

## Importance of bilingualism

### What is the issue?

\n\n

Encouraging bilingualism in children leads to cognitive benefits, helping them realise their potential in a competitive world.

\n\n

### Why there is more demand for private schools?

\n\n

- \n
- English is an aspiration language for most Indians and learning it is viewed as a ticket to economic prosperity and social status.
- \n
- Thus almost all private schools in India are English medium.
- \n
- Many public schools have the State's official languages as the primary school language.
- \n
- Here, English is introduced as a second language mostly from grade 5.
- \n
- Some States also mandate learning of a non-native third language from grade 6.
- \n
- This lack of priority to the English in public schools is one of the major reasons for high enrolment ratios in private schools.
- \n

\n\n

### How does this affect native language?

\n\n

- \n
- Proficiency in English is often correlated with higher educational and social standing.
- \n
- Given the parent's preference for English, many private schools aggressively

focus on building English-speaking skills among children right from nursery grades.

\n

- Many of these schools adopt a 'total English pedagogy' in which all of formal and informal school interaction is in English right from nursery grades.

\n

- Many schools also discourage the use of native language by completely banning any conversation in native language.

\n

- As a result, children have a negative attitude towards their native languages.

\n

\n\n

### **What does the research show?**

\n\n

\n

- People are born with an innate capacity to learn any language and more than one language.

\n

- Behavioural studies indicate that if children are exposed to two languages by age 7, then they gain proficiency in both the languages.

\n

- Several studies have indicated that bilingual children have better cognitive benefits over monolingual children especially on non-verbal tasks, conflict resolution, cognitive flexibility and other cognitive control tasks.

\n

- However, bilinguals tend to divide their linguistic competence across two languages and hence have a marginally compromised lexical strength and lexical recall.

\n

- Despite this, they do not have any academic or literacy disadvantage.

\n

- Thus, bilingualism should be encouraged in early childhood policy for cognitive benefits.

\n

\n\n

### **What schools should do?**

\n\n

\n

- The current practice of starting second language in primary school may not

be the best strategy.

\n

- Instead, schools should encourage 'everyday' use of at least two languages right from kindergarten.

\n

- It should actively encourage parents to speak both English and their mother tongue right from the birth of the child.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: Business Line**

\n

