

Cover Sheet

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Activity 1 – Hyperlink – <https://uowtsd->

[my.sharepoint.com/my?id=%2Fpersonal%2F2408631%5Fstudent%5Fuwt%5F%5Fac%5Fuk%2FDocuments%2FBilingualism](https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/my?id=%2Fpersonal%2F2408631%5Fstudent%5Fuwt%5F%5Fac%5Fuk%2FDocuments%2FBilingualism)

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AI Summary

I acknowledge the use of copilot (<https://copilot.microsoft.com/>) on 06 April 2025.

I used the following prompt: Bilingualism and early reading.

Introduction

Bilingualism has no standard definition, however there is a wider explanation that considers bilingualism and multilingualism as the ability to speak more than one language (Chen and Paillda, 2019, Baker, 2011, Baker and Wright 2021 and Siencyn, 2019).

Baker and Wright (2021) depict bilingualism as speaking in two languages in every day life. Similarly Siencyn (2019) addresses bilingualism as a first language, where a child learns both languages from birth, and sequential bilingualism, where a child learns a second language alongside their native language at age two to three. Baker and Wright (2021) consider bilingualism as a personal attribute with varied levels of oral fluency and written or writing skills linking to the classification of bilingualism in relation to proficiency, acquisition and cognitive processing (Chen and Padilla, 2019). This assignment will explore the benefits of bilingualism, its impact on brain development, divergent thinking and relevant frameworks and programmes.

Benefits of bilingualism/multilingualism

Historically bilingualism was deemed to be a disadvantage with educators advocating for children to be raised as monolingual, single language speakers (Bialystok and Werker, 2016). This reinforced one language being superior linking it to higher socioeconomic status. However, research shows bilingualism does not cause language or learning delays (Baker & Wright, 2021). Despite this, some professionals still argue that monolingualism leads to better academic success (Bright & Flippi, 2019).

Research from the latter half of the twentieth century confirms bilingualism and multilingualism do not have a detrimental impact on a child's cognitive ability (Bialystok and Werker, 2016 and Bright and Flippi, 2019).

Bilingualism is not restricted by lack of privilege or socioeconomic circumstance. In its most common form it is due to a natural consequence of living in a home where the community language is different to what is spoken at home (Chen and Padilla, 2019 and Bialystok and Werker, 2016).

Stewart *et al.* (2024) recognise that bilingual children manage two language systems, understanding different word orders and how their languages interaction with the wider world. This aligns with Schroder's (2018) discussion regarding the advantages of regularly bilingualism in the relation to 'Theory of Mind', what

someone else thinks, feels, desires is different to one's own. They address that although further research is needed findings indicated a positive effect on children's prosocial development which in turn could impact children's social competence in real-world contexts (Schroder, 2018). Additionally, Lee and Kim (2011, as cited in Chen & Padilla, 2019) found that highly bilingual individuals perform better on creative thinking tasks than monolingual peers.

WAL/EAL

Welsh as an additional language, WAL, relates to a learner who is accessing their whole curriculum through Welsh with neither Welsh or English spoken at home. When referring to English as an additional language, EAL, it refers to any learner, whose first language is not English, who may already be fluent in one or more language or dialect (WG, 2021).

Smidt (2016) identifies that children learn their social language first through their families and culture, both verbally and non verbally. The repetitiveness of everyday life lends itself to the ability to repeat phrases and non verbal interactions which are meaningful and purposeful to the child. This repetition can be seen in the adjoining video.

In Wales a child's right to be educated in their own language is protected within the UNCRC under article 30, and furthermore by the General Comment no. 11. stating 'education in the child's own language is essential' (Welsh Language Commissioner, WLC, 2023).

Gorrara *et al.* (2019) and Smidt (2016) highlight that teaching with respect for culture, diversity, and language fosters belonging and resilience in learners, encouraging them to think both locally and globally.

Baker and Wright (2021) add further that placing a child with ALN in a class where they don't speak the language can amplify insecurity, lack of self esteem and increased feelings of failure. Aligning with this the Welsh Curriculum offers an inclusive, multilingual approach, valuing diversity and culture (Gorrara *et al.*, 2019). Baker and Wright (2021) address the lack of bilingual ALN education and that bilingual children are often assessed in their non prominent language. Furthermore they highlight the minimal research on ALN and bilingualism.

The Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC, 2023) outlines actions for Welsh Government to improve ALN and Welsh-medium provision. These include reviewing current ALN policies, gathering strong evidence-based data, and implementing structured national interventions to address workforce and resource challenges (WLC, 2023).

Brain development

Nacamulli (2015) states a child's brain has more plasticity, as a result both hemispheres are used to acquire language. Multilingualism offers the brain a more holistic grasp of social and emotional concepts and builds more grey matter which contains the majority of the brain's neurons and synapse, all of which are needed for brain development. It can also boost mental health and delays the early onset of dementia and Alzheimer's by as much as five years (Nacamulli, 2015).

In agreement Schug *et al.* (2021) also found that bilingual children had more grey matter than their monolingual equals equating to significant impact on development in the early years with better retention, memory and sequencing with particular focus on fluency, articulation and production of speech and speech perception (Schug *et al.*, 2021, Pliatsikas *et al.*, 2020 and Stewart *et al.*, 2024).

