

According to Britannica (2023), bilingualism is simply the ability to speak two languages. However, Franson (2009) states that defining bilingualism can be difficult as being bilingual means different things to different people. Franson (2009) states that there are different types of bilingualism. For example, a person may have become bilingual by learning a second language after their first language. This is defined as sequential bilingualism. Whereas, simultaneous bilingualism is where a person has grown up with the use of two languages.

Learning a second language in the early years of life is particularly advantageous.

Studies show that children who learn a second language at a young age learn languages more effortlessly than adults. Through passive listening and exposure, children unconsciously learn new languages (United Nations, 2022). The early years are considered a critical period for language acquisition. Eric Lenneberg introduced the critical period hypothesis. He argued that there is a limited window in which children can easily learn language. Beyond this critical period, language acquisition becomes more difficult. He believed that language acquisition needed to take place between age two and puberty (Vanhove, 2013).

On the other hand, Harach (2018) claims that there are added benefits to learning a language as an adult and stated that a study by researchers found that adults were better at grasping an artificial language.

There are many benefits of bilingualism in the early years, but two significant benefits are cognitive and communication benefits.

On the cognitive side, evidence shows that bilingualism enhances multitasking and problem-solving skills, memory, inhibitory controls and attention to detail (Bilingual Kidspot, 2019).

This is further emphasised by Carmarthenshire County council (2023) as they state that bilingual people tend to be more creative and flexible.

Theorist Bruner supports this and believes that language helps us to develop cognitively (Brain and Mukherji, 2005).

Additionally, a study by Peal and Lambert (1962) demonstrated that bilingual children outperformed their monolingual peers on tasks that measured their skills and abilities.

Specifically memory, attention and executive function (Bialystok and Werker, 2017).

According to Bee and Boyd (2007), The communication benefits are also noteworthy. Bilingual children are better able to communicate with people from different cultures and backgrounds. Ultimately leading to increased social interaction and understanding.

Bilingualism also provides social flexibility. People who are bilingual can adapt between different social environments and are advantaged in social interactions compared to monolinguals (Ikizer and Ramirez-Esparza, 2017).

As stated by the Welsh Government (No date), practitioners should support all children who are potentially bilingual and multilingual as they believe that maintaining at least two languages is an advantage for later academic achievement.

Some children have English as an additional language. EAL is defined as anyone who has been exposed to a language other than English during early childhood. This may include children who

have a diverse background, in their literacy or in educational background (Our Lady St Gerads, No date).

The Welsh Government (No Date), states that children with EAL may need more time settling into settings. Not fluent speaking the same language as their peers can cause anxiety for the child and so it is significant for practitioners to provide the necessary support for both children and parents to help them integrate and succeed.

The practitioner's role is crucial in modelling precise English and building on what the child already knows.

Similarly children with Welsh as an additional language need equal support. As stated by Carmarthenshire county council (2022), this is where a child speaks a language other than English or Welsh as their first language. Again this could be because they were born in a different country or because of diverse backgrounds.

In situations like these, Practitioners should prioritise relationship-building activities and build trust with the child. This is because children learn better when they feel safe in their environments (Stewart 2019). This is supported by Maslow's hierarchy of Needs (Mind Tools, No date).

Carmarthenshire County council (2022), go on to state that bilingualism has a positive effect on performance and so children should be encouraged to use their home language in the setting. The setting can do basic things to support the child such as speaking clearly, making learning visuals, planning learning activities that are collaborative and ensuring the environment is safe and welcoming for both the child and the parent.

Partnership is crucial in these situations.

In terms of teaching a new language to a child, whether welsh or english, there are techniques that practitioners can use that are proven to be beneficial in language learning. These may include the sandwich technique, immersion technique or dual language approach. In my activity, I used the sandwich technique.

According to Multilingual Montessori (No Date), The sandwich technique involves 'sandwiching' the familiar word or phrase between the new word or phrase. For instance, if a child was learning the word one in welsh. The sandwich technique would be to say 'UN, one, UN'.

Theorist Skinner argued that children learn through imitation. With the sandwich technique, children will copy the adults.

The immersion technique involves exposing children to the language in a natural setting. As stated by Phorms Education (No Date), learning by immersion includes learning a language by being immersed in what is called a language bath. They hear, speak and learn by experiencing it in their surroundings. It is natural without any pressure.

