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Bilingualism is the ability to use two languages in daily life. Definitions of bilingualism can vary. For instance, a person might state they are bilingual because they can converse orally in two languages. However, they are unable to read and write competently in one language. Wei (2000, quoted in Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013, p. 1) states that bilingualism is common in many parts of the world, with one in three people being bilingual. For example, in the United States, a large proportion of the population is bilingual. By 2035, over 50% of children who enroll in the early years will have grown up speaking a language other than English.

Having proficiency in speaking and writing in more than two languages is known as multilingualism. Jayanath (2021) points out that two categories can be seen under bilingualism, namely coordinate bilingualism and compound bilingualism. Whilst additive and subtractive multilingualism are the two major categories of multilingualism. Both bilingual and multilingual education have improved significantly, and the benefits that they possess are individual and culturally social, economic, and cognitive benefits (Jayanath, 2021).

The first aspect to note is that children who are either bilingual or multilingual perform better with problem-solving tasks and creative activities. This is because bilingualism has a positive effect on a child's cognitive development from an early age (Marwa, 2024).

Secondly, being bilingual or multilingual can provide numerous benefits within education and to a child's development from an early age. Being able to converse in more than one language enables families to engage in different cultural experiences. It provides a bridge with some families between generations and creates a bond. For example. A small child who can speak to their grandparents in their language provides a sense of belonging within families, especially extended ones (Baker & Wright, 2017).

The cognitive benefits that both bilingual and multilingual children possess have been found to outperform monolingual children on tasks that require switching between tasks and maintaining attention. Guide (2025) states that the reason for this is that bilingual children are constantly managing two linguistic systems, which requires them to exercise greater cognitive control.

Let's begin by considering Welsh as an additional language. Murphy (2014, quoted in Dallimore & Cunningham–Wynn, 2017, p. 54) describes how Welsh became a core subject within the curriculum for Wales in 1988 and states it is crucial that this still plays a key role in the recovery of Welsh as a language. According to research carried out by the Welsh Government and Welsh Language Commissioner, over 80% of children have learnt to speak Welsh in school, with only one in five children from 3 to 15 years old learning Welsh at home. When early intervention is provided in both English and Welsh from an early age in both early years practice and at home it enables the Welsh language to evolve through the generations. It must be noted that the statement about what matters for languages, literacy and communication sets out what must be included in the curriculum with regards to learning and teaching Welsh (Wales.gov.uk). One should not forget that the needs of the learner must be addressed when deciding on the details of what is learnt and taught. For example, the observation video that has been included within this document highlights the small steps of progression used daily when introducing the Welsh language within an early year's setting. An equally important

aspect to consider is that early year's practitioners are translanguaging (using both the English and Welsh language simultaneous) throughout the setting. This has also been highlighted within the observation video enclosed. Garcia and Li Wei (201, quoted in Danizete, 2015, p. 177) argue that translanguaging in both primary and secondary education is a successful multimodal approach.

It must be noted that enabling children to learn more than one language from an early age is beneficial. Research undertaken by GOV.UK (2018) states that pupils with English as an additional language, even children that have lived in England from birth, have been exposed to limited amounts of English before starting school. The data collected revealed that 64% of pupils who started at an English school from nursery upwards were recorded as competent or fluent in English. This compares to 50% of those who joined an English school after nursery. One might refer to Vygotsky's (1986 quoted in Mistry and Sood, 2015, p.11) social-cultural theory understands human development and that humans develop through lived experiences. His theory suggests that children's cognitive growth is influenced by both social interactions and cultural tools.

Similarly, the benefits of bilingualism within brain development must be noted. Bilingual children are constantly switching between languages this strengthens their brain's ability. The constant need to focus on which language to use and when enhances their skills. A study was carried out by Pliatsikas et al., (2020) on children from 3 to 21 years of age based on how brain development may be affected by bilingualism. The study included both bilingual and monolingual. The findings from the study suggest that bilinguals show more grey matter (less development loss) starting around late childhood into adolescence, as well as an increase in white matter integrity (greater development increase) compared to monolinguals. To conclude, the evidence within the study indicates that the bilingual brain differs from the monolingual brain, which is apparent during development. However, researchers have sought to identify many benefits of

bilingualism beyond just language. One way to assess a bilingual child's creativity skills (this is when a child can form their own opinions or participate in a creative task) is by using divergent thinking tests. According to Booton et al., (2021), who studied 111 children over five state schools in England. Both the monolingual and the bilingual children did not differ in age, gender or non-verbal intelligence. In conclusion. The findings showed no evidence for an effect of bilingualism on divergent thinking. Furthermore, the possibility that any differences between monolingual and bilingual children are due to other factors such as general intelligence. It also highlights the fact that multicultural experiences impact divergent thinking independently of bilingual status. Additionally, Hommel et al., (2011) conducted research on divergent and convergent thinking in bilinguals. The results indicated that high-proficiency bilinguals performed better in convergent thinking tasks and low-proficiency bilinguals performed better in divergent thinking tasks.

Finally, Mehisto and Genesse (2015 cited Gorrara et al., 2019, p 246) state that Wales is at the forefront of bilingual and multilingual education. It is considered the best practice of how language immersion in education can be used. In Wales, several legislative measures have been put in place to promote the Welsh language. The Welsh Language Measure Act in 2011 established the language commissioner and set out the standards for the Welsh language (Welsh.Gov.UK). Another vital legislation within education is the Welsh Language Education (Wales) Act, proposing that by 2050, Welsh will become the primary language of education. This comes as figures taken in 2019 show a fall in modern foreign languages, not just Welsh. The decline has been sufficient, with 32% from 2013 – 2018 alone. Stats Wales (2019 quoted in Gorrara et al., 2019, p24) states that in both GCSE and A levels, the decline has been sufficient with a response to declining trends in language learning. The National Curriculum for Wales 2022 states that by moving away from traditional methods of monolingual teaching and by making connections with different cultures and languages. Take, for example, the four purposes within the Curriculum for Wales. The Welsh Government (2020) states that the

language, literacy, and communication area of the curriculum aims to address the aspects of communication by giving children the ability to speak Welsh, English, and other foreign languages fluently. It also seeks to motivate children to apply what they have discovered about one language to the study and application of other languages.

To maintain the Welsh language through education Wales has 22 initiatives formed by the Welsh Government and local authorities within Wales that assist individuals to become bilingual. One initiative for adults who wish to learn Welsh is Cymraeg for life along with Mudiad Meithrin, which promotes Welsh-medium early years education and provides Welsh language resources for families and young children. Another initiative that has grown considerably is Urdd Gobaith Cymru, which is Wales' largest youth club, encouraging children and young people through the medium of Welsh (Urdd Gobaith 2025).

In conclusion, the impact of bilingual education on early years is a vital tool. By providing benefits for cognitive, social, and emotional development. It sets the foundations to allow children to embrace two or more languages and allows them to think more critically and to connect to their cultural heritage more deeply.

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