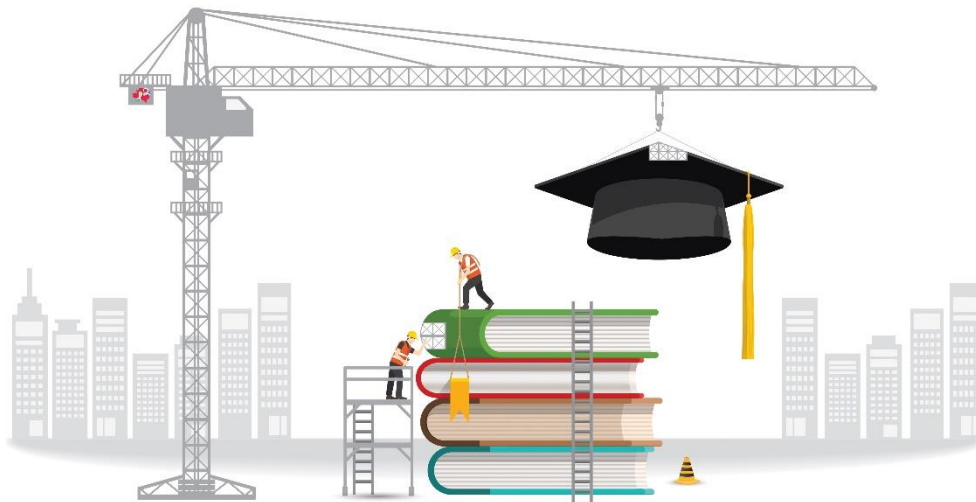




Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers  
Association canadienne des professeurs de langues secondes

# Why Learn Languages? Languages Build Academic Performance

*Second-language learning is beneficial on many levels, but to what extent? Let's have a look at the second article of the series, based on the [Literature Review on the Impact of Second-Language Learning \(2017\)](#), for the academic impacts of L2 learning.*



“Why Learn Languages? Languages Build Brains,” part one of the series, makes it clear that learning a second language has positive cognitive impacts, in particular when it comes to focus and memory. But the question that parents have across the country persists: If my child learns a second language will it impact his academic performance? Of course it will, but positively...

In the Literature Review, Mary Grantham O'Brien and her team analyzed the impact – positive! – of bilingualism on academic success in two foundational subjects: literacy and mathematics.

## Languages Build Literacy

Children who learn a second language show either comparable or enhanced first-language literacy skills related to reading and understanding written texts (O'Brien et al., 2017). In particular, learning a second language positively influences the development of first-language spelling and reading skills as a result of an enhanced understanding of language structures (Hussien, 2014). This



boost in skills, in part, is explained by the fact that second-language learning can be viewed as language awareness training (Murphy, Macaro, Alba, & Cipolla, 2014).

## Languages Build Math Skills

In their study, Padilla, Fan, Xu, and Silva (2013) found that grade 4 and 5 students enrolled in an immersion program matched or outperformed their English-only program peers in academic achievement on core subjects such as math and science. Clarkson (2007) also discovered that knowing two languages can sometimes help second-language learners to self-correct their own mathematical errors. Additionally, being proficient in mathematics in one language can help in learning it in the second language.

Bottom line, if your child learns a second language at school, at worst it will have no impact and at best it will boost their academic performance.

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