellectual ability and conventional teaching. It is independent of socio-economic or language background.”

According to World Health Organization – ICD-11 (2019), “Developmental learning disorder with impairment in reading is the classification corresponding to dyslexia. It involves significant and persistent difficulties in learning to read, including decoding, reading fluency, and reading comprehension.”

According to the World Federation of Neurology, “Dyslexia is a disorder manifested by difficulties in learning to read, despite conventional instructions, adequate intelligence and socio-cultural opportunities.”

History of Dyslexia

Dyslexia was viewed as a form of aphasia, characterised by impairments in some language functions, notably reading and writing. It was formerly called word blindness, a phrase used to describe individuals who, despite not being physically blind, seemed to struggle to remember the visual representations of words necessary for reading and spelling. The person could see the letters and words when reading, but they couldn’t understand or speak them. The terms dyslexia, developmental dyslexia, and specific reading disability superseded “word blindness” during the 1920s and 1930s.

Below is a timeline tracing key milestones and developments in the understanding and study of dyslexia by several early pioneers, like Samuel Orton, Grace Fernald, Samuel Kirk, Helmer Myklebust, from 1872 to 2023.

19 th Century	
1872	The autopsy of a person who had trouble speaking and reading revealed cortical injury (Broadbent).
1877	- A patient with severe reading difficulties was found to have “complete text blindness” (Kussmaul). - Introducing the notions of “word blindness” and “word deafness” (Kussmaul)
1895	Acquired word blindness described in article (Hinshelwood)
1896	Two reports regarding congenital word blindness patients have been published (Kerr and Morgan).
20 th Century	

1902	Letter and word visual memory linked to congenital word blindness case (Hinshelwood)
1917	Monograph <i>Congenital Word Blindness</i> published (Hinshelwood)
1921	Multisensory (tactile-kinesthetic) approach was created to teach non-readers (Fernald and Keller).
1925	- American medical literature includes the first account of word blindness (Orton). - Visual difficulties with reading and spelling described as strephosymbolia or “twisted symbols” (Orton). - Questioned the reliability of IQ tests for people with dyslexia (Orton).
1932	- An expectation formula is created to assist in identifying reading impairments (Monroe). - The book “Children Who Cannot Read” details a synthetic phonics method (Monroe). - Based on Orton’s ideas, Gillingham and Stillman create a multisensory method.
1935	Successful remediation results from an accurate diagnosis (Monroe).
1936	Kirk designed remedial reading drills.
1937	Language processes only involve the left hemisphere of the brain (Orton).
1943	The multisensory Fernald method book is released: <i>Remedial Techniques in Basic School Subjects</i> (Fernald)
1967	- Clarified the link between reading difficulties and oral language (Johnson and Myklebust) - The publication <i>Learning Disabilities: Educational Principles and Practices</i>, discusses the visual and auditory forms of dyslexia (Johnson and Myklebust).
1968	ITPA published the term “learning disabilities” (Kirk).
1987	- Dyslexia formally recognised as a specific learning disability (<i>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</i>) - Established specialised instruction and accommodations such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
1989	In those with dyslexia, the right hemisphere’s right planum temporale has been found to be abnormally big (Galaburda).
1991	“Discrepancy Definitions of Reading Disability: Has Intelligence Led Us Astray?” published; challenges the IQ–achievement discrepancy model (Keith Stanovich)
1993	To promote reading disability research worldwide, the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading was established.

1994	First controlled trial of phonics-based intervention (<i>Sound Linkage</i>) in the UK validates evidence-based remediation
1995	Fictional cultural moment – <i>Percy Jackson Book 1</i> introduces a popular hero with dyslexia, increasing public awareness among young adults (Rick Riordan)
1996	The Maharashtra Dyslexia Association is a dedicated organisation founded by a group of parents and experts to protect dyslexic students' rights to a suitable education.
1997	The Orton Dyslexia Society becomes the International Dyslexia Association, signaling international consolidation
1998	Judy Singer coins <i>neurodiversity</i>, shifting discourse toward neurological differences rather than deficits