In contrast to Schug *et al.* (2020) Pliatsikas *et al.* (2020) and Hilchey and Klein (2011, quoted in Chen and Padilla, 2019) found that while there are similarities in the development of the monolingual and bilingual early years brain there are very minimal differences in cognitive ability. They presented more positive differences in future trajectories and added that the advantages were more apparent in middle aged adults (Pliatsikas *et al.*, 2020, Chen and Padilla, 2019 and Baker and Wright, 2021).

Sorge *et al.* (2017) discussed executive functioning (EF) and the positive relationship between bilingualism and attention abilities. They add that bilingualism does not impede attention difficulties' and can be a valuable addition to supporting children's development. In agreement Nacamullis (2015) adds that while bilingualism does not necessarily add more cognitive benefits it does build more active, engaged and healthier brains.

Divergent thinking

Divergent (creative) thinking is when a mind is more elastic and can offer a variety of solutions (Baker and Wright, 2021). The link between divergent thinking and bilingualism offers the hypothesis that being able to use two or more languages may increase flexibility of thought and originality in thinking while increasing problem solving skills (Baker and Wright, 2021 and Trautner, 2019). Trautner (2019) agrees and discusses cognitive flexibility which offers a greater ability to redirect focus thinking more quickly in response to change.

Mukhijar, J and Rajan, G (2025) consider how bilingualism enhances flexibility and divergent thinking and state that it supports analytical and metalinguistic, the understanding and functioning of language, skills while encouraging creativity and problem solving. They also address that it exposes children to more diverse and cultural world views, while encouraging empathy and tolerance of others that leads into adulthood and beyond.

In agreement Baker and Wright (2021) recognise that the bilingual child's vocabulary will also be at a higher level than that of a monolingual due to the number of words across both languages. An additional benefit of seeing printed words in two different languages may enable early attainment of reading (Huang, 2019, quoted in Baker and Wright, 2021, p 207).

However Baker and Wright (2012) also recognise that not all research displays the benefits of bilingualism. They offer that some studies have shown lower language levels, difficulties in the retrieval of vocabulary and delayed learning language skills.

Frameworks and programmes

The Welsh language has official status in Wales and is overseen by the Welsh Language Commissioner, WLC (PAVO, 2021). The WLC's responsibilities include shaping policy, promoting Welsh language and expanding the public's rights to use Welsh while ensuring public bodies adhere to Welsh language standards (WLC, 2025).

Welsh Government's, WG, strategy 'Cymraeg 2050' aims to increase the number of Welsh speakers to one million by 2050 (WG, 2017). This includes promoting Welsh provision within early years and supporting Welsh within families.

Transmission within families is essential however there is significant disparity across Wales (WG, 2021). Initiatives to support this include providing practical advice to families, supporting Welsh-speaking households, and encouraging non-Welsh-speaking parents to learn and use the language with health professionals sharing information early on about the benefits of language transmission (WG, 2021).

The Active Offer provides Welsh services proactively, ensuring users don't need to request them (PAVO, 2021). Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids Clubs, CPCKC, supports this through the Welsh Promise, helping childcare settings integrate Welsh into provision (CPCKC, 2024).

Siencyn (2019) describes the immersion method used by Mudiad Meithrin, an organisation established to nurture Welsh-medium provisions for early years children. This method relies on two principles. First adults provide distinct linguistic expression and secondly children are in fact skilled communication and language learners (Mudiad Meithrin, no date and Siencyn, 2019). This child focused communication includes repetition, clear and simple speech, exaggerated articulation and visual cues, including showing, pointing and naming. All of which are illustrated in the video component of the assignment.

Hicky and Mejia (2014) note challenges for the early years immersion method, including a lack of bilingual Welsh speakers, low pay, limited career opportunities, and poor resources. Despite these issues, it remains an effective way to teach children a second language (Siencyn, 2019; Hicky and Mejia, 2014). Siencyn (2019) agree and highlights the shortage of fluent Welsh bilingual speakers as a key problem for Welsh-medium childcare.

Stewart *et al.* (2024) highlights compelling international evidence supporting early bilingual intervention to sustain children's long term social and academic outcomes. Without it early education and care will suffer. This is compounded by budget cuts resulting in less available childcare places with a significant number of additional childcare settings not being able to sustain the current model (Stewart *et al.*, 2024). BookTrust (2024), through its WG funded Bookstart programme, encourages families to read together and supports bilingualism by offering dual language books. Reading bilingually with children helps them navigate both languages confidently code switching between the two (Bilingual Kidspot, 2018 and Pliatsikas *et al.* 2020). Shared bilingual activities promote shared interests, joint activities, friendships and

foster inclusivity (McCleod *et al.* 2015). This inspired the choice of a story and song session for the supporting activity.

Conclusion

Bilingualism in the early years enriches a child's holistic development (WG, 2021). Early bilingual learning strengthens cognition, nurtures cultural awareness, and enhances flexibility. It supports brain development, mental health, social understanding and acceptance and has far reaching benefits for a child's future prospects within a globalised society.

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