

The research evidence on bilingualism and complementary schooling

Research shows that:

- bilingualism aids cognitive development and enhances educational achievement;
- bilingual children find it easier to learn other languages;
- children who are fluent in their home language as well as English develop positive identities and self-esteem, feel well accepted in their communities and in the wider society, and are effective inter-cultural communicators.

Our bilingual young people are a resource for the UK. They are well prepared for global employment opportunities and can facilitate community cohesion. It is therefore important to invest in bilingualism, by supporting the development of children's languages.

All languages learned will contribute to the cognitive, educational and inter-cultural benefits described above. The National Languages Strategy encourages primary and secondary schools to broaden the range of languages taught, from French and Spanish to world languages such as Arabic and Chinese. Bengali, for example, is the seventh language in the world with over 100 million speakers.

New research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) shows it is also vital to support children's learning at complementary schools (after-school and weekend classes run by different language communities). These schools give 'added value' to mainstream learning by:

- enabling students to explore their identities in relation to languages and cultures;
- developing bilingual teaching approaches that suit students' different needs;
- building students' confidence and skills as learners.

Complementary schools have strong links with families and involve parents as key partners in children's learning. Share Our Languages, a recent research study as part of the Our Languages project, demonstrated that:

- family learning (where parents and children work together on educational tasks) is very successful when conducted bilingually, facilitating children's understanding in home languages as well as English.

References

Positively Plurilingual: The Contribution of Community Languages to UK Education and Society.
www.cilt.org.uk/pdf/pubs/positively_plurilingual.pdf

Cummins, J. (2003) *Bilingual Children's Mother Tongue: Why Is It Important For Education?*
www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/index.htm

Multilingualism in Complementary Schools in Four Communities (Angela Creese, Taşkin Baraç, Arvind Bhatt, Adrian Blackledge, Shahela Hamid, Vally Lytra, Peter Martin, Li Wei, Chao-Jung Wu, Dilek Yağcıoğlu-Ali)
www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/esrcinfocentre/viewawardpage.aspx?awardnumber=RES-000-23-1180

British-Chinese Pupils' Identities, Achievement and Complementary Schooling (Becky Francis, Louise Archer, Ada Mau)
www.roehampton.ac.uk/researchcentres/cerepp/currentresearchproj/britishchinese.html

Developing Bilingual Learning Strategies in Mainstream and Community Contexts (Charmian Kenner, Mahera Ruby, Eve Gregory, Salman Al-Azami)
www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/esrcinfocentre/viewawardpage.aspx?awardnumber=RES-000-22-1528

Share Our Languages
www.ourlanguages.org.uk