

Student number: 2520856

Word count: 1305

Module Code: ECEY4010

Multilingualism in early years practice

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of notes and other resources I used, which I may be asked to use in evidence.

Part 1

Video hyperlink – [Multilingualism Activity.mov](#)

Part 2

Multilingualism in education has become an increasingly important topic in today's culturally diverse world. As classrooms bring together students from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds, the ability to support and value multiple languages is no longer optional but essential. Multilingual education not only reflects the realities of global migration and communication, but also plays a key role in promoting inclusion, equity, and academic success. When educators view students' native languages as strengths instead of obstacles, they can foster more engaging and effective learning environments. Research has shown that multilingual approaches can enhance cognitive development, improve problem-solving skills, and deepen cultural awareness (Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2000). At the same time, implementing multilingual education presents challenges, including the need for trained teachers, appropriate resources, and supportive policies (García & Wei, 2014). Despite these obstacles, the growing emphasis on multilingualism highlights a shift toward more inclusive and holistic educational practices.

Multilingualism in childhood has been closely linked to enhanced brain development, particularly in areas related to executive function, attention control, and cognitive flexibility. Studies suggest that children who are exposed to more than one language from an early age develop stronger abilities to switch between tasks, filter irrelevant information, and adapt to new learning contexts. When it comes to learning and understanding new languages, it is common knowledge that children are like 'sponges' meaning they absorb the language easier and quicker while they are at the prime window of learning (Bialystok, 2011; Carlson & Meltzoff, 2008). Neuroimaging research further indicates that multilingual experiences can lead to structural and functional changes in the brain, including increased grey matter density in regions associated with language processing and executive control (Mechelli et al., 2004). These cognitive advantages are thought to arise from the constant management of multiple linguistic systems, which strengthens neural networks involved in monitoring and control. However, the extent of these benefits can vary depending on factors such as age of acquisition, proficiency, and the quality of language exposure (De Houwer, 2009). Overall, the evidence highlights that multilingualism not only supports language development but also contributes positively to broader aspects of children's cognitive and neurological growth.

Welsh as an additional language provides a valuable context for understanding multilingualism in children, particularly within bilingual education systems such as those in Wales. Learning Welsh alongside English has been shown to support children's cognitive development,

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including enhanced metalinguistic awareness and improved executive functioning (Thomas & Roberts, 2011; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012). In Welsh-medium and bilingual schools, children often develop the ability to switch between languages effectively, which can strengthen their overall language skills and contribute to broader academic achievement. Furthermore, exposure to Welsh as an additional language fosters cultural identity and a sense of belonging, while also promoting openness to linguistic diversity (May, 2017). Research also indicates that acquiring Welsh does not hinder English development; instead, it can reinforce literacy and communication skills across both languages (Baker, 2011). Despite challenges such as varying levels of exposure and resource availability, the inclusion of Welsh in education highlights the benefits of multilingualism in supporting both cognitive growth and cultural engagement among children.

Welsh language policy provides a clear example of how governments can actively promote multilingualism through education, legislation, and community initiatives. The Welsh Government's strategy, *Cymraeg 2050*, sets an ambitious target of reaching one million Welsh speakers by 2050, alongside increasing the proportion of people who use Welsh daily (Welsh Government, 2017). To achieve this, policies focus heavily on expanding Welsh-medium education, supporting bilingual schooling, and ensuring that all learners develop Welsh language skills. For example, the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025 aims to ensure that pupils become independent Welsh language users by the end of compulsory education (Welsh Government, 2025). In addition, broader legislation such as the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 establishes Welsh as an official language and promotes its use in public services, reinforcing its status in everyday life (UK Government, 2011). Promotion of the language also extends beyond schools through community programmes, workplace initiatives, and adult learning opportunities, all designed to increase both the number of speakers and the use of Welsh in society (Lewis, 2021). Together, these policies highlight a comprehensive approach to fostering multilingualism, where education, policy, and cultural identity work in tandem to sustain and grow the Welsh language.

Code switching is the practice of alternating between two or more languages or language varieties within a conversation or learning context which is an important feature of multilingual education. In classroom settings, it can serve as a valuable pedagogical tool, allowing students to use all their language skills to enhance understanding, engagement, and learning. Research suggests that allowing learners to move between languages can scaffold understanding of complex concepts, particularly for those who are not yet fully skilled in the language of instruction (Ofelia García & Wei, 2014). Rather than being seen as a deficiency, code switching is increasingly viewed as a resource that affirms students' linguistic identities and promotes inclusivity in diverse classrooms. Teachers who strategically incorporate code switching can enhance engagement, clarify meaning, and bridge gaps between home and school languages (Jim Cummins, 2007). Moreover, it contributes to the development of bilingual competence and metalinguistic awareness, both of which are linked to improved academic outcomes. Overall, recognising and utilising code-switching in education supports more equitable and effective learning environments in multilingual societies.

Code switching between English and Welsh can play a significant role in supporting the development and normalisation of the Welsh language in education and everyday life. By allowing speakers to move fluidly between the two languages, code-switching helps maintain communication while gradually increasing confidence and competence in Welsh. In classroom settings, it enables learners to access new concepts in English while reinforcing Welsh

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vocabulary and structures, supporting a smoother transition towards greater use of Welsh as a medium of instruction. This approach aligns with the concept of translanguaging, as discussed by Ofelia García and Li Wei (2014), where both languages are used as complementary resources rather than kept strictly separate. Additionally, code-switching can help normalise Welsh in informal and social contexts, making it feel more accessible and relevant, particularly for learners who may lack confidence. By validating bilingual language use, educators can foster positive attitudes towards Welsh, encourage its everyday use, and contribute to broader goals of language revitalisation in Wales.

Multilingualism in education offers a wide range of cognitive, academic, and social benefits for learners. Research shows that students who learn and use multiple languages often develop stronger problem-solving skills, greater cognitive flexibility, and enhanced metalinguistic awareness, which can support overall academic achievement. According to Ellen Bialystok (2001), bilingual and multilingual learners demonstrate advantages in executive control processes such as attention and task switching. In addition, multilingual education can improve literacy development, as skills acquired in one language can transfer to another, a concept highlighted by Jim Cummins (2000) through his interdependence hypothesis. Beyond cognitive gains, multilingualism also promotes cultural awareness, inclusivity, and positive identity formation, helping students value both their own and others' linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, it can enhance future employment opportunities in an increasingly globalised world. Overall, integrating multilingualism into education supports both academic success and the development of socially and culturally aware individuals.

In conclusion, multilingualism and practices such as code-switching play a vital role in creating inclusive and effective educational environments. By recognising and valuing learners' full linguistic abilities, educators can enhance understanding, support language development, and promote positive attitudes towards minority languages such as Welsh. Policies and approaches that encourage bilingualism not only strengthen academic outcomes but also contribute to cultural preservation and identity. As highlighted by researchers such as Jim Cummins and Ofelia García, embracing linguistic diversity in education allows students to thrive both cognitively and socially. Ultimately, fostering multilingualism is essential for preparing learners to succeed in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world while supporting the sustainability of languages like Welsh.

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