21 st Century	
2001	Series of fMRI studies (2001–2008) identify disrupted phonological and orthographic networks and brain activation differences in left hemisphere regions in dyslexic individuals
2002	For the first time, National Dyslexia Awareness Month celebrated in the UK
2003	Anglophone vs. other orthography studies and recognition of multiple cognitive subtypes of dyslexia—phonological, visual, attentional, magnocellular, etc.
2005	UK's Dyslexia Institute merges with Hornsby International Dyslexia Centre to form <i>Dyslexia Action</i> Dr. Jeffrey Gruen and his team at Yale University identify gene <i>DCDC2</i>, strongly associated with dyslexia
2009	Publication of the <i>UK Rose Review</i>, offering a comprehensive and practical definition of dyslexia
2010	Enactment of the UK's <i>Equality Act</i>, protecting individuals with dyslexia under anti-discrimination law
2011	Launch of grassroots <i>Decoding Dyslexia</i> campaign in New Jersey, later spreading across all 50 U.S. states
2016	U.S. Senate unanimously passes Resolutions 275 & 576, urging national recognition of dyslexia as an “unexpected difficulty in reading” requiring early, evidence-based support
2019	“Go Red” message promoted by various associations to raise dyslexia awareness

2020	Nearly 140 years after Rudolf Berlin coined the word, a Google search for dyslexia yields more than 32 million results.
2023	- Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) publishes updated <i>Principles & Standards for SLD</i>, offering an interdisciplinary, evidence-based framework - India's Ministry of Education (NCERT) launches a comprehensive handbook on Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs)

Categories of Dyslexia

Dyslexia can be divided into two categories:

1. Dyslexia based on causes

- a. Primary Dyslexia: Clinicians have long recognised that dyslexia is family-based, which implies that a child with a dyslexic parent is more likely to develop the learning disorder themselves. Dyslexia that is genetically inherited is referred to as primary dyslexia.
- b. Secondary Dyslexia: Secondary dyslexia is a term that describes reading difficulties that are the result of issues with brain development during the early phases of baby's development. It is important to note that both primary and secondary dyslexia are classified as developmental dyslexia.
- c. Developmental Dyslexia: The term "developmental dyslexia" signifies an unexpected reading difficulty for children and adults who typically possess the intelligence, incentive, and education that are considered essential for accurate and fluent reading. Children and young people with developmental dyslexia are distinguished from those who have comparable problems following serious brain injuries.
- d. Acquired Dyslexia: A brain injury from disease or trauma can sometimes cause a child or adult to have difficulty processing language, which can lead to dyslexia. This kind of dyslexia is known as trauma or acquired dyslexia.

2. Dyslexia based on symptoms

- a. Phonological Dyslexia: This involves having a lot of trouble pronouncing words and having trouble with non-words. Multi-syllabic words where prefixes and suffixes are absent, included, or replaced can sometimes be challenging as well (Funnel 1983). Difficulty dividing words into syllables and smaller sound units called phonemes is included in this kind of dyslexia. For instance, a child with poor phonemic abilities is able to hear and repeat

a word aloud to you. However, he will find it difficult to explain how to break it down into its constituent sounds. Because of the challenges in this area, readers may have trouble connecting graphemes with phonemes, which makes it harder for them to “decode” or pronounce words.

By reading pseudowords, like ‘jeet’, students are evaluated for problems in these areas. The goal is to present a child with a word they have never encountered and observe whether they can figure out how to pronounce it. Phonological dyslexia is also referred to as auditory dyslexia.

Smith(1991) mentions other reading and spelling patterns of children with phonological dyslexia:

- Inability to recall specific sounds or sound sequences.
- Trouble combining individual sounds into words.
- Trouble hearing words and leaving out one sound and replacing it with another (say cat; now take off the /c/ and put on an /f/).
- Difficulty recalling the sounds that specific letters and phonetically regular and irregular letter combinations represent.
- Trouble deciphering unfamiliar words due to a lack of understanding of phonetics and problems with sound sequencing.
- Difficulties including vowel sounds.
- Making assumptions about unfamiliar words rather than utilising word-analysis techniques.
- Because spelling is attempted by sight rather than by ear, it continues to be at a lower reading level.
- Correct spelling is more common in words that the child has seen frequently and can thus revisualise.
- Unusual spellings that are difficult to identify, due to lack of phonetic patterns.
- Misspelling that includes superfluous letters and leaves out syllables.

b. Surface Dyslexia: Children with this type of dyslexia have difficulty reading because they are unable to identify words by sight. For a number of reasons, sight-reading is a necessary

talent. One explanation is that some words have difficult spellings. For instance, words like weight and debt cannot be sounded out; readers must memorise them. The other factor is reading fluency. In order for children to read swiftly and precisely, they must be able to identify a large number of frequent words at a glance — without sounding them out (Newcombe & Marshall, 2017).

