

MORE LANGUAGES, MORE BENEFITS

A **Second Language (L2)** is any language acquired after the first language. Some people have more than one first language.

A **bilingual** is a person who speaks two languages. Similarly, a **trilingual** is a person who speaks three languages. A **monolingual**, on the other hand, is a person who only speaks one language.

A **Third Language (L3) learner** is a person who has already acquired two languages *and is learning a third one*.

In this pamphlet, we are focusing on students who are bilingual in English and another language. This language will usually be one that they speak at home or spoke in another country before migrating to Australia.

Bilingualism benefits the learning of a third language and is in turn boosted by third language learning.

L3 learners as better performers in the target language than L2 learners

Research shows that L3 learners are more effective learners of the third language than are L2 learners. L3 learners tend to:

- achieve better results across various measures (acquisition of oral and written language, grammatical development);

- participate more actively in the classroom processes by asking and answering more questions;
- find it easier to follow the lesson and understand or guess words much faster than monolinguals;
- make more use of the dictionary to look up new words and to be more organized in their notes (e.g. they usually write down lists of new words and grammatical rules);
- often show an interest in going a bit beyond what the teacher tells them and ask for some extra or new information, while L2 learners tend to be content with what they are taught. Thus, L3 learners seem to participate more readily than L2 learners in extracurricular activities;
- have some contact with multilingual resources (such as TV programs, videos, music, and radio) in their home language. They are therefore more able and willing to make use of such resources for L3 learning;
- pronounce the language in a more native-like way and have a more extensive vocabulary.

L3 learners' awareness of how language works and willingness to use the target language

L3 learners benefit from a better understanding of how language works in general, are able to take advantage of correspondences between similar languages (similarities can be seen in vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling and/or grammar) and are interested in the languages of other communities.

L3 learners tend to be more aware of how language works than L2 learners and better able to recognize the different parts of a sentence. In local research, through observing and interviewing L3 learners, it was noted that:

- L3 learners remember grammatical rules more easily and are better able than monolinguals to explain them after having studied them in class.
- L3 learners are also able to infer rules with very little help from the teacher and provide the correct metalanguage for the rule.
- L3 learners who speak a home language which is similar or related to the target language have the further advantage of similarities in vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling or grammar (e.g. verb endings).
- Even bilinguals who study a third language unrelated to their home language notice and draw on some similarities between languages, such as sounds and word order.
- L3 learners often show an interest in listening to and understanding the third language outside class and some even try to create opportunities to utilize the third language actively.
- Many L3 learners are keen to share language experiences with people from other ethnolinguistic communities, such as exchanging words in different languages with friends.

Overall, knowing, speaking or understanding two languages, whether closely related to the third language or not, tends to help students learn the target language, by providing some comparisons between languages, making recognition of words easier, facilitating pronunciation and

understanding, making grammar less difficult to grasp, and consequently boosting students' overall confidence.

**Third language acts as a stimulus
for maintenance and enhancement
of home language
and interest in languages in general**

Besides generally finding the learning of a third language easier than L2 learners, L3 learners also tend to benefit in another way. Acquiring a third language at school often strengthens the motivation for the home language. Several positive attitudes have been expressed by students.

- L3 learners often notice an improvement in their home language, such as an increase in their vocabulary or better pronunciation, which in turn leads them to use their home language more at home.
- Increased competence in the home language also seems to lead L3 learners to enjoy speaking it more in general and make them proud of knowing another language.
- Learning a third language may also boost bilinguals' confidence, making them less shy and embarrassed about using the home language in public places.

Overall, learning a third language at school tends to boost students' confidence in their bilingualism and make them appreciate their home language more, in some cases even leading to a desire to maintain their heritage in the future and pass it on to the next generation. Besides an

increased interest in their home language, the acquisition of a third language often also leads to a broader interest in languages in general. L3 learners tend to display an interest in learning other languages to simply talk to people who know how to speak them, for work, to travel, or to discover different cultures and countries.

Overall, it seems that **bilinguals have several clear advantages over monolinguals when learning a new language**. They have a **better understanding of how language works**, which promotes their learning of a further language. On the other hand, learning a **third language also tends to boost students' confidence in their bilingualism** thus benefiting them in the knowledge and use of the home language. It is therefore logical to conclude that it is not appropriate to exclude bilinguals from learning a third language in secondary schools.

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