

Cover Sheet

Research for learning - ECEY5010

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Are children's Cultural needs being represented in Early Years settings?

Literture Review

Devarakonda (2021), Ang (2010) both explain that due to the continued growth of diversity in population within the UK and the increase in migration It is there bringing families with young children, it is therefore as important as ever to ensure children's diversities including religious practices, values and cultures are being included, valued and celebrated within Early years settings in Wales. While policies and framework within Wales highlight the importance of culture inclusion such as the Welsh government's curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (2024) which states the pedagogical approach should include inclusive practice which not only recognises diversity but values and promotes it Ensuring equal treatment, respect representation and opportunity. This is to ensure that all children develop a strong sense of belonging and feel they are valued and represented within the setting. In doing so this ensures that all children have equal opportunity to thrive. Inclusive practice also includes and recognises the values and diversities of the families, insisting that inclusive practice respects and responds to the unique experiences of all children and their families. This is underpinned by legislation such as United Nations rights of the child (1989) with it articles based on children's right to be free from discrimination (article 2) whatever their ethnicity, sex, religion, language, ability or any other status, what they think or say, whatever their family background. It also states that from children from minority and indigenous groups have the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of people in the country where they live. Article 30 and 31 states that every child has the right to play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities which would also include home and family cultures and events. Other legislation such as the Equality Act (2010), and Anti- racism framework support cultural inclusion by raising the question 'what is culture and cultural competency?' Cultural competency is understanding our own cultural identity, beliefs, values, privilege and identities of those around us (Cardiff Metropolitan university, n.d).

The guidance from Welsh government (2024) that supports the Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity in Early years puts emphasis on developing children's knowledge, understanding and positive awareness and attitudes of both Welsh culture and other cultures that are part of the diverse society in Wales.

The Welsh government (2024) is aware and acknowledges there is a gap in research and data around inclusive practice in Wales. The Childcare and Play sector have made commitments of continuous improvements through targeted research, professional learning and community engagement.

The Welsh government also commissioned study, as there has been relatively little research into the factors that influence why some parents do not access funded childcare provision in Wales. The study revealed that out of the parents from ethnic minority communities that took part, some of the barriers accessing provisions were; negotiating a different educational experiences compared to their own in their country of origin, attempting to replicate some of their own upbringing and maintaining cultural and language practices while managing the different social norms and the behaviours expected in childcare and nursery provision in Wales (Hughes & Jones 2021).

While policies and frameworks within Wales highlight the importance of cultural inclusion there is little research to evident cultural inclusion is equal across the settings in Wales and with the National Minimum Standards only going as far as insisting social, cultural and religious practises are understood and catered for. Lacking the emphasis of how important cultural diversity is and how important it is that all children's cultures are celebrated and valued.

Gorard *et al* (2023) conducted a study looking at the disproportionality of ethnic minority teacher compared to ethnic minority student. The study showed there are proportionally more white British teachers than there are white British students in schools. This was more out of proportion in larger, more diverse cities such as London. From these finding Gorard *et al* (2023) felt that a student lacking any teacher of the same ethnic group might be treated differently and lack a sense of belonging which might affect their attainment outcome. This would suggest that the same would be for Early years setting within the same areas and lacking a sense of belonging early on may have a more detrimental effect on a child.

According to Owen (2017) during a study involving seven Early years setting in England, it was revealed that although practitioners understood the importance of diversity and expressed desires for better inclusive practice, they felt there was a distinct lack of much needed resources to support inclusive practice, such as funding, time and training. The study also revelled parental involvement within the setting was fundamental to authentic inclusion.

In a study looking at inclusion and diversity from the perspectives of Early years professionals in Northern Ireland, to see if appropriate training, understanding and knowledge made a difference to children's well-being in the early years. Magennis and Richardson (2019) asks the question 'are Early years children too young to notice?' This question can be answered by Nasie, Diamond & Bar-Tal's (2015) research into culture awareness in the Early years. Their findings show that children begin to show awareness from a very young age, which it why it is important to address any issues of diversity and inclusion within the Early years.