Other reading and spelling patterns of children with surface dyslexia are listed by Smith (1991):

- Confusion with letters that differ in orientation (b-d, p-q).
- Confusion with words that can be dynamically reversed (was-saw).
- Very limited sight vocabulary; few words are immediately recognised from their overall shape; rather, they must be carefully pronounced, as if being seen for the first time.
- Losing track of what one has read, as when shifting focus from the right side of one line to the left side of the next.
- Leaving out words and letters since they were not visually observed.
- Moving the eye too quickly from one letter to the next may hide the image of the first letter, causing it to be overlooked.
- Because of shortcomings in visual retrieval, it's hard to remember words quickly.
- Reading is made more difficult for the child because visual signals are so confusing; it is simpler for them to learn to read by spelling out the words aloud before putting them in print.
- Additions, omissions, and replacements when the meaning of the text directs reading.
- Having trouble remembering the shape of a letter while writing.
- Uses phonetic spelling, but not in an odd manner (laf-laugh; bisnis-business).
- Capable of spelling complicated phonetic words, but not basic irregular ones.

c. Visual Dyslexia: Students with deep dyslexia struggle with phoneme-grapheme conversion and more conceptual words. Their reading is characterised by common mistakes or semantic substitutions. They often can read familiar words, especially concrete nouns, but could generally have trouble trying to read more abstract nouns, adjectives, and words. Deep dyslexia is used to describe a severe impairment. There are semantic mistakes (such as

reading street as road), visual errors (such as reading badge as bandage), derivational errors (such as reading edition as editor), and challenges in understanding functional words (such as ‘as’, ‘the’, and ‘so’). Deep dyslexia is often described as an acquired reading disorder due to a brain injury (Mather & Wendling, 2012).

d. Direct Dyslexia: A common term for this type of dyslexia is hyperlexia. People usually have good reading abilities, but their text comprehension is often very poor. They may frequently be able to understand how vocabulary is used. Although they seem to be able to read print using phonological and whole-word recognition techniques, their semantic analysis does not seem to be able to make sense to the text reading.

e. Rapid naming deficit: The rate at which one may recall the names of symbols (letters, numbers, colours, or pictured objects) from long-term memory is referred to as rapid naming. People with dyslexia tend to perform worse than average readers on RAN tests.

f. Double Deficit Dyslexia: Children with a double deficit struggle with phonological awareness and have a poor naming speed. Although phonological deficiency is common, a child can occasionally learn to decode with assurance, even if it never becomes instinctive or smooth.

World Cinema

Cinema is a stunning blend of art, literature, and science. Art and literature are reflections of life, and they brilliantly depict every moment of it. On the other hand, science researches man and his surrounding world. So, cinema, as a combination of these three, ultimately represents man and his life in society. Cinema is also known as the place where you watch a film or a movie. The “cinematic” part is all about how films look and how they tell stories. It’s the cool and beautiful stuff you see on screen. Basically, everything you see that appears cinematic has a language and follows a structure.

The phrase “World Cinema” refers broadly to films made outside of the dominant American Hollywood system. It represents a wide, rich tapestry of storytelling traditions, aesthetic choices, and cultural perspectives from all over the world. While the term “World Cinema” frequently unintentionally establishes Hollywood as the centre norm, it is used in

academic and critical contexts to highlight the global diversity of film practices and voices that represent various social realities, philosophies, and creative methods.

World Cinema began in the early twentieth century, concurrent with the rise of Hollywood. Countries such as France, Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union, and India were pioneers in shaping world cinema. The silent era of the 1920s witnessed notable films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Germany, 1920), *Battleship Potemkin* (Soviet Union, 1925), and *A Page of Madness* (Japan, 1926), all of which experimented with form and narrative in ways that differed from the American model. In India, Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) established the groundwork for what would become one of the world's major cinema businesses. World Cinema is not just geographically diverse, but also ideologically and stylistically so. From the Italian Neorealism of the 1940s and 50s—films like *Bicycle Thieves*—which focused on working-class struggles, to the French New Wave of the 1960s that rejected traditional filmmaking conventions (*Breathless*, *the 400 Blows*), and the socially reflective cinema of Iranian directors like Abbas Kiarostami, each movement brought new languages and grammar to film.

