

Characteristics of Learning Disabilities and Multilingual Development

Behaviors and Characteristics Associated with Learning Disabilities	Associated Behaviors with Multilingual Development
Difficulty carrying out a series of directions, generally because of poor short-term memory or lack of attention	Difficulty carrying out a series of directions because directions are not understood or challenges associated with remembering directions in a new language.
Difficulty with phonological awareness (i.e., distinguishing between or manipulating sounds auditorily), even though the student knows the sounds.	Difficulty distinguishing auditorily between unfamiliar sounds not in one's first language, or that are in a different order than in the first language.
Slow to learn sound-symbol correspondence; may seem to know letter sounds one day but not the next.	Confusion with sound-symbol correspondence when it is different than in one's first language. Difficulty pronouncing sounds not in the first language.
Difficulty remembering sight words; may know word one day but not the next.	Difficulty remembering sight words when word meanings are not understood or when irregular patterns are used (e.g. <i>ea</i> can have both the long e and short e sounds).
Difficulty retelling a story in sequence. This may be because of poor short-term memory or retrieval skills.	Difficulty retelling a story in English without the expressive skills to do so. Yet the student might understand more than he or she can convey (i.e., receptive skills in English may be stronger than expressive skills).
Forgets words, omits words, or adds words to a sentence due to word retrieval challenges or memory limitations	Forgets names of familiar things and has to describe them because the word is not yet in English vocabulary or the word/concept is not yet learned in home language.
Confusion with figurative language, idioms, and words with multiple meanings; students with LD might be very literal.	Confusion with figurative language, idioms, pronouns, conjunctions, and words with multiple meanings.
Slow to process challenging language.	Slow to process challenging language because it is not well understood.
Can do rote arithmetic on paper, but has difficulty with math word problems, due to challenges with processing, abstract reasoning, working memory.	Difficulty with math word problems because the language required for the task is not yet familiar for computation, or because numerals may be unfamiliar across linguistic and cultural contexts.

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Avoids writing due to fine motor difficulties, expressive language challenges, or grammatical and lexical limitations.	Avoids writing due to fear of making mistakes on paper or length of time it takes to develop ideas.
Challenges with transferring skills and concepts from one context to another, due to poor memory, comprehension difficulties, or difficulty creating conceptual categories.	Transferring of skills is challenging if in the early stages of learning English, or if concepts were not learned in a meaningful context.
Difficulty categorizing, classifying, or summarizing due to organizational or executive functioning problems.	Difficulty categorizing, classifying, or summarizing due to learning stages of developing vocabulary, or does not understand directions in English and needs the task to be modeled.
May have poor auditory memory and not be able to repeat a string of sounds or words accurately.	May seem to have poor auditory memory if sounds or words are unfamiliar or not well understood.
May have difficulty concentrating.	Learning in a second language is mentally exhausting, thus difficulty concentrating at times.
May seem easily frustrated and/or discouraged.	Learning in a second language can be frustrating.

(adapted from Klingner & Eppolito, 2014, p. 15-16; Hamayan et al., 2013, p. 47-48)