Other countries such as Singapore, who are recognised as a successful model of multicultural inclusive society. However, they themselves see a lack in evidence-based literature of what multiculturalism looks like in education and how inclusive practice is taught to the younger population.

A study that was conducted in Hong Kong looking at the professional development in Early years education due to the increase of cultural diversity showed positive outcomes directly linked to a training programme for developing the multicultural teaching competence for early childhood teachers. After taking part in the programme, the teachers reported feeling more competent in engaging in culturally responsive practices. (Lin *et al.* 2024). This study reinforces issues raised in previous studies in Hong Kong highlighting teachers' lack of cultural competence and teaching strategies in working with diverse learners (Ng *et al.* 2020, 2021) According to several studies that conducted qualitative analyses of teacher interviews, (Ng *et al.* 2020, 2021) kindergarten teachers reported that they were generally unprepared to accommodate the educational needs of ethnic minority children. Which relates to similar issues raised by Early years practitioners in the previously mention study in England by Owen (2017).

A study into whether cultural practices influence children's play. Boyette's (2016) research looked at different cultures and found that the communities who were more physically active saw children engage in rough and tumble play and competitive games, where other cultures who promoted calm behaviour and self-control saw children displaying more modesty during play. Boyette (2016) concluded that cultural practices influence play and as play influences development so does culture.

Methodological Consideration

The chosen sample for this study involves a non-biased random selection of 10 early years settings across Wales. These will be selected at random regardless of size, location or demographic. From each setting both practitioners and parent will be asked to take part in a mixed method research study to gain insight and perspectives of children's cultural needs. Mixed methods in research refers to a combination of methods being used for data collection (Hammond & Wellington, 2021). By using more than one method to collate data and information means that the researcher gains a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the topic than if only one approach was used as well as gain a range of viewpoints and understandings (Robert-Holmes, 2018) (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018) which, in the interest of this study would benefit the researcher as there maybe a contrast in perspectives.

The plan for this mixed method study will be in two parts, gaining both qualitative and quantitative data. Firstly, practitioners will be asked to partake in a semi-structured conversational interview (qualitative) with both open and closed questions to obtain whether they feel all children cultures are being represented within their setting. As

interview are commonly used for data collection and when done in a semi-formal manner can make participants more relaxed and comfortable compared to other methods for example being observed (Nolan, 2013). This method can also promote trust, respect and credibility between researcher and participant. However, Nolan (2013) also raises the issues of how best to record the information gathered from the interview stating that certain method such as transcribing or notetaking can occur errors and miss information out. For the purpose of this study the most appropriate form of recording would be to with voice recording software that would be later be stored on a password protective device and only used for it purpose and only kept for the length of time necessary. Consent will be gain prior to the interview for both participation and recordings.

The benefit of using interviews as research methods are that it allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of events as well as their thoughts, values, feelings and perspectives. They encourage participant to elaborate on their answers and as interviews are interactive unlike questionnaires or surveys, this allows for clarification of questions and identification of unexpected themes (Hammond & Wellington 2020).

Robert-Holmes (2018) describes one of the benefits of mixed method research is the triangulation of different types of quantitative and qualitative data. Triangulation is used to compare and combine different sources of evidence in order for the researcher to gain a better understanding of the research topic. This means if both the qualitative and quantitative data agree it can give the researcher confidence in the accuracy of their findings and increase validity of their findings. However, gaining a broader perspective can lead to contrast of opinions. In regard to this study using both types of quantitative and qualitative data was necessary as there may be practitioners who feel they are meeting the cultural needs of children, but the families may disagree. Gaining both perspectives from practitioners and families allows the researcher greater depth of understanding and ensures that settings can improve on their practice if needed.