This cinematic influence extends to numerous aspects of society, including the representation of marginalised groups such as differently abled individuals, like people with dyslexia. The portrayal of disability in films worldwide plays a critical role in either perpetuating harmful stereotypes and prejudices or challenging them and fostering inclusivity. Historically, cinema has often depicted differently abled characters through a lens of pity, heroism, or comic relief, reinforcing societal misconceptions and biases, often leaned into stereotypes or used disability merely as a plot device. However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift towards more nuanced, empathetic and layered portrayals, contemporary films are increasingly attentive to internal experiences, educational challenges, and the societal systems that shape dyslexic lives.

This global approach allows for comparative analysis: how different cultures represent dyslexia; whether it is framed as a learning disability, a neurological difference, or a misunderstood gift; and how storytelling, visual style, or even subtitles and sound design are used to reflect dyslexic perception. For example, in India's *Taare Zameen Par* (2007), dyslexia is explored through a deeply emotional and visual narrative, contrasting rigid educational norms

with a child's rich inner world. Meanwhile, films like *A Mind of Her Own* (UK) focus on resilience within Western educational systems.

Thus, in analysing dyslexia in World Cinema, the paper draws on an expanding global culture that emphasises storytelling while also reflecting diverse understandings of learning, ability, and identity. Dyslexic individuals' stories come to life within this greater cinematic tradition—not just as sympathetic subjects, but as complex characters who challenge norms, redefine narratives, and contribute to the diverse voices celebrated by World Cinema.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to ascertain the portrayal of dyslexia in both Indian and international cinema. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To explore how global cinema raises awareness and promotes understanding and challenges misconceptions about dyslexia.
- To analyse the impact of cinema in shaping public attitudes, and influencing educational practices related to dyslexia.
- To assess how 21st-century films from diverse cultural contexts portray the lived experiences, challenges, and abilities of dyslexic individuals.
- To investigate the cultural, educational, and social frameworks, assessing whether dyslexia in different countries is represented as a deficit, a learning difference, or a unique cognitive strength.

Research Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research methodologies and depends heavily on secondary data. The data has been collected from books, journal articles, and close analysis of films that directly engage with the theme of dyslexia. The author selected 14 films for this study that were produced during the time span of 2006 to 2022. Out of the fourteen films examined, thirteen are international productions, while only one film—*Taare Zameen Par*—is produced in India. Although numerous films have been produced globally that explore other categories of disability, the author identified only these fourteen films that depict dyslexia as a primary

thematic or narrative element. The study intends to comprehend how dyslexia is framed, interpreted, and communicated by global cinematic narratives with current scholarly literature.

The qualitative approach for the study combines thematic analysis, content analysis, and contextual film analysis focusing on cross-cultural contextualization, differences in portrayals, associating with existing research material and evolving attitudes toward dyslexia from 2006 to 2022.

Film Selection Criteria

Films were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. Each film contains dyslexia as a major theme, character trait, or narrative concern rather than a passing reference.
2. Selections represent multiple regions to examine how portrayals shift across cultures, and educational structures.
3. The corpus includes feature films, short films, and documentaries to capture a wide spectrum of representational strategies.
4. Many selected works have social relevance and are used in training programs, classrooms, or advocacy campaigns, making them culturally impactful sources.

Research Gap

By reviewing of the relevant literature on dyslexia, the author discovered that, while numerous studies examine films portraying other types of disabilities, there is a notable lack of research specifically focused on the depiction of dyslexia in cinema.

Analysis of Selected Films

A Mind of Her Own (2006)

Inspiring Drama Directed by Owen Carey Jones, A Mind of Her Own portrays a young woman's battle with dyslexia, in particular the visual and academic processing difficulties she faced while pursuing to become a doctor. Sophie's character is a central figure in the narrative, and her determination to overcome the challenges posed by her undiagnosed learning disability forms the emotional and narrative core of the film. The movie, of course, takes some dramatic liberties, but it does a good job capturing the internal and external struggles faced by individuals

with dyslexia (especially women, who are lesser-known for their learning disorders in media portrayals). Sophie's story highlights the challenges of misdiagnosis, the danger of creating low expectations, and the harm caused by educational gatekeeping before offering a message of hope for resilience, self-belief, and the transformative power of support and accommodation. Though it's not a clinical portrayal, but yes, the film resonates as a motivational tool, particularly in educational and advocacy settings. *A Mind of Her Own* has been used widely in schools, women's education events, and awareness campaigns to inspire and inform audiences about the persistence and potential of dyslexic individuals. Its contribution lies in shifting the perspective of dyslexia from a limitation, to a challenge that can be overcome with the right mix of courage, support, and opportunity.

