

Impact of the Time of Diagnosis on Dyslexic Adolescents' Self-efficacy Beliefs

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Children and adolescents with specific learning disorders have been found to hold lower self-efficacy beliefs than their normally developing peers (Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv & Ziman, 2006). Although these lower self-efficacy scores might be due to a reduced access to self-efficacy sources (Hampton & Mason, 2003), most research in this domain seems to have focused on inter-group comparisons. Research looking at mediating variables that might facilitate or hinder the access to the sources of self-efficacy is thus still scarce. As a diagnosis can help a child make sense of his or her own strengths and difficulties, diagnostic timing has been linked to how children accept their disorder. In line with these results, the aim of the present preliminary study was to investigate whether diagnostic timing might impact self-efficacy beliefs within a group of dyslexic adolescents. Early-diagnosed adolescents were hypothesized to hold higher scores above all in regards to academic self-efficacy.

Method

Sample:

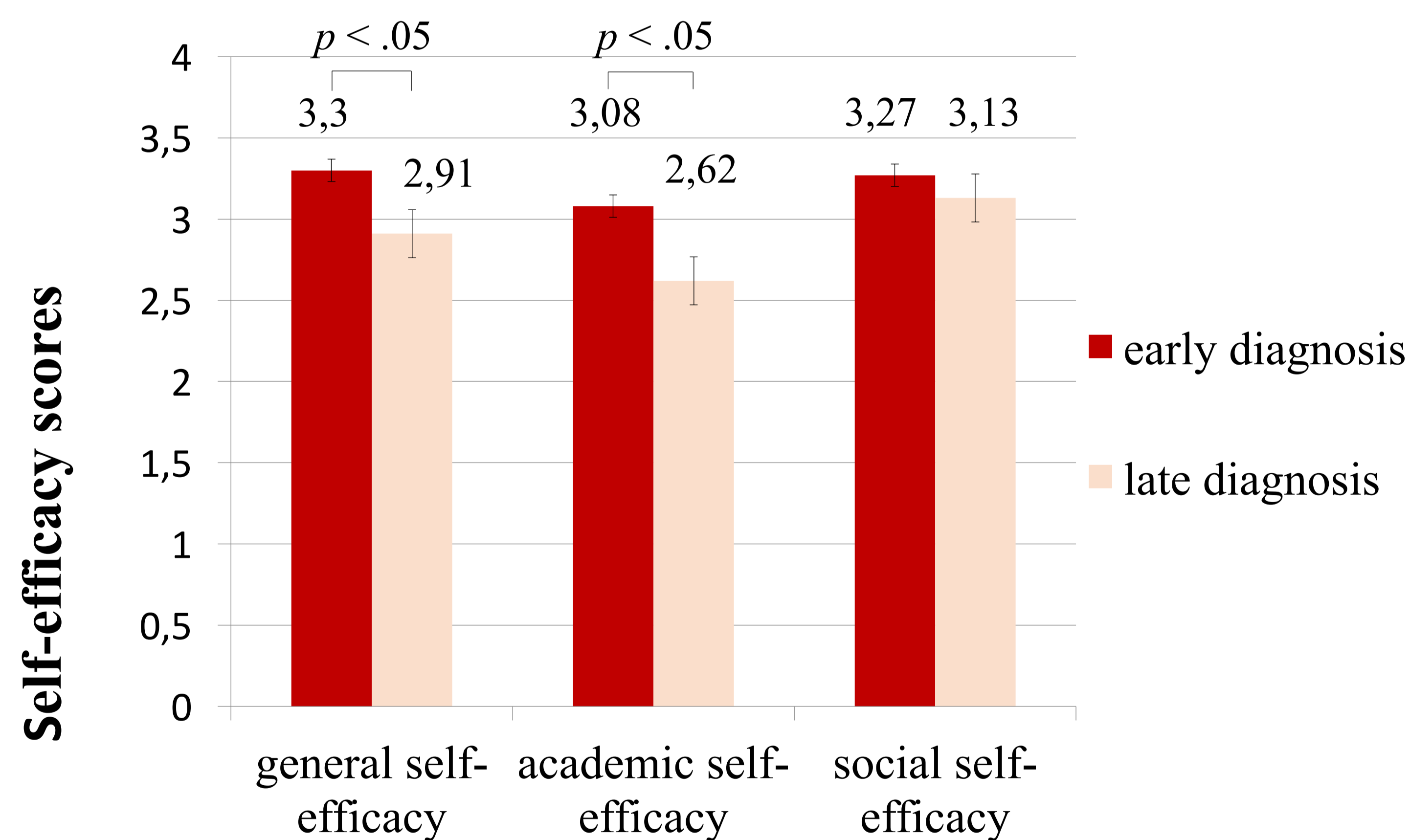
	Early-diagnosed adolescents	Late-diagnosed adolescents
n = 18	7	11
Age ($D = 0.29, p = .88$)	M=15,1 (sd =1,77)	M=15,5 (sd =1,37)
Age at diagnosis ($D = 1, p < .001$)	8,1 (sd = 0,90)	13,5 (sd = 1,37)
Remedial training (in months) ($D = 0.26, p = .94$)	20,00 (sd = 11,83)	20,64 (sd = 12,99)