Once setting have confirmed participation, questionnaires will be sent out to the families of the children via setting by email to gain data on whether they feel setting are meeting cultural needs and what could be working better. The questionnaire will be optional, and families will be able to access these anonymously. To ensure all participants can be included, the questionnaire will be produced through a multilingual survey tool such as Smart survey or Survey monkey, which allows participants to select the questions in their preferred language. The decision to anonymise the questionnaire was to ensure data protection and confidentiality but also allow parents to give open and honest feedback regarding their experiences and those of their child without concern. However, like many questionnaires collecting data by sending to participant in this manner, there is always an expectation of participant not filling in and returning

them. It would be expected that a percentage would not be returned. To aid this issue, reminders will be sent out via setting at a later date.

During the consideration of this study, it was proposed that observing children within the setting would give an additional element to the study which could be seen as beneficial. However, due to the age of children there may have been issues such as parental consent. This may be difficult if only some of the children in setting have consent to be observed and recorded. Children themselves may withdraw assent during the observation. The children may also be aware of being recorded and act differently in front of an unfamiliar adult. To gain sufficient data, the researcher may have to observe multiply time in some settings, which could extend the study too long making early data invalid as well as presenting with travel issue etc. It was felt that adult perspectives were enough to gain insight on the research question.

Other limitations to consider when looking into researching is the Halo effect. This is a natural occurrence, a cognitive bias that happens during the first impression of a person. This can also be known as contamination effect as it influences a person perception of another. (Latapie, 2025) (Gabrieli *et al*, 2021). The general feeling of a person based on one trait or attribute can impair someone judgement on other skills or qualities the same person has. This can either benefit or hinder the person involved depending on their ability of that one trait (Thorndike, 1920). For example, if someone is a good speaker it may be presume, they are intellectually superior then someone who struggles to articulate in the same manner. Equally someone could be considered trustworthy from their appearance alone (Gabrieli *et al*, 2021). This is a consideration for the researcher, as meeting people for the first time and making unconscious bias judgements could jeopardise the findings of the study, causing a lack of objectivity and increase the possibility of errors (Latapie,2025).

Another factor of not including children's observations as part of the research is the Hawthorne effect. This occurs when participants of a study change their normal behaviour due to knowing that they are being watched or studied (Oswald, Sherratt & Smith, 2014), for example a child seeing the camera or iPad may withdrawal or behave differently knowing that they are being recorded. As the nature of this study is based on early years children it would be difficult to record and study children's natural behaviour within their normal setting as the researcher is not a familiar adult and would need to be in close proximity to be able to watch or study the children. Oswald, Sherratt & Smith (2014) suggests a six-stage protocol to establish rapport and build trusting relationship with the children being observed is necessary to avoid the Hawthorne effect. However, as this would not be manageable with up to 10 different Early years settings across Wales and without using the protocol it would not be guaranteed that the children's behaviour would not be affected by the presence of somebody unfamiliar, again this

was one of the reasons observations were not considered as a method to collect data for this study. children's observations will not be considered for part of this study.

Ethical Consideration

Due to the nature of this study around the cultural needs of children in Early Years settings. It is paramount that the researcher a depth of understanding and sensitivity towards cultural differences, ethnicity and diversity. Bera insists fact researchers demonstrate respect for all persons directly involved and indirectly affected in regard to the research including the researcher themselves. This includes but is not exhausted by ensuring everybody is treated fairly sensitively with dignity and freedom from prejudice. In recognition of their rights and their differences arising from ethnicity nationality cultural identity faith etc (Walker,2014). BERU (2024) also expects researchers to be mindful of structural inequalities such as socio economic, parental status etc

Researcher also needs to be aware of those indirectly affected such as the children in Early years setting their rights and interests should be taken into account (Harcourt, 2011). There is an ethical responsibility when conducting research that involves others especially when the research is education based, as these tend to affect children and their families whether directly or indirectly. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure the quality of research is of a high standard as poor quality research is not only a waste of time and resources but is also unethical and may cause harm (Cohen, 2017).

