Importance of bilingualism

What is the issue?

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Encouraging bilingualism in children leads to cognitive benefits, helping them realise their potential in a competitive world.

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Why there is more demand for private schools?

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- English is an aspiration language for most Indians and learning it is viewed as a ticket to economic prosperity and social status.
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- Thus almost all private schools in India are English medium.
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- Many public schools have the State’s official languages as the primary school language.
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- Here, English is introduced as a second language mostly from grade 5.
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- Some States also mandate learning of a non-native third language from grade 6.
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- This lack of priority to the English in public schools is one of the major reasons for high enrolment ratios in private schools.
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How does this affect native language?

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- Proficiency in English is often correlated with higher educational and social standing.
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- Given the parent’s preference for English, many private schools aggressively

focus on building English-speaking skills among children right from nursery grades.
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- Many of these schools adopt a ‘total English pedagogy’ in which all of formal and informal school interaction is in English right from nursery grades.
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- Many schools also discourage the use of native language by completely banning any conversation in native language.
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- As a result, children have a negative attribute towards their native languages.
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What does the research show?

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- People are born with an innate capacity to learn any language and more than one language.
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- Behavioural studies indicates that if children are exposed to two languages by age 7, then they gain proficiency in both the languages.
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- Several studies have indicated that bilingual children have better cognitive benefits over monolingual children especially on non-verbal tasks, conflict resolution, cognitive flexibility and other cognitive control tasks.
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- However, bilinguals tend to divide their linguistic competence across two languages and hence have a marginally compromised lexical strength and lexical recall.
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- Despite this, they do not have any academic or literacy disadvantage.
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- Thus, bilingualism should be encouraged in early childhood policy for cognitive benefits.
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What schools should do?

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- The current practice of starting second language in primary school may not

be the best strategy.
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- Instead, schools should encourage ‘everyday’ use of at least two languages right from kindergarten.
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- It should actively encourage parents to speak both English and their mother tongue right from the birth of the child.
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Source: Business Line

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