

# BASIC INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS VS. COGNITIVE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

## BASIC INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Refers to conversational fluency in a second language
- There are often contextual supports involved in this type of communication, such as facial expression, gesture, visuals, and instant feedback from conversation partners

## Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

- Refers to the use of a second language in academic situations
- Higher level thinking is required
- This level of language proficiency often occurs in context-reduced scenarios, meaning that supportive and meaningful contexts are less often available.
- Learners typically cannot rely on visual cues or feedback

## EXPECTATIONS

On average, it takes, “**approximately two years** to achieve functional, social use of a second language” (Bilash, 2011). This describes a reasonable expectation for basic interpersonal communication skills, including but not limited to daily conversations, ability to respond to questions and social overtures.

With regards to cognitive academic language proficiency, Bilash (2011) states that it might take **five to seven years or longer** for some bilingual learners to reach the academic proficiency level of a native speaker in that language.

Adjusting our expectations for children can improve our ability to support them more effectively, help us to work at their level, and diagnose language disorders more appropriately.

### How to help young learners:

1. Start with context. Provide feedback often, and use facial expression and body. Using visuals (images, graphs) can be effective in supporting early learning.
2. Start simple. Tasks that require less cognitive effort are best for early learning. language. Ensure the task includes concrete ideas (such as objects, rather than ideas and concepts).
3. As a learner becomes more proficient, the cognitive effort required to complete the task should be increased.

Source: Bilash, O. (January 2011). *BICS/CALP: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills vs. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency*. Best of Bilash: Improving Second Language Education.

<https://bestofbilash.ualberta.ca/bics%20calp.html>

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