Prioritising early and informed consent is the foundation of trust between the researcher and the participant. Being provided early on with all the relevant information about the research ensures that participants have the opportunity to take part or discard participation (Walker, 2017). It is also important that participants are aware they can withdraw consent at any time without explanation (BERU 2024). To ensure informed consent is applied before the study begins a covering letter will be sent to settings beforehand, once settings have accepted to take part only then will families of the children within the satins receive questionnaires. The letter will include all necessary information to fully comprehend the research process. The question is being sent to families will be fully informative with clear guidance on how information will be stored if families consent to taking part. Parents would have the option to decline consent either by filling in the questionnaire and returning it or not returning forms will be processed as active refusals of consent (BERU 2024).

To ensure anonymity for parents the question is will be sent using particular software that does not show who sent it. The questionnaire will be distributed by e-mail through the setting reducing GDPR risks. This means at no time will the researcher have any personal information of families or children who attend the satin this is one of the major advantages of using questionnaires over other data methods. A participant is

considered anonymous if the researcher or another person cannot identify the participant from the information provided (Cohen, 2017)

Another way of protecting participants privacy is through the promise of confidentiality, this means not disclosing information about the participant that could in any way identify the individual it also means not discussing the individual with another person or passing on information that can identify the individual (Cohen, 2017) To ensure confidentiality for practitioners during the interview it will not be necessary to record names or other personal details. However, a recording of practitioner's voice will be taken to ensure accurate results these will be kept on a password protected device and only kept for the necessary time in order to collate all the data. After the data has been collected and results have been recorded the recording files will be deleted. This information will be noted on the information sheet sent prior to research undertaking so practitioner is a fully aware before consenting.

The researcher needs to take responsibility for how the study is conducted and how all persons involved are affected This includes the university themselves. With the risk of reputation The University of Wales Trinity St David (UWSTD, 2025) expect researchers to understand the responsibility and insists they follow the University's core aspects of research integrity to their standard. These include the expectation the researcher to display honesty and rigour in all aspects of research. UWSTD (2024) insist transparency and open communication in declaring conflicts of interest reporting data methods and sharing results whether they are what is expected or more of negative outcome. There is also a responsibility from the researcher of care and respect for all applicants and those affected as well and even though the university supports and encourages student and staff too conduct research studies, the researcher has to adopt an element of accountability if their standards fall short of the university's code.

As there is an obligation for the researcher to be accountable and possible liable for any mishap, error or wrongdoing whether intentional or not it is necessary for the research to be able to critically reflect on the responsibilities of the research throughout the study (Bos 2020). The potential risk of safeguarding implications or risk of harm to the researcher are seen as low due to the nature of this study however it is still important that the researcher is familiar with safeguarding procedures to minimize the risk of sexual harassment, violence and harm as much as possible. (University of Warwick. 2024)

When conducting research that involves others, there is an element of duty to care towards participants. All participants should be pre warned of any potential harm that could arise during this study. There is no predictable potential risk for harm in regards to this research however if at any point during interviewing participants become uncomfortable distressed or upset the researcher was cease the interview immediately

to reduce any further emotional harm and the participant will be given option to withdraw consent then and at any time during the study (Cohen,2017)

An important consideration needs to be made for the potential for researcher bias it needs to be ensured that the researcher is not imposing their own feelings or opinions onto the data the danger of this would be during the interview method and the researcher must ensure not to influence the participants answers can be a way of directing conversation to influence in the conversation. It is essential to keep views experience and value aside (Walker,2014).

Conclusion

With the UK increasing in culture diversity and the increase in young children and their families coming from varied cultural backgrounds it is clear why policies and legislation prioritise inclusive practise and celebrate children's cultures and diversities. However, there is a clear lack of research and evidence to understand whether children's cultural needs are being met within the Early years settings. As cultures should be more than just acknowledged but also valued and celebrated there needs to be more than just policy to ensure this is happening in all Early years settings across Wales.

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