

The Brain Behind Language: Executive Functions in Young Learners' Success

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ABSTRACT

Learning an additional language in primary school is a complex process that relies on key executive functions (EFs) such as working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility. These cognitive skills are essential for vocabulary retention, sentence processing, and attention regulation. However, the development of EFs varies among young learners, and individual differences—particularly those linked to ADHD and other learning challenges—can significantly impact language learning.

This presentation explores the critical role of executive functions in additional language learning, focusing on how deficits in working memory hinder listening comprehension and word retrieval, how poor inhibitory control affects attention and language switching, and how limited cognitive flexibility challenges adaptation to new grammatical structures. Drawing from recent research and classroom experiences, this session will provide educators with practical, research-based strategies to support diverse learners. Topics include scaffolding techniques for memory enhancement, self-regulation strategies to improve focus, and adaptive learning approaches to foster linguistic flexibility.

By bridging cognitive science and language pedagogy, this session aims to equip educators with effective, inclusive strategies that enhance language learning outcomes for all students.

Keywords: Additional language learning, executive functions, ADHD, inclusive education, cognitive science, language pedagogy