

Being Bilingual

Read this article about the advantages of speaking another language and make notes under the three headings after the text.

If you speak another language, and you also speak English, or any other language, your brain may have developed some distinct advantages over your friends who only speak one language. New research into bilingualism has found that being fluent in two languages, particularly from early childhood, increases a person's ability to concentrate and might also protect against brain diseases in old age.

Until fairly recently, parents and teachers feared that introducing children to a second language when they were very young could not only delay their language skills but also harm their intellectual growth. In addition, there were fears that bilingual children would become confused in their use of language. New research, however, has found that bilingual children speak their first word, and their first fifty words and so on, at the same age as children who only speak one language. Furthermore, there is no evidence that children confuse the two languages.

Bilingual children may have an advantage at school. In fact, even before they start school, they are better than others at focusing on a task and ignoring distractions. School-age bilingual children have been found to have an above-average ability to concentrate. They also find it easier to interact and make friends with a wide group of other children. Managing two languages helps the brain to focus and ignore irrelevant information.

More recently, scientists have discovered that the brains of bilingual adults are different, especially in the brain's left side, where most language and communication skills are controlled. The effect is strongest in people who learnt a second language before the age of five. This discovery suggests that being bilingual from an early age significantly changes the brain's structure.

For many years now, scientists have been arguing about exactly how the brains of bilingual people organise language. However, thanks to technological advances, scientists have recently discovered that the processing of different languages mostly happens in the same brain area. On the other hand, when bilinguals rapidly switch backwards and forwards between their two languages, they show significantly more activity in the right side of the brain than people who speak only one language.

Speaking two languages gives the brain an excellent workout!

Write notes under the following headings.

Heading 1: Fears about encouraging young children

(1)

(2)

Heading 2: Advantages for children of being bilingual

(3)

(4)

(5)

Heading 3: Effects of bilingualism on the brain

(6)

(7)

(8)

(9)