Dyslektikern (The Dyslexic) (2006)

Dyslektikern is a short Scandinavian drama film that presents a fictional yet realistic portrayal of a teenager with deep dyslexia, characterised by semantic processing errors affecting written language comprehension and production. The narrative focuses on daily struggles of the protagonist in academic settings, as well as the emotional pressure generated by family expectations and societal misunderstanding. The distinctive concentration of the movie on the cognitive and psychological challenges faced by the dyslexic teenager fosters empathy and a nuanced understanding of the condition that goes well beyond surface-level reading difficulties. Although dramatised, what is portrayed, remains true to the actual experiences of many dyslexic individuals in terms of both frustration and resilience. This educational movie is a significant learning resource which is utilised into Scandinavian language teacher training programs, where it supports efforts to develop pedagogical approaches sensitive to complex learning differences. *Dyslektikern* contributes to the discourse on dyslexia by emphasising the often-overlooked semantic aspects of the condition and by humanising the adolescent experience within a culturally specific context.

Taare Zameen Par (Like Stars on Earth) (2007)

Aamir Khan's *Taare Zameen Par* is a very thoughtful and perceptive work that presents developmental dyslexia, specifically surface dyslexia characterised by visual and orthographic processing difficulties. Its plot revolves around Ishaan, a young boy misunderstood as lazy or unintelligent, whose struggles with reading and writing, hides a rich imaginative inner world.

The film sheds light on the emotional toll of undiagnosed learning disabilities, critiquing rigid educational systems and societal pressures that prioritise rote learning over individual strengths. Through the intervention of an art teacher, the story thus becomes a powerful champion of inclusive and supportive pedagogy, thereby exemplifying how a neurodivergent child can have a better educational experience with suitable guidance. The film's accuracy in representing dyslexia, from symptoms to the psychological distress caused by mislabelling, has been widely praised. It sparked widespread public discourse in India, contributing to increased awareness of dyslexia and influencing educational policy and teacher training. On a global scale, Taare Zameen Par is regarded as an ideal example in psychology and education courses as a case study for early identification and intervention, and remains a powerful resource in campaigns for inclusive education. The film is extremely moving but it is not overly sentimental, allowing Ishaan's story to unfold with authenticity and respect for his lived experience.

Kara Tointon: Don't Call Me Stupid (2010)

Kara Tointon: Don't Call Me Stupid is a British television documentary in which actress Kara Tointon opens up about her experience with dyslexia focusing mostly on reading and memory-based challenges. The film offers a rare and valuable perspective on adult dyslexia, highlighting how the condition continues to impact individuals beyond childhood and into professional life. Tointon's journey, from going through scripts, and dealing with low self-esteem issues, to finding the strategies that work for her, gives an honest and relatable story that explains what dyslexia really is and overcome the stigma often connected with it. Alongside personal reflections, the documentary features expert commentary and assessments, that allow the audience to learn more about the cognitive and educational meaning of the condition. Its strength lies in normalising adult dyslexia and encouraging open conversation about learning differences in both academic and professional settings. The documentary has found a place in adult literacy programs and is frequently used in secondary educator training to foster awareness of how dyslexia can persist and evolve. By blending vulnerability with advocacy, Don't Call Me Stupid contributes meaningfully to the broader dialogue on inclusive education and lifelong learning support.

Dyslexia: A Hidden Disability (2011)

Dyslexia: A Hidden Disability is a short documentary that offers a brief yet powerful overview of dyslexia, with specifically focusing on how the condition manifests in academic environments. The film draws out student interviews, classroom footages, and commentary from educators and specialists, to explain the often-invisible barriers dyslexic students face—ranging from difficulties in reading and processing information to the emotional distress caused by misunderstanding and lack of support. Despite its short runtime, the documentary effectively underscores the discrepancy between intelligence and academic performance in dyslexic learners, challenging common misconceptions within the educational system. It promotes early intervention, improved training for teachers, and the use of accessible teaching strategies specialised to the requirements of neurodiverse students. In the UK, *Dyslexia: A Hidden Disability* has been incorporated into secondary school teacher training modules, as an efficient and comprehensible tool for increasing awareness and encouraging inclusive teaching methods. Its straightforward presentation and emphasis on real student experiences make it a useful teaching tool for fostering empathy and pedagogical responsiveness.

