

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.
- Many schools also discourage the use of native language by completely banning any conversation in native language.
- 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.
- Behavioural studies indicate that if children are exposed to two languages by age 7, then they gain proficiency in both the languages.
- 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.
- However, bilinguals tend to divide their linguistic competence across two languages and hence have a marginally compromised lexical strength and lexical recall.
- Despite this, they do not have any academic or literacy disadvantage.
- 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

