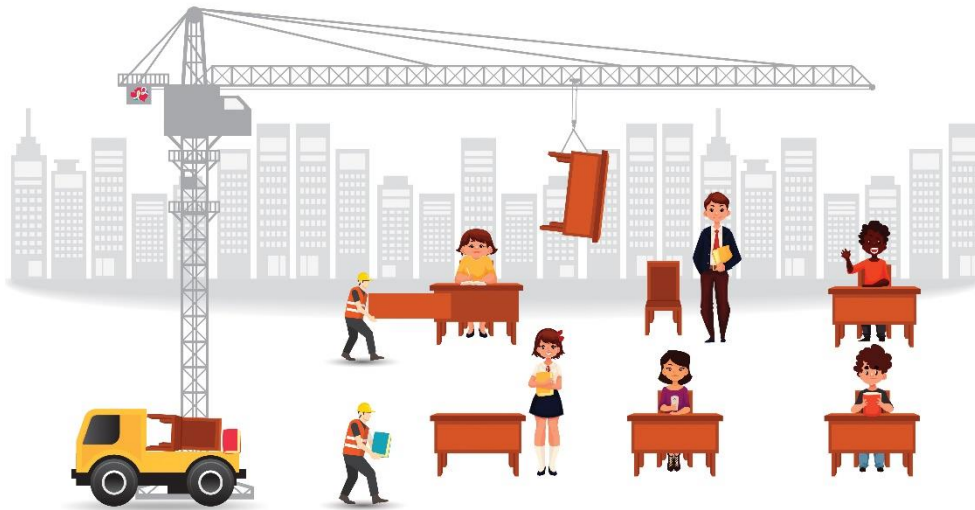




Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers  
Association canadienne des professeurs de langues secondes

# Why Learn Languages? Language Learning is for All

*Second-language learning is beneficial on many levels, but to what extent? Let's look at the seventh article of the series, based on the [Literature Review on the Impact of Second-Language Learning \(2017\)](#), related to students with exceptionalities and L2 learning.*



## Language Learning is for All Learners

Research suggests that learning two languages may actually benefit students with special education needs (O'Brien et al., 2017).

Students with special needs often succeed in language programs because their difficulties are not always related to language learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Furthermore, students who do have trouble with receptive or productive language can benefit from second language learning if provided with proper support. Research has confirmed that success in the language classroom depends on pedagogy. The language-learning challenges of students with exceptionalities are not always greater than those of other children (Virginia Department of Education, 2017).

## Bilingualism Benefits Language Development

Do bilinguals show additional delay in language development compared to their monolingual peers? One study showed no difference in terms of language proficiency in the dominant or second



language. Specifically, there was no linguistic delay found in bilingually exposed children with autism spectrum disorder, suggesting that bilingualism does not impede language development (Hambly & Fombonne, 2012).

In another study, researchers investigated whether Italian-speaking children with dyslexia have difficulty learning or reading words in a second language, in this case, English. In general, they seem to assimilate English pronunciation rules as quickly as other children. Their difficulties are often similar to those of children without dyslexia (Palladino, Bellagamba, Ferrari, & Cornoldi, 2013).

Spanish-speaking English language learners identified as being at risk for reading problems in Grade 1 were also studied. Researchers found that early comprehensive reading intervention helped them catch up to their peers without requiring special education (Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006).

Essentially, students with exceptionalities who are learning a new language may be enhancing rather than delaying their language development. Their language-learning challenges are often not significantly different from those of other children, so interventions used to teach second languages to students with special education needs may actually benefit all students.

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