The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia (2012)

The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia, a documentary directed by James Redford, explores the genetic and neurobiological underpinnings of dyslexia while providing an insightful and stimulating analysis of the condition. Through a combination of professional commentary, neurological research, and deeply personal testimonies—including those of successful individuals such as entrepreneur Richard Branson and attorney David Boies—the movie invalidates long-held misconceptions regarding dyslexia as a sign of low intelligence or laziness. It draws attention to the variability of dyslexic experiences as well as the cognitive abilities that are frequently linked to dyslexia, such as creativity, problem-solving, and visual thinking. The documentary's central message reframes dyslexia not as a weakness, but as a different way of learning that is often incompatible with traditional educational models. It is widely utilised in school workshops, parent education programs, and policy discussions to promote more inclusive academic environments and enhance early intervention methods. Despite the film does not focus on any one character, its collective narrative successfully dismantles stereotypes and presents a positive interpretation of what it means to live—and thrive—with dyslexia.

Dislecksia: The Movie (2012)

Directed by Harvey Hubbell V, *Disleksia: The Movie* provides a distinctive and captivating examination of dyslexia through the lens of lived experience, with a special emphasis on processing-based difficulties. Hubbell offers an insider's viewpoint as a dyslexic filmmaker, integrating humour, firsthand storytelling, and professional interviews to educate and entertain. The movie eliminates the misconceptions and stigma associated with dyslexia while simplifying difficult neurological and pedagogical ideas into easily understood material. It celebrates neurodiversity while highlighting the systemic flaws in conventional education by fusing scientific insights with first-hand recollections. The use of humour does not diminish the seriousness of the topic, but rather make it more approachable and disarming, particularly for audiences unfamiliar with learning differences. Its self-reflective and frequently satirical tone invites empathy without pity, emphasising the importance of understanding, accommodation, and advocacy. *Disleksia: The Movie* has been shown extensively at educational institutions, schools, and community forums as a means of raising awareness and sparking discussion. Its distinctive narrative style and authentic voice make it a compelling resource in efforts to reshape public perception and encourage more inclusive educational environments.

Embracing Dyslexia (2013)

Embracing Dyslexia, directed by Luis Macias, is a heartfelt documentary that focuses on the emotional, educational, and familial aspects of dyslexia, providing a comprehensive yet personal overview of the condition. The film exposes the profound frustrations, misdiagnoses, and psychological barriers that many families face in the absence of early detection and support through open interviews with parents, educators, and dyslexia specialists. The documentary's focus on the emotional experiences of both parents and children, is what makes it unique, capturing the disbelief, shame, and eventual empowerment that frequently define the dyslexia journey. While it does not delve deeply into the neurological specifics, the film effectively humanizes the condition and advocates for empathy, early screening, and educational reform. Its accessibility and emotional resonance make it a widely used resource in dyslexia awareness campaigns, teacher professional development (PD) programs, and parent advocacy initiatives. *Embracing Dyslexia* functions not only as an educational tool but also as a call to action, encouraging schools and communities to shift from stigmatisation toward informed support and inclusive practice.

Les Enfants de la dyslexie (2014)

Les Enfants de la dyslexie is a French television documentary that offers an in-depth overview of the difficulties encountered by children and families dealing with dyslexia in the French educational system. The film integrates human narratives with professional insights from educators and doctors, providing a comprehensive overview of dyslexia while emphasising the lived experiences of affected children and the systemic deficiencies that impede timely diagnosis and support. The documentary exposes a system that frequently neglects dyslexic adolescents by examining institutional deficiencies, including inadequate teacher training, insufficient accommodations, and bureaucratic delays. Simultaneously, it highlights the resilience of families advocating for their children and presents examples of best practices emerging from specialised interventions. The film's strength resides in its combined emphasis on emotional experience and structural analysis, making it both informative and socially impactful. Les Enfants de la dyslexie has been presented at educational conferences around France and is integrated into special education training programs, functioning as a vital resource for fostering awareness and stimulating discussion on inclusive education reform. Its human-centered, grounded approach makes it a valuable addition to the debate on dyslexia in Francophone settings.

Mein Stift und ich – Leben mit Legasthenie (2015)

A German television documentary called Mein Stift und ich – Leben mit Legasthenie examines the day-to-day lives of people who have phonological and surface dyslexia. The film highlights the difficulties of decoding written language and phoneme-grapheme correspondence through personal stories. It also highlights how assistive technologies, like digital learning tools, speech-to-text software, and reading pens, can transform academic participation and autonomy. By highlighting perspectives from a variety of age groups, the documentary offers a comprehensive look at how dyslexia affect self-esteem, work, and education in the German context. It also covers more general attitudes of society, stimulating more institutional assistance and normalising learning differences.