Although the immersion technique is an easy, natural way of learning a language, there are disadvantages to using this technique. According to Tania (2019), with the immersion technique, it is more difficult to teach children written english. It may be easy to miss out on things like grammar, spelling and sentence structures. Which are all things that are significant for effective communication.

It is also difficult for children to learn language through this technique when they are alone. It is required that they are around other people to take in the information. Whereas with other techniques, learning can be done independently.

Finally, dual language learning simply refers to the curriculum being taught in two languages (Education Reform, 2013). Compared to the immersion technique, dual language learning is more structured.

Overall, all techniques have been shown to be beneficial and effective in teaching a language to those who have English as an additional language or Welsh as an additional language.

As previously mentioned, bilingualism has many benefits. The ability to speak more than one language has been shown to have significant cognitive and neurological benefits. According to Bialystok, Craik and Luk (2012), Bilingualism enhances certain cognitive processes, promotes brain plasticity, and provides protection against cognitive decline.

Pliatsikas et al (2020), also stated that bilingualism affects the structure of the brain. Research showed that compared to monolinguals, bilinguals showed more grey matter and higher white matter. This is significant to acknowledge as grey matter plays a key role in brain activities like thinking, remembering, feeling and doing. All of these functions are called cognition. If a person loses or has little grey matter, they have a cognitive decline. As a person ages, they naturally lose grey matter and a bilingual brain would slow this down due to the inevitable grey matter increase caused from being bilingual (Lliades, 2021).

Additionally, according to Alzheimers society (2017), a study revealed that bilinguals have increased connectivity in certain areas of the brain that help to protect from dementia.

However, Grundy et al (2020) states that bilingualism does not prevent Alzheimer's disease; it can only fight off and prolong the initial symptoms.

Bilingualism also supports divergent thinking. Divergent thinking is defined as the process of creating different, unique ideas or solutions to a problem that needs to be solved. Divergent thinking generally includes discovering multiple answers or solutions (Airfocus, No date).

A study on the effect of bilingualism on divergent thinking showed that the bilingual participants outperformed the monolingual participants on fluency, flexibility and elaboration in divergent thinking. The study demonstrated that bilinguals are advantaged on several divergent thinking tasks (Kharkhurin, 2009).

However, Hommel et al (2011) published a study that compared low and high proficient bilinguals on divergent tasks and discovered a low proficient bilingual advantage for fluency in divergent thinking, suggesting that bilingualism should not be related to creativity.

The Welsh government (2023) published a Welsh language strategy action plan that includes two main targets. One million Welsh speakers by 2050 and a 20% increase of those that speak Welsh daily. The Welsh government believes that it is significant to ensure that Welsh remains the main language spoken in areas where there is a high amount of Welsh speakers. It is planned to create bilingual citizens by giving opportunities to all to learn the language.

This is an ambitious aim however there are multiple ways to support this strategy.

According to Curriculum Cymreig, schools are required to celebrate cultures and the traditions of Wales whilst maintaining respect for other cultures, and make a conscious effort to gain knowledge surrounding the traditions and values as well as the religious beliefs and practices of Wales.

It can also be supported by visiting historical sites, and ensuring the use of the Welsh language is taught and used (Welsh Government, No date).

The foundation phase framework ensured to include Curriculum Cymreig and contributed to it by ensuring children felt a sense of belonging to Wales and being taught the Welsh heritage, literature and arts as well as the language. Promoting the Welsh language has been committed by all settings and schools in the foundation phase (Welsh Government No date). During the promotion of the Welsh language, practitioners should make learning fun, offer exciting and stimulating activities and support learning through visual support and practical resources. They should also be aware of children's feelings. They may be silent and retract from learning due to not understanding and lacking the confidence to try and learn. Positive attitudes should be shown during these times (Brock and Rankin 2008).

Bilingual education is praised for many reasons however it is also criticised. According to Fajkus, (2020), programmes that promote bilingualism are inconsistent. As children and young adults go into higher education, learning the Welsh language is not compulsory. Consequently, some students may forget or lose their ability.

According to Brock and Rankin (2008 pg 39), Parents can support their child's bilingual education by attending play groups such as Ti a Fi where parents attend with their children and socialise in an informal Welsh atmosphere in order to learn Welsh alongside their children.