

Student Name: Riftana Amin

Student Number: 2505214

Module: ECEY4010

Word Count: 1500

I asked Copilot "What activity can I carry out in an early year setting that uses both English and the Urdu language"

I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Bilingualism and Multilingualism

Bilingualism refers to the ability to use two languages, while multilingualism refers to the use of more than two languages in communication across different contexts (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2017; Cambridge University, 2019). In early childhood education, multilingualism is increasingly common and is recognised as supporting inclusion, identity and cognitive development (Cambridge University, 2019; Gianni, 2024; Bialystok, 2016).

Cummins (1979) argues that languages are interdependent. Meaning skills developed in one language can support development in another. This challenges earlier deficit perspective of bilingualism that suggested it may delay learning, instead it positions itself as an educational advantage when supported effectively (Bialystok, 2016). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory further suggests that language is developed through social interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning occurs through scaffolding from a more knowledgeable other (Eun, 2019).

This paper critically examines the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism. Welsh and English as an Additional Language (EAL), brain development and divergent thinking. It also evaluates key educational frameworks supporting multilingual education. A recorded "What's in the Bag?" English-Urdu vocabulary activity is used throughout to demonstrate how theory is applied in practice through repetition, modelling and interaction.

Cummins' (1979) interdependence hypothesis suggests that literacy and cognitive skills transfer across languages, meaning development in one language can

strengthen conceptual understanding in another. This supports the view that bilingualism enhances rather than hinders development when both languages are valued.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasises that learning occurs through social interactions. Eun (2019) highlights the ZPD, where children develop understanding through guided support. In the "What's in the Bag?" activity, this is demonstrated through practitioner modelling of vocabulary such as "apple-seb" "book-kitaab", followed by repetition and guided recall before children attempt independent recall (Eun, 2019; Shabani *et al.*, 2010).

Bialystok (2016) found that bilingual children often demonstrate stronger metalinguistic awareness, understanding that objects can be represented by different linguistic labels. This is directly reflected in the activity where children recognise that one object has two names across languages.

Giannini (2024) highlights that multilingual education promotes inclusion and identity particularly for children from linguistically diverse backgrounds. However, Flippi *et al.*, (2024) caution that bilingual advantages are not universal and may be influenced by socioeconomic context and quality of language exposure.

Therefore, bilingualism should not be viewed as automatically beneficial, but rather as dependent on high-quality interaction, consistent exposure and supportive educational environments (Filippi *et al.*, (2024; Bialystok, 2016) as demonstrated in structured bilingual activities.

In Wales, bilingual education is supported through the national policies that promotes both Welsh language development and inclusive support for multilingual learners; Welsh Government (2015b) highlights the importance of developing effective provision for English as an Additional Language (EAL), while Welsh Government (2021) emphasises the importance of maintaining children's home languages as part of identity and wellbeing.

Immersion approaches play a key role in Welsh language development. Hickey and de Mejía (2014) explain that immersion supports natural language acquisition through meaningful exposure rather than formal instruction. Welsh Government

(2024) further states that Welsh language learning is embedded in everyday interactions within early years settings.

The “What’s in the Bag?” activity reflects immersion principles by exposing children to repeated vocabulary in English and Urdu within meaningful contexts. Rather than privileging one language over the other, both are valued equally (Hickey and de Mejía, 2014; Welsh Government, 2024).

Dallimore and Cunningham-Wynn (2017) highlight that language use in early years settings influences children’s identity and engagement. Similarly, Kalogirou *et al.*, (2017) demonstrate that interactive vocabulary-based approaches are effective in supporting language acquisition.

However, Stewart *et al.*, (2024) identify a gap between policy and practice, suggesting that practitioners may require further training and confidence to effectively implement multilingual strategies in early years settings. Overall, effective bilingual education requires both strong policy frameworks and skilled practitioners who can embed language learning into meaningful interactions.

Early childhood is a critical period for brain development, during which language exposure significantly shapes cognitive processes. Bilingualism has been associated with improved executive functioning, including attention control, working memory and cognitive flexibility (Bialystok, 2016).

Junge and Cutler (2014) highlight that early word recognition is strongly linked to later language development, reflecting the importance of early cognitive processing in brain development. In the “What’s in the Bag?” activity, repeated exposure to vocabulary such as “apple-seb” supports memory, recognition and recall across languages, strengthening early language processing skills.

Bialystok and Werker (2016) highlight that bilingual children are exposed to a richer linguistic environment, requiring them to recognise, differentiate and interpret language patterns across two systems. Such experiences are thought to support neural adaptation associated with language learning and cognitive processing (Bialystok, 2016).

Cummins (1979) further suggests that cognitive and linguistic skills transfer between languages, meaning development in one language can support learning in another.

This reflects cognitive processes involved in brain development, where prior linguistic knowledge supports new language acquisition and more efficient learning. This is supported by research highlighting the relationship between early language processing and later development (Junge and Cutler, 2014) and evidence that bilingual experiences influence cognitive development (Bialystok, 2016).

