

Basic Acknowledgement format of AI tool use:

I acknowledge the use of Co Pilot on 23/3/2026 & 24/3/2026 to consider academic research that supports multilingualism in Early Years and education.

I used the prompt(s):

1. Find academic research around multilingualism in early years
2. Key theorists in early years multilingualism
3. Early childhood brain development research
4. Alphabetise but keep the format of the following references.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work.

I confirm that 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 as evidence.

What is Multilingualism in the Early Years (EY) in the UK and what are the benefits?

This paper discusses multilingualism - both the benefits and contradictions. As seen in the Welsh language for EY presentation, language supports children in the EY with the development of skills for making themselves understood and developing a sense of belonging.

Multilingualism in the EY has become increasingly significant as an area of focus within education in the UK, reflecting the growing linguistic diversity of a contemporary society. EY settings now welcome children who arrive with a wide range of home languages, cultural backgrounds and communication experiences, positioning multilingualism as a central consideration in supporting equitable and inclusive provision. Far from being an educational barrier, multilingualism is widely recognised as a cognitive, social and cultural strength that enriches children's learning and development. Understanding how young children develop and use multiple languages is therefore essential for practitioners seeking to create environments that value linguistic diversity and promote positive developmental outcomes.

Goodwin (2013) recognised that young children bring rhyme and rhythm into any play area or park, bringing it naturally into their play. There is a musical quality at the heart of language itself. Children often invent playful, nonsensical rhymes and verses, experimenting with sounds, patterns, and the flow of words often without thinking. The Early Learning Goals from the Department for Education (2025) highlight how valuable this is as a child develops phonemic awareness, and the stepping stones outline that children often take pleasure in rhyming and rhythmic activities. Where they present an awareness of rhyme and alliteration, this should be harnessed to support language development. Young children begin to notice and respond to the rhythm in spoken language, where they develop the skills to continue a sequence of rhyming words.

According to the National Literacy Trust (2022), multilingualism stimulates the developing brain in young children and promotes the ability to consider one's opinions and desire to communicate in more than one language. Whilst the brain of young children is developing so are their abilities, and young children are naturally able to learn a second (and often multiple) language(s). Whilst adapting to an alternative language, families are encouraged to continue to converse in their home language, supporting the development of the child's use of dialect. Articles 29, 30 and 40 of the UNCRC (1989) promotes that all children have a sense of belonging, thus ensuring that each child has the right to converse in a language that encourages this for the individual, with a right to enjoy their own culture. The document also states that

children access interpreters to support their language and needs if required. (UNCRC 1989, articles 29,30 & 40).

The Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development, as written by Vygotsky (1978) theorises the benefits of language and the links between development of cognitive growth. The links between learning and social interactions are said to develop through conversation and activities with those considered as more knowledgeable others. Cognitive skills which have been shaped by solid cultural awareness are given opportunities to be encouraged.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

According to Read (2012) in collaboration with NALDIC (2012) it is necessary to ascertain a learner's level of language when considered EAL. The levels of fluency in English can be categorised as fluent in spoken English. Good reading skills but can struggle with written tasks. Developing, where the learner is starting to learn and explore the new language to early acquisition, where the learner has started showing an interest in the new language. The level of fluency should be ascertained to enable targets to be considered. Hester (2013) implies that confidence with speech develops first, with the written and reading skills developing later. Educational practices must be considered and effective to ensure language needs are fully developed, with a consistent approach to assessing levels, analysing data and producing an effective and differentiated programme. Skills should be monitored whilst developing and data should reflect the proficiency. Confidence in teachers should also be monitored and developed to ensure that programmes are followed consistently. However, when confidence in teaching is lacking, consistency can be affected and the levels of learning difficult to monitor and analyse.

