

Speaking two languages: Benefit or burden?

Teaching materials and teacher's guide

These materials are provided by Multilingual Capital, Queen Mary University of London. They can be used at GCSE, A-level, or in other language teaching contexts to relate to themes relevant to languages, linguistics, psychology, sociology, contemporary British society, or social sciences research. This document provides guidance on using the materials in a 1-2 hour teaching session.

STAGE I: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Collect students' responses to the list of questions below.
(If possible, collect parents' responses too, e.g. online or via email.)

Using different languages:

1. Since most people from other countries speak some English, there's no use in British people learning another language. *Agree or disagree?*
2. Spending time learning a language won't help me when I finish my studies and try to get a job. *Agree or disagree?*
3. If immigrants in Britain want to learn English properly, they need to stop speaking their heritage language. *Agree or disagree?*
4. When bilingual children or adults mix their languages together, it means they haven't learned the languages properly. *Agree or disagree?*

Growing up bilingual:

5. A bilingual child will not do as well as others in school. *Agree or disagree?*
6. A child's language development will be slower if they are bilingual. *Agree or disagree?*
7. It's a good idea to learn languages young, because adults can't learn languages as well as children do. *Agree or disagree?*
8. For a child to learn a language well, parents have to teach them properly. *Agree or disagree?*

STAGE II: WHAT DOES RESEARCH SHOW?

- a. Summarise and present the survey results.
- b. Download the file 'Speaking two languages: Questions and answers'.
- c. Present the material and discuss. Discussion themes are suggested below.

Sample themes:

1. Were you surprised that some of your views are not supported by research?
2. Why are some views very common even though they don't seem to be supported by research?

STAGE II: WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE?

- a. Discuss student experiences with bilingualism.
(sample questions 1 & 2 below)
- b. Allow bilingual or non-native students a chance to 'be an expert' to 'teach' aspects of their knowledge and experience.
(sample questions 3 & 4 below)

Sample questions and activities for students:

1. Does your personal or a friend's experience with bilingualism tally with the research cited?
2. If you have personal experience of being bilingual, or friends who are, have you noticed misconceptions about being bilingual, about other languages, or about language use in minority communities?
3. If you speak another language, briefly 'teach' your classmates one aspect of how your language works that is different to English. For example, are words ordered differently? Do you have different inflections that you add to words to create meanings? Is politeness indicated in different ways? Is pronunciation different in some regular way? Are there features that you know English speakers have a particularly hard time with?
4. If you speak another language, briefly describe some of the social functions that that language fulfils in your life.