Filippi *et al.*, (2024) emphasise that bilingual outcomes are shaped by environmental and socioeconomic contexts, suggesting that language development is highly sensitive to variation in exposure and opportunity. Overall, bilingual experiences may support the cognitive development through strengthened memory, attention and processing skills, although outcomes vary depending on environmental and socioeconomic factors (Bialystok, 2016; Filippi *et al.*, (2024).

Divergent thinking refers to the ability to generate multiple ideas, interpretations or solutions and is closely associated with creativity and cognitive flexibility, which may be influenced by bilingual language use and switching between linguistic systems (Booton *et al.*, 2021; Su *et al.*, 2026).

Booton *et al.*, (2021) found that bilingual children may demonstrate enhanced divergent thinking in idea-generated tasks, likely due to increased cognitive flexibility from managing multiple language systems. Storme *et al.*, (2017) further suggest that language switching can increase the originality of responses in creativity-based tasks.

However, Van Dijk *et al.*, (2018) argue that creativity should not be attributed solely to bilingualism but rather understood as a product of broader sociocultural and environmental influences, highlighting the importance of considering context rather than assuming direct causal relationships.

Su *et al.*, (2026) emphasise that multicultural attitudes and openness to experience contribute significantly to creative thinking development, reinforcing the role of inclusive educational environments.

In the “What’s in the Bag?” activity, divergent thinking is supported as children recognise that a single object can be represented in multiple ways (e.g., “book” and “kitaab”) encouraging flexible thinking and an understanding that meaning is not fixed to one linguistic form (Booton *et al.*, 2021; Van Dijk *et al.*, 2018). Overall, while

bilingualism may support aspects of divergent thinking, creativity is shaped by a combination of cognitive, cultural and educational factors rather than bilingualism alone (Van Dijk *et al.*, 2018; Su *et al.*, 2026).

Educational frameworks in Wales strongly support bilingual and multilingual development. Welsh Government (2015a) promotes creative learning approaches that enhance engagement, communication and language learning. Welsh Government (2024a) further emphasises immersive language learning as central to early years Welsh language development.

Welsh Government (2021) highlights the importance of maintaining Welsh within families, aligning with Cummins' (1979) theory that home language development supports overall linguistic competence through interdependence.

Powell *et al.*, (2023) emphasises that creative learning programmes improve engagement and participation. Cultural Learning Alliance (2017) highlights the importance of cultural learning in developing identity, communication and educational outcomes. McTavish (2021) further argues that recognising cultural capital is essential in supporting inclusive early years practice.

The “What’s in the Bag?” activity aligns with these frameworks by embedding language learning with a meaningful, interactive and culturally inclusive experience, supporting communication and identity development through equal value placed on English and Urdu. (Welsh Government, 2015a; Welsh Government, 2024; Cultural Learning Alliance, 2017; McTavish, 2021).

However, Stewart *et al.*, (2024) highlight a gap between policy and classroom implementation, suggesting that practitioner training, confidence and resource availability remain key challenges. Overall, frameworks emphasise that multilingual education must be embedded within everyday practice, not treated as an additional or separate activity (Welsh Government. 2015a; Welsh Government, 2024; Hickey and de Mejía, 2014; Giannini, 2024).

In conclusion, bilingualism and multilingualism offer significant cognitive, linguistic and social benefits when supported effectively in early childhood education, Cummins (1979) and Vygotsky (Eun, 2019) emphasise the importance of language transfer and scaffolded learning, while research by Bialystok (2016) and others

highlights cognitive and metalinguistic advantages. Although Welsh policy strongly promotes multilingual education (Welsh Government 2015a; Welsh Government, 2024a), effective implementation depends on practitioner knowledge, confidence and resources.

Welsh policy frameworks strongly promote bilingual and immersive language education, although research indicates that effective implementation depends on practitioner skill and consistency (Welsh Government, 2015a; Welsh Government, 2024; Stewart *et al.*, 2024).

The “What’s in the Bag?” activity demonstrates how theoretical concepts can be translated into practical, interactive bilingual learning experiences using English and Urdu (Hickey and de Mejía, 2014; Welsh Government, 2024a; Kalogirou *et al.*, 2017). Overall, this demonstrates the importance of integrating theory, policy and practice to support meaningful bilingual learning in early childhood education.

References

- Bialystok, E. (2016). *Bilingual education for young children: Review of the effects and consequences*. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, [online] 21(6), pp.666–679. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1203859>. (Accessed 22 May 2026).
- Bialystok, E. and Werker, J.F. (2016). Editorial: *The systematic effects of bilingualism on children’s development*. *Developmental Science*, [online] 20(1), p.e12535. <https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12535>. (Accessed 22 May 2026).

Booton, S.A., Hoicka, E., O'Grady, A.M., Chan, H.Y.N. and Murphy, V.A. (2021). Children's divergent thinking and bilingualism. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 41(41), p.100918. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2021.100918>. (Accessed 22 May 2026).

Cambridge Assessment International Education (2017). *Bilingual learners and bilingual education*. [online] Available at: <https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/Images/271190-bilingual-learners-and-bilingual-education.pdf> [Accessed 22 May 2026].