Mixed methods:

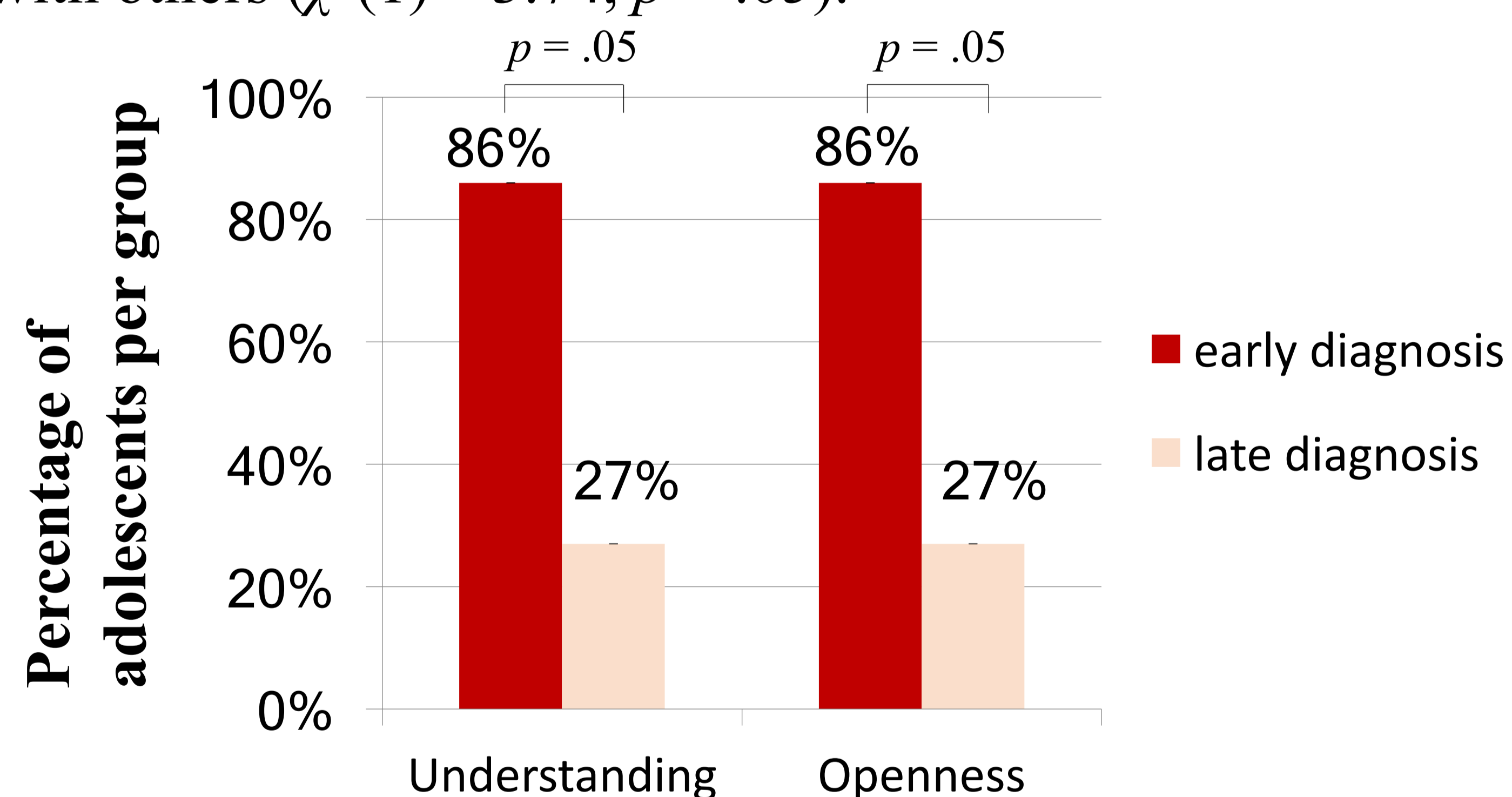
- **Quantitative:** The study employed German scales adapted to 12-17-year-old adolescents (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1999) investigating general self-efficacy via 10 items ($\alpha = .79$), academic self-efficacy via 7 items ($\alpha = .73$) and social self-efficacy via 6 items ($\alpha = .60$).
- **Qualitative:** Semi-structured interviews investigated students' understanding and openness towards others regarding their dyslexia (e.g. "How would you describe dyslexia?", "Are your teachers or classmates aware of your disorder?")