Brain Development

Welsh Government (2022) 'Talking Points' document summarises that in the early stages of brain development, learners have a more positive attitude towards learning an additional language. It is said, however, that the interest declines as the learners mature and it is considered that this is due to the learner lacking in confidence. It is suggested that this may also be due to a lack in teacher confidence causing an inconsistent approach, poor transition and a lack of engaging resources. This declining outcome would be detrimental to the Welsh Government's (2018) drive to establish 'A Million Welsh Speakers by 2050' as set out in the Government's vision for Wales.

Ginsburg (2007) reports that prenatal brain development is primarily driven by genetic factors, although environmental influences still have significant effects. Inadequate maternal nutrition

such as low folic acid intake, or exposure to harmful substances like drugs or alcohol, can negatively impact the developing brain. In contrast, much of postnatal brain development is shaped by and emerges through interactions, experiences and the environment.

Huber (2023) researched that the white matter within the brain is used for effective communication and is established within the brain's dorsal pathways. This is where expressive language is developed and where long-term use of language is promoted. The white matter contains myelin, a fatty coating that supports the signals being transmitted quickly and effectively. Language and speech is established within the left section of the brain.

Divergent Thinking

'Divergent thinking' is the cognitive ability which enables an alternative approach to a problem to develop an effective outcome. Suzuki et al (2022) conducted a study of 60 Japanese speakers, learning English as an additional language. Assessments of divergent thinking were undertaken, analysing "a set of complexity, accuracy, fluency and discourse measures". The results showed that both divergent thinking fluency, and convergent thinking, played a role in the development of speech, meaning that those who are considered more diverse with their thinking may develop more effective skills when learning a second language. Divergent thinking skills are assessed with open-ended questions enabling a variety of responses. The research conducted suggested that divergent thinking can be argued as "distinguishable indicators of creativity".

Frameworks and Programmes (Curriculum in Wales)

The Welsh Government (2019) Minority Ethnic Achievement Local Authorities (MEALA) Group is an association of Education professionals from areas across Wales, working in the field of minority ethnic achievement. The priority for the MEALA Group is the educational achievement of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds aged between 3 – 19 years who are in an education setting in Wales. A large percentage of these learners will have English/Welsh as an Additional Language (EAL/WAL) – as recorded through the PLASC (Pupil Level Annual School Census) system. This system is used to record the first language of those attending an educational setting in Wales. Welsh Assembly Government (2011) PLASC recording guidance advises that Wales has an established bilingual educational provision and therefore requires a robust system to successfully record those learners who are considered as engaging with English as an Additional Language (EAL). The main purpose of this data collection is to ascertain

the levels of diversity within educational settings in Wales. The collection of this data became mandatory in 2012.

The DfE (2023) notes that when adults are showing a genuine interest by joining in and warmly responding, babies and toddlers thrive. With a caregiver's use of exaggerated tone and a sing-song style of address, babies and toddlers are more likely to respond and tune in to language. This supports their development of communication.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued that divergent thinking fluency is the foundation for learning multiple languages. However, it can also be considered that those learning additional languages are subjected to further experiences linked to an affluent background. Those who are not submerged in alternative cultures etc in order to develop a second language may also have the abilities but lack the opportunities. Overall, the evidence views multilingualism as a powerful contributor to children's development, wellbeing and educational outcomes. For practitioners and policymakers, the priority is to create inclusive environments that celebrate linguistic diversity, by strengthening teacher confidence and upholding children's rights to use and develop their languages. By doing so, early years settings can foster rich, equitable and culturally responsive learning communities that support every child to thrive. Within the UK, EY frameworks emphasise communication, language and belonging as key principles of children's learning. These principles align with broader rights-based perspectives, which highlight the importance of enabling children to maintain their home languages while developing proficiency in English or Welsh. Research in evolving psychology, sociocultural theory and neuroscience further demonstrates that early childhood represents a developmental period for language acquisition, during which time children's brains are more receptive to learning additional languages. This underscores the need for pedagogical approaches that nurture, rather than replace, children's existing language acquisitions.

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