Aired on German public broadcasting, the film reached a wide audience and has since been incorporated into teacher training seminars, where it functions as both a pedagogical aid and an awareness-raising tool. Its pragmatic focus on coping strategies, combined with

emotionally resonant storytelling, makes *Mein Stift und ich* a valuable resource in shaping inclusive practices within German-speaking educational environments.

Niños con dislexia (2016)

Niños con dislexia is a short educational documentary produced for Latin American television that offers a grounded and culturally contextualised look at dyslexia, with a focus on general and surface dyslexia. Set in Argentine schools, the film features real students navigating academic life with the condition, bringing authenticity and immediacy to its portrayal. By centering the voices and experiences of children, the documentary highlights the visible struggles with reading, spelling, and orthographic processing, while also revealing the emotional toll of being misunderstood in conventional classroom settings. Educators and parents are also interviewed, contributing insights into both the challenges of early identification and the evolving strategies being employed to support these learners. The documentary serves a dual role—as a tool for awareness and as a prompt for pedagogical reform within Spanish-speaking education systems. Widely used in Latin American teacher training workshops, *Niños con dislexia* plays a vital role in fostering inclusive teaching practices and promoting regional understanding of dyslexia. Its strength lies in its accessibility and its commitment to showing dyslexia not as a disability to be pitied, but as a learning difference that, when recognised and supported, need not hinder a child's potential.

Farther and Sun: A Dyslexic Road Trip (2018)

Farther and Sun: A Dyslexic Road Trip is a British television documentary that explores the intergenerational impact of dyslexia through a deeply personal narrative. Featuring actor and comedian Robert Rinder and his father, who both have dyslexia, the film documents their shared journey—both literal and metaphorical—as they travel together to better understand the condition that connects them. Focusing on inherited dyslexia, the documentary intertwines personal anecdotes with expert commentary, drawing attention to the genetic underpinnings of dyslexia and the varied ways it manifests across generations. The father-son dynamic adds emotional depth, emphasising the psychological effects of undiagnosed or misunderstood dyslexia in earlier generations compared to the growing awareness and support available today. The road trip format offers a unique structure, allowing reflection, discovery, and dialogue to unfold organically. The film subtly critiques past educational failures while offering hope

through progress in diagnosis and pedagogy. Farther and Sun is notable for its warmth and relatability and has been appreciated for humanising dyslexia through lived experience. It serves as an engaging resource for awareness efforts, particularly in family education, school communities, and discussions around inherited learning differences.

Mical (2020): A Real-Life Fight Against Dyslexia Misunderstanding

Mical is a moving short film based on the true tale of a mother's unwavering determination to provide secure adequate schooling for her dyslexic son. The film focuses on processing-based dyslexia and emphasises the emotional, social, and institutional issues that arise when a learning difference is not recognised by the school system. The boy is mislabeled as slow or inattentive, demonstrating how school systems frequently overlook the delicate needs of neurodiverse students. The narrative vividly depicts the psychological toll of misdiagnosis, emphasising not only the child's hardships but also the persistence of a parent struggling with institutionalised indifference. Educators, parents, and policymakers have all accepted the film as a training and awareness tool. It is commonly utilised in teacher education programs, special education seminars, and advocacy campaigns to encourage early detection, inclusive teaching techniques, and empathy-driven support systems. Finally, Mical reminds viewers that dyslexia is not a problem in the learner, but rather a failing in how educational environments respond. Its limited runtime conveys a powerful message: with empathy and the correct care, any kid can thrive.

Dyslexia: L'aventure du cerveau (2022)

Dyslexia: L'aventure du cerveau is a French science documentary that delves into the neurological and visual-processing foundations of dyslexia, presenting complex brain research in an accessible, engaging format. Drawing on the latest findings in cognitive neuroscience, the film explains how differences in brain structure and function—particularly in areas related to visual perception, phonological processing, and language integration—can contribute to reading difficulties. Featuring a diverse range of multilingual dyslexic individuals, the documentary broadens its scope beyond monolingual Western contexts, offering insight into how dyslexia manifests across different languages and writing systems. With contributions from neuroscientists, educators, and affected individuals, it balances empirical rigor with human-centered storytelling. The film is particularly effective in making technical concepts—such as

