

Dyslexia - Problems faced by dyslexic children learning to read in English

by [Luqman Michel](#) on July 11th 2010 and filled under [Education](#)



Bahasa Malaysia

Let's take a look at the Malaysian national language (Malay) which all students in Malaysia have to learn.

The only letter that represents more than one sound in Bahasa Malaysia is the letter 'e'. It can be pronounced 'er' or 'ay'.

You pronounce 'besok' as if it is 'bay-sok' (meaning tomorrow) and 'beruk' with the 'er' sound pronounced as in the first two letters of the English word 'berth'.

If you have not heard the word previously you would not know how to pronounce it.

One can learn how to read the newspaper in Malay within a month of learning. Of course one would not understand what one is reading. Take any long word in Malay eg. 'rambutan' (a local fruit) the sound can be broken down to ram-bu-tan, kewarganegaraan (citizenship) which can be broken down into: ke-war-ga-ne-ga-ra-an.

I remember being shocked when my son Fadhil, in Year One, read the word 'Tahun taksiran' on an income tax letter he found in my car. When I asked him who had taught him to read those words, he replied, 'No one, Daddy. Anyone can read this.' That was an incident that occurred in 1987 and is still vivid in my mind.

Mandarin (Han Yu Pin Yin)

This is even easier than Malay. There are no exceptions as in the Malay letter 'e'.

English

There is no way you can pronounce some of the words in English if you have not heard them before. A few words as an illustration would be: chalet, quay, island and know.

Many words in the English language are irregular. They are not spelt the way they sound and this is basically why dyslexics have a problem reading English as opposed to reading Malay or Han Yu Pin Yin.

There are:

- Words with multiple pronunciation for the same spelling: wind (as in the winter wind) and wind (as in wind down the windows).

- Words spelt similarly and pronounced similarly: cut, but (however, there is an exception to this rule – put)
- Words with different spellings but are pronounced the same way: pear, pair; road, rode; hare, hair.
- Words with silent letters: Salmon, plumber, debt.

In English there are simply too many exceptions. Would I want to teach these kids the exceptions? The answer is an emphatic NO! Having taught dyslexic children over the last five years, I know that it is not necessary to burden them with this enormous task of learning the exceptions. They will learn the exceptions as they go along. It is a natural process.

I did not study English by learning what is a consonant blend or consonant digraph and yet I can read very well.

Children should be taught the regular words and learn the others as they arise. From the onset I let my students know that many letters have different sounds and that we’ll learn them as we come to them. This is a very important point as far as the dyslexic child is concerned.

I believe that a dyslexic child is very logical in his thinking and his mind will “shut down” the moment you read, say, “A cat”. This is because the sound represented by “A” is “er” while the sound represented by “a” in “cat” is “air”.

I point out to them the different sounds the letter makes when we come to those letters as we read. I then compare it with the previous sound the letter had made in a different word. Once the dyslexic child learns that a letter has more than one sound (unlike in Malay and Han Yu Pin Yin) it will be easier for him to read in English.