Cambridge University (2019). *Multilingualism in the classroom: benefits in education and policy recommendations* | Cambridge University Press & Assessment. [online] Cambridge University Press & Assessment. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/gb/partnership/research/Multilingualism-in-the-classroom-benefits-in-education-and-policy-recommendations> [Accessed 22 May 2026].

Cultural Learning Alliance (2017). *The value of Cultural Learning*. [online] Available at: https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ImagineNation_The_Case_for_Cultural_Learning.pdf [Accessed 22 May 2026].

Cummins, J. (1979). *Linguistic Interdependence and the Educational Development of Bilingual Children*. *Bilingual Education Paper Series*, [online] 3(2). Available at: <https://www.library.brownblog.com/Cummins1979-Linguistic%20Interdependence-ED257312.pdf> [Accessed 24 May 2026].

Dallimore, D.J. and Cunningham-Wynn, L. (2017). *Language Learning and Childcare Choice in Wales*. *Cylchgrawn Addysg Cymru / Wales Journal of Education*, 19(2), pp.51–77. <https://doi.org/10.16922/wje.19.2.4>. (Accessed 22 May 2026).

Eun, B. (2019). The zone of proximal development as an overarching concept: a framework for synthesizing Vygotsky's theories. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, [online] 51(1), pp.18–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1421941>. (Accessed 24 May 2026)

Filippi, R., Ceccolini, A., Perry, R.C. and Thomas, M.S.C. (2024). *The impact of multilingualism and socio-economic status on academic performance: evidence from*

the SCAMP and the national pupil databases. International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 28(1), pp.1–20.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2024.2397445>. (Accessed 22 May 2026).

Giannini, S. (2024). *Multilingual Education: A Key to Quality and Inclusive Learning*. [online] United Nations. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/multilingual-education-key-quality-and-inclusive-learning> [Accessed 22 May 2026].

Hickey, T.M. and de Mejía, A.-M. (2014). Immersion education in the early years: a special issue. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 17(2), pp.131–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2013.866624>. (Accessed 23 May 2023).

Junge, C. and Cutler, A. (2014). Early Word Recognition and Later Language Skills. *Brain Sciences*, 4(4), pp.532–559. <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci4040532>. (Accessed 23 May 2026).

Kalogirou, K., Beauchamp, G. and Whyte, S. (2017). *Vocabulary Acquisition via Drama: Welsh as a second language in the primary school setting. The Language Learning Journal*, 47(3), pp.332–343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2017.1283351>. (Accessed 22 May 2026).

McTavish, A. (2021). *Cultural capital – Early Education*. [online] Early Education. Available at: <https://early-education.org.uk/cultural-capital/> [Accessed 22 May 2026].

Powell, D., Griffiths, E., O'Prey, L. and Bell, M. (2023). *Evaluation of the Creative Learning through the Arts Programme (2015 to 2020) Final Report*. [online] Available at: <https://arts.wales/sites/default/files/2024-02/evaluation-creative-learning-through-arts-programme-2015-2020.pdf> [Accessed 22 May 2026].

Shabani, K., Khatib, M. and Ebadi, S. (2010). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development: Instructional implications and teachers' professional development. *English Language Teaching*, [online] 3(4), p.238. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081990.pdf> [Accessed 24 May 2026].

Stewart, S., MacDonald, N. and Waters-Davies, J. (2024). *Early Childhood Education in Wales: Policy, Promises and Practice Realities. Cylchgrawn Addysg*

Cymru / Wales Journal of Education, 26(2). <https://doi.org/10.16922/wje.26.2.9>.
(Accessed 4 May 2026)

Storme, M., Çelik, P., Camargo, A., Forthmann, B., Holling, H. and Lubart, T. (2017). *The Effect of Forced Language Switching during Divergent Thinking: A Study on Bilinguals' Originality of Ideas*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02086>. (Accessed 22 May 2026).

Su, L.-C., Wei, J.-H. and Chuang, H.-H. (2026). *Fostering Divergent Thinking through a Growth Creative Mindset: The Mediating Roles of Multicultural Attitudes and Openness to Experience*. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 60(102129), p.102129.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2026.102129>. (Accessed 22 May 2026).

Van Dijk, M., Kroesbergen, E.H., Blom, E. and Leseman, P.P.M. (2018). *Bilingualism and Creativity: Towards a Situated Cognition Approach*. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 53(2). <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.238>. (Accessed 22 May 2026).

Welsh Government (2015a). *Creative learning through the arts - an action plan for Wales*. [online] Available at:
<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/creative-learning-through-the-arts-an-action-plan-for-wales-2015-2020.pdf> [Accessed 22 May 2026].

Welsh Government (2015b). *Evaluation report on capacity building approaches to support the delivery of English as an additional language in Wales*. [online] Available at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/24503/1/151001-capacity-building-en.pdf>
[Accessed 1 May 2026].

Welsh Government (2021). *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*. [online] Available at:
<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-01/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families.pdf> [Accessed 22 May 2026].

Welsh Government (2024). *'How we immerse children in the Welsh language is unique to us in Wales'* | GOV.WALES. [online] GOV.WALES. Available at:
<https://www.gov.wales/how-we-immersed-children-welsh-language-unique-us-wales>
[Accessed 24 May 2026].