neural mapping, hemispheric specialisation, and eye dominance—understandable to general audiences without sacrificing scientific accuracy. *Dyslexia: L'aventure du cerveau* is widely used in neuroscience and language acquisition courses, where it supports interdisciplinary teaching on learning disorders, brain plasticity, and literacy development. Its synthesis of research and personal narrative makes it a vital educational resource in both scientific and pedagogical contexts.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study concludes that World Cinema has played a vital and evolving role in shaping contemporary understanding of dyslexia. There is an evident shift across the fourteen chosen films — from earlier portrayals that risked sentimentality or exceptionalism, to more grounded, realistic, empathetic, and comprehensive representations. While some countries frame dyslexia within medical or deficit-based models, others highlight it as a cognitive difference that can flourish under supportive pedagogical environments. Films such as *Taare Zameen Par* demonstrate cinema's ability to spark national conversations and influence educational discourse, while documentaries like *The Big Picture* and *Dislecksia: The Movie* advocate for neurodiversity and dismantle long-held misconceptions.

Despite substantial progress, challenges remain. Certain films continue to simplify dyslexia through overly inspirational narratives or by relying on tropes of hidden genius. Yet, the overall trajectory points toward increasing authenticity, complexity, and respect for lived experience. The study affirms that cinema, when responsibly crafted, can function as a powerful tool for social inclusion—broadening public understanding, encouraging early identification and support, and helping to reshape cultural attitudes toward learning differences - ultimately contributing to a more inclusive world for individuals with dyslexia.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*. American Psychiatric Association. <https://www.psychiatry.org/>
- Branson, R. (2007). *Teaching Children with Dyslexia*. Routledge. (Original work published 2007)

- Dhanke, O. (2024, February). *Educational Equity for Dyslexics: National Education Policy 2020 and its impact*. Indian School of Public Policy. <https://www.ispp.org.in/educational-equity-for-dyslexics-national-education-policy-2020-and-its-impact/>
- Elaine, F. (1983). Phonological Processes in Reading: New Evidence from Acquired Dyslexia. *British Journal of Psychology*, 74(2), 159–180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.1983.tb01851.x>
- Henderson, A. (2012). *Dyslexia, Dyscalculia and Mathematics* (2nd ed.). Routledge. (Original work published 2012)
- International Dyslexia Association. (2002). *Definition of Dyslexia*. International Dyslexia Association. <https://dyslexiaida.org/definition-of-dyslexia/>
- Mather, N., & Wendling, B. J. (2012). *Essentials of Dyslexia Assessment and Intervention* (A. S. Kaufman & N. L. Kaufman, Eds.). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment. (2024). *Rashtrapati Bhawan, among other key buildings and monuments across India, illuminated in Red as part of “Act4Dyslexia” campaign*. Pib.gov.in. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2068879>
- Mishra, N. (2024, March 2). *Let me give it a try. Let's take a simple journey into the world of movies, film, and cinema*. LinkedIn.com. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/difference-between-film-movie-cinema-naman-mishra-5y3tc/>
- Newcombe, F., & Marshall, J. C. (2017). *Reading and writing by letter sounds*. In K. Patterson (J. Marshall & M. Coltheart, Eds.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Raj, F. (2010). *Breaking Through*. VIFA Publication. (Original work published 2010)
- Rawe, J. (2024, October 10). *What is dyslexia? Understood*. <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/what-is-dyslexia>
- Smith, C. R. (1991). *Learning Disabilities: The Interaction of Learner, Task and Setting*. Allyn & Bacon. <https://www.amazon.com/Learning-Disabilities-Interaction-Learner-Setting/dp/0205123708>
- Sohal, A. P. (2022, August 22). *What is Dyslexia? What are four types of Dyslexia? What Is Dyslexia? What Are Four Types of Dyslexia?* <https://www.neurokidsdoc.com/blogs/what-is-dyslexia-what-are-four-types-of->

dyslexia/#:~:text=There%20are%20four%20types%20of,deficit%2C%20and%20double%20deficit%20dyslexia.

- Sue du Plessis. (2023, February 3). *What Are the 12 Types of Dyslexia?* Edublox Online Tutor | Development, Reading, Writing, and Math Solutions; Edublox Online Tutor. <https://www.edubloxtutor.com/dyslexia-types/#Dyslexia-types-based-on-causes>
- Timeline of Learning Disabilities*. (2025). Ldonline.org. <https://www.ldonline.org/ld-topics/about-ld/timeline-learning-disabilities?>
- Vellutino, F.R, & Fletcher, J. M. (2007). *Developmental Dyslexia* (M. J. Snowling & C. Hulme, Eds.). Malden MA: Blackwell.
- World Health Organization. (2019). *International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)*. Who.int. <https://icd.who.int/en/>