

From Fear to Fluency: Embracing Bilingualism to Defeat Foreign Language Anxiety



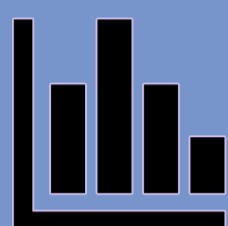
Did you grow up with a **mother tongue other than German**? Or do you **speak one language particularly well**?
Write your language on a **sticky note** and **put it in this box!**

Space for sticky notes

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Do you think it is good to grow up multilingually? Please vote!



What is "bilingualism"?

The development of the so-called **first language**, L1 for short, begins with the birth of a child. This term is often used synonymously with the word **mother tongue**, but it refers solely to the language that a child acquires during its early phase of life - regardless of which caregivers in its environment speak this language.

If a child learns two languages during the first three years of life, this is called **early** or **simultaneous first language acquisition** or **bilingualism**. Such children are often called "**balanced**" bilinguals.

How the child learns the second language also plays an important role: for example, playfully in a multilingual environment or formally in a (school) language course.

The context of language acquisition is decisive for which and how many **mistakes** the child makes when speaking. The first language remains dominant because the child achieves a higher **linguistic achievement and performance** than in the second **level of** language acquired later. The second language, in most cases English, then functions as a **link language** if the mother tongue is a migrant language that differs from the surrounding or national language.



Bilingualism has many **advantages**: It works against the **fear** of speaking a foreign language (**xenoglossophobia**; **Foreign Language Anxiety, FLA** for short). However, this connection has not yet been conclusively researched. Nevertheless, we encounter this fear everywhere in everyday life nowadays - whether at school, at work or on holiday.

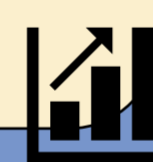
Bilingualism in everyday life



Executive skills & cognitive flexibility: Bilinguals often develop high cognitive flexibility because they can switch between different languages. This can manifest in improved problem-solving skills, decision-making, and creative thinking.

Enhanced communication opportunities: Being bilingual or multilingual provides access to a broader range of cultures, people, and ideas. This can lead to enhanced social skills, increased confidence in interacting with others, and thus counteract **FLA**.

Career benefits: Bilingual people have a better chance of career opportunities in international companies and can use their communication skills in different languages. This strengthens their language skills and takes away language anxiety.



Bilingualism at school



Native speaker: The inclusion of native speakers of the target language in the classroom can help learners to experience authentic language models and improve their communication skills. Through contact with natives, inhibitions are reduced and self-confidence in the foreign language is strengthened.

Better language skills in other foreign languages: Bilingual students often have better general language competence due to their experience with several languages. This can lead to improved understanding and performance in other foreign languages.

Peer support: Multilingual students can help other learners as language partners and support them in learning the foreign language. This informal exchange creates a relaxed environment and allows learners to practise and build their confidence in a restriction-free context.



Foreign Language Anxiety – Why bilingualism helps

TIME FOR DEVELOPMENT

Important requirement for bilingualism

Myth: "Bilingual education confuses children and causes them to fall behind in their language development."

Reality: Children are **not** confused by bilingual education and do **not** fall behind in their language development.

→ It is merely a **delay**.

BRAIN PERFORMANCE

Learning two languages at the same time consumes more **energy** because the brain needs to accomplish a lot.

→ Therefore, one should rely on more time to **process** both languages.

What are the implications for bilingual schools?

Pupils of bilingual schools should be given appropriate **time** (in the curriculum).

SUCCESSFUL PRACTICAL EXAMPLES:

PRIMARY SCHOOL:

Bilingual primary school Am Graben, Eichstätt

- Subjects: mathematics, HSU, art, music, sport
- Teacher chooses English as the language for appropriate teaching phases or whole lessons
- Subject terms are secured in German-language lessons



GRAMMAR SCHOOL:

Bilinguales Gymnasium Phorms, Hamburg

- State-recognised public school
- Following bilingual *Phorms* primary school
- Authenticity: Native-speaking teachers teach in equal parts German and English



Bilingualism helps with FLA – but what can you do to become (partially) bilingual?

Strategies for students & parents

- Start learning a foreign language **as early as possible**.
- **Grade 5 - Grade 10**: For optimal engagement with the language, language contact should also be encouraged in extracurricular activities:
 - **Input**: Watch/listen to as much music, podcasts, videos, films, etc. as possible in the foreign language and connect it with their own interests.
 - **Output**: Singing along to as many songs, talking along to films and talking to friends as possible. Added value for all: Parents, multilingual or not, can also actively participate in these activities.

Strategies for (prospective) teachers

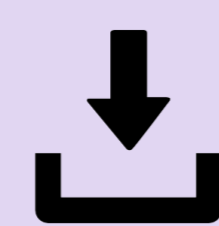
CLIL, short for **Content and Language Integrated Learning**, is an internationally widespread educational approach to bilingual subject teaching. It involves using an **additional language**, other than the learners' mother tongue, for learning and teaching content – grammatical accuracy of the target language is not the focus. Research shows that language learning is more effective when combined with content in a subject other than the language being learned. CLIL has been shown to **improve language skills** in different contexts and can be used for authentic communication. Teachers can start by teaching their subject **gradually** in, for example, English until they feel comfortable in the foreign language and can teach most or all of the lesson in the foreign language.

What does the future hold?

- ❓ More **research** in the field of **Foreign Language Anxiety** and its prevention or intervention.
- ❓ More **research** on **bilingualism** or **multilingualism** could help to design and spread projects such as bilingual schools and bilingual subject teaching.

„20 years from now“: What if bilingualism were implemented in all schools?

- ➔ The relationship to languages and speaking would change positively for pupils.
- ➔ Fewer pupils would be afraid of speaking the foreign language, as it is part of different areas of life and is familiar.



Deutsch



English



Français



Русский



Selected literature:

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