Results

Given the small sample size, non-parametric Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were performed and revealed that early-diagnosed students hold higher general ($D = 0.68, p < .05$) and academic ($D = 0.68, p < .05$) self-efficacy beliefs, no differences were observed for social self-efficacy ($D = 0.21, p = .99$).



By analyzing students' statements, the two variables of understanding and openness of dyslexia were found to be confounded and a chi-square analysis revealed that early-diagnosed dyslexic adolescents, compared to their late-diagnosed peers were significantly more likely to have adequate representations of their dyslexia ($\chi^2(1) = 3.74, p = .05$) and to talk about it with others ($\chi^2(1) = 3.74, p = .05$).



Discussion

Diagnostic timing was found to have an impact not only on dyslexic adolescents' academic, but also on their general self-efficacy beliefs, with an early diagnosis of dyslexia being associated with higher self-efficacy scores. The students' statements also revealed that an early diagnosis seems to be linked with a better understanding of the disorder, possibly because time has been found to be an important factor in the acceptance of dyslexia (Ingesson, 2007). Hence, an early diagnosis might serve as a protective factor which can consequently contribute to higher general and academic self-efficacy scores. These findings thus not only highlight the significance of an early diagnosis beyond the benefits of early rehabilitation, but also the potentially negative consequences a late diagnosis can have on adolescents' general and academic self-efficacy as well as their acceptance of the disorder.

Hampton, N. Z., & Mason, E. (2003). Learning disabilities, gender, sources of efficacy, self-efficacy beliefs, and academic achievement in high school students. *Journal of School Psychology, 41*(2), 101-112. doi: 10.1016/s0022-4405(03)00028-1. Ingesson, S. G. (2007). Growing up with dyslexia: interviews with teenagers and young adults. *School Psychology International, 28*(5), 574-591. doi: 10.1177/0143034307085659. Lackaye, T., Margalit, M., Ziv, O., & Ziman, T. (2006). Comparisons of self-efficacy, mood, effort, and hope between students with learning disabilities and their non-LD-matched peers. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 21*(2), 111-121. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-5826.2006.00211.x. Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1999). Skalen zur Erfassung von Lehrer- und schülermerkmalen. *Dokumentation der psychometrischen Verfahren im Rahmen der Wissenschaftlichen Begleitung des Modellversuchs Selbstwirksame Schulen*. Berlin.

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