

## **10 popular beliefs on bilingualism and bilingual education**

### **1. Monolingualism is the norm and bilingualism is the exception.**

Not true. We estimate that more than half the people on the planet are bilingual and 40% speak more than one language on a daily basis. Bilingualism is a phenomenon that exists throughout the world, on all continents and in the majority of countries. There are different ways of being or becoming bilingual: plurilingual family situation, living near a border, schooling in foreign language, working abroad, etc.

### **2. Being bilingual means mastering two languages and two cultures.**

Mastery of two languages is rarely perfect and balanced. We estimate that only 20% of bilinguals are as at ease with one language as they are with the other. Being bilingual is first and foremost about being able to communicate easily in two languages, and being able to switch between languages depending on the situation and the tasks at hand: bilingual people develop and use their languages in different and varied social contexts, for distinct purposes. What's more, we can speak a language without actually knowing and mastering all of the cultural values and practices associated with it: a bilingual person is not strictly bicultural.

### **3. You will never be bilingual if you learn a second language too late in life.**

There is no age limit when it comes to learning another language. The quality of exposure to the language and its teaching, along with motivation, are essential to successful learning. If an adult can learn quicker than a child, he or she will, however, find it more difficult to lose their accent.

### **4. One language must be mastered before learning another.**

Mastering one language is an illusion, as we continue to learn it throughout our lives. Nevertheless, it is beneficial to be able to rely on past achievements in your primary language to develop skills in another language. In the same way, studying another language enriches the knowledge and mastery of the primary language.

### **5. A child who has a bilingual education must have at least one bilingual parent.**

Bilingual teaching applies to all children. It is an educational device and not a school that is just for children from bilingual families. The academic success of children who attend bilingual institutions therefore does not depend on the linguistic skills of their parents. However, if they have the benefit of being exposed to the language outside of school, it means that their learning is enriched and consolidated.

**6. You have to be a good student to undergo bilingual education.**

Whether or not certain bilingual educational institutions decide to select only the best students, bilingual education applies to all children without discrimination. All students find added value in bilingual education, regardless of their level of learning. Switching to another teaching language can even sometimes help to relieve educational difficulties and encourage better learning.

**7. The use of different languages must be avoided in the classroom.**

On the contrary, bilingualism can complement the development of both languages: the teacher can then build on this observation to develop adapted teaching strategies, taking the linguistic level of students into account. Alternating languages from one activity to the next and exchanging points of view by comparing ideas and documents in the original language encourages reflection, memorisation or even conceptualisation.

**8. You can't study a subject correctly in a foreign language (history, mathematics, sciences, etc.) without mastering this language.**

Not true, it all depends on the strategies adopted by the teacher, who must take the linguistic level of students into account. With beginners, for example, it is fluent and efficient to deliberately draw on the students' native language. Additionally, studying a subject in a foreign language allows students greater and different practice of this language, and to be enriched by it.

**9. Educating a child in two languages increases the risks of difficulties in their learning.**

Bilingual children have no greater difficulty in learning than monolingual children. The only situation that could lead to a bilingual child having difficulty in their learning is if they have not sufficiently mastered any of the languages before starting school.

**10. The benefits of a bilingual education are purely linguistic.**

Bilingual education allows students to deepen their knowledge of languages and cultures associated with them, which invites them to think and understand the world differently. Furthermore, it motivates students by offering an authentic and dynamic linguistic practice within the framework of different academic disciplines. By approximating language and knowledge, we encourage students to exercise mental flexibility, which translates to being better able to resolve problems in various situations, as well as making them more self-sufficient.