

# Predictors of second language acquisition in students with literacy difficulties

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## Introduction

- Literacy difficulties can be defined as having impairments with reading and writing. These difficulties can affect the way a student learns in a classroom, especially when the student wants or needs to learn a second language.
- Dyslexia has a neurobiological origin that has similar impairments and can be defined as having decoding issues when trying to read, ultimately affecting writing as well: two essential tools in academics and the foundations that sustain life-long education (Ring & Black, 2018; Lyytinen et al., 2004).
- These difficulties compromise proper literacy development by limiting the ability to accurately specify phonological representations and the ability to create mappings between graphemes and phonemes (Kormos, 2017; Lyytinen et al., 2004).
- It is thought that students with dyslexia may have a harder time to learn a second language due to phonological problems which hinders vocabulary acquisition and reading in a new language, but there are some cases that prove that students with dyslexia are able to read easier in another language, due to orthographic differences in languages. (Kormos, 2016, 2017; Lundberg, 2002).
- There are instances where multilingual students, who are learning English, can be misidentified by their teachers as having specific learning difficulties who need special education (Park, 2019).
- With proper identification, early intervention and appropriate accommodations within classrooms, students with literacy difficulties can learn a second language (Kormos, 2017; Kormos & Smith, 2012).

## Objective

The purpose of the review is to determine what literacy difficulties entail, to discuss the predictors of second language acquisition and how teachers can further help their students overcome these reading and writing impairments to learn a second language.

## Methods

The literature mentioned in this research was obtained through *ComDisDome*, *ScienceDirect* and *PubMed* research databases, along with Google Scholar. Seven relevant articles and two relevant books were identified and analyzed. The search terms that were researched were: *second language acquisition*, *second language learning*, *L2 learners*, *specific learning difficulties/differences*, *dyslexia*, *literacy difficulties*, *students with literacy difficulties* and *students learning a second language*.

## Predictors

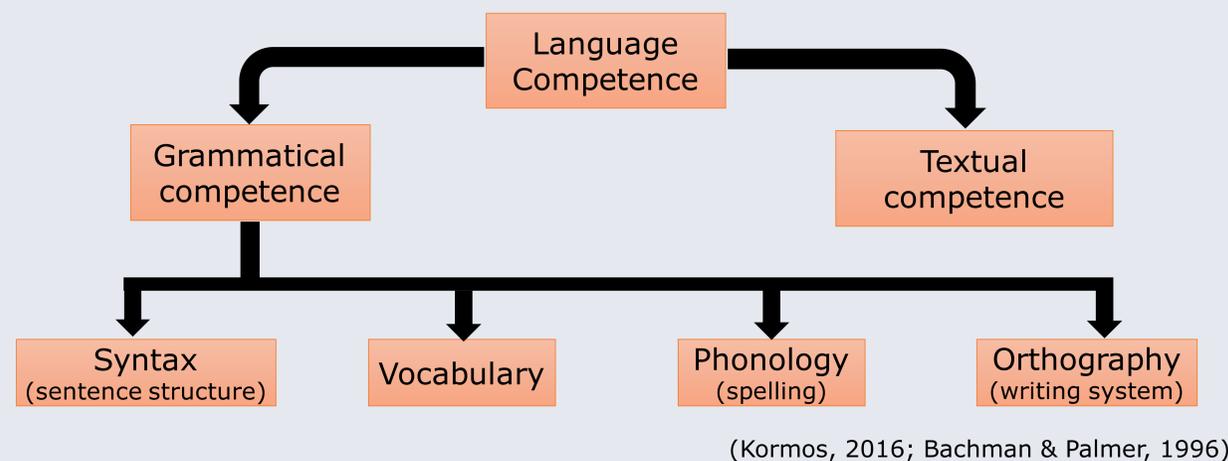
- There are four main predictors for successful second language acquisition (Kormos, 2016, 2017; Kormos & Smith, 2012; Ring & Black, 2018; Jean & Geva, 2009):
- orthographic differences
  - cognitive abilities with focus on phonological awareness, automatized rapid naming, working and phonological short-term memory capacity and verbal aptitude
  - affective factors such as motivation, language learning anxiety, and self-confidence
  - teacher capacity and will to provide appropriate accommodations

## Results

- Grapheme-to-phoneme mapping is difficult for students with reading impairments (Kormos & Smith, 2012).
  - Logographic languages are easy to acquire even if there are reading difficulties because of the cuing of hieroglyphic symbols (Kormos, 2016, 2017).
  - Languages that have simple grapheme-phoneme rules such as Italian and German are easier to acquire compared to English and French that have more complex grapheme-phoneme rules (Kormos & Smith, 2012).
- Reduced phonological awareness, automatized rapid naming, working and phonological short-term memory and verbal aptitude are factors that were assessed in individuals with literacy difficulties, dyslexia, and specific learning difficulties (Ring & Black, 2018; Kormos, 2016, 2017; Kormos & Smith 2012)
- Through interviews and observations in two schools in a Californian school district in the Park (2019) study, the results showed that the teachers who were trying to implement the Response to Intervention (RTI) policies into their teachings, had failed their English-learning students by inaccurately referring these students to special education.

## Accommodations In and Out of the Classroom

- Scaffolding assists students with these difficulties by gradually introducing the students to reading and writing activities (Kormos & Smith, 2012; Kormos, 2016, 2017)
- The following techniques can help with deficits of word recognition to increase the development of word decoding and meaningful use of printed language when reading (Kormos & Smith, 2012)
  - Frequent and consistent systematic practice on word recognition tasks
  - Maintain age-appropriateness and length of the text, starting with short paragraphs and then gradually increasing difficulty
  - Interests of the student to find text that peaks the student's interests
    - Cultural and social contexts should be taken into account to deter biases
- The following techniques can help decrease the cognitive load, memory demand and frustration from writing (Kormos & Smith, 2012).
  - Keeping the students interested and motivated by incorporating the students' interests
  - Utilizing organization tools such as visual organizers
  - Checklists and guidelines to establish self-editing and self-correction
  - Computer access and assistive devices such as spellcheckers and electronic dictionaries



## Conclusions

The overall message to conclude is that it is more than possible for students with literacy difficulties to acquire a second language when given appropriate opportunities. These four predictors give further insight on ways to accommodate these difficulties when providing foreign language learning. These students may feel isolated or excluded from full participation in classroom, therefore by acknowledging these difficulties and intervening early with adequate techniques within the school system, will not only help these individuals personally but can also benefit them socially. By implementing these accommodations for students with literacy difficulties who need or want to acquire a second language would benefit those who currently struggle with associated impairments.

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