

Cover sheet

For this assignment I have submitted the following:

Component 1: 10 minute recording of myself undertaking an activity which promotes and supports bilingualism

Component 2: A written supporting paper that includes the benefits of bilingualism, brain development, WAL/EAL, divergent thinking and frameworks and programmes

Word count: 1600 words

AI statement: AI was used to support the structuring and organisation of my 10 minute recorded activity. All content and ideas presented are my own.

[Click here to watch my bilingual activity video](#)

Introduction

Bilingualism is the term used for having the ability to use two languages. During early childhood, exposure to more than one languages can play an important role in supporting speech and language development and social development. When children are exposed to more than one language at a younger age, they are able to develop a clearer understanding of language and meaning. In Wales, the Welsh language is focussed on within education and everyday life, which is why bilingualism is important. The curriculum for Wales encourages children to speak both Welsh and English for them to become confident using both languages. In this assignment, I will write about the benefits of bilingualism in early years and how it can support brain development as well as speech and language development. I will also explore how practitioners can support children with Welsh or English as an additional language. This will be linked to a practical activity that I will be doing during my recorded piece as part of this module.

Benefits of bilingualism

Bilingualism can have a positive impact on children's speech, language, and communication development. When children are introduced to more than one language at a young age, they are able to develop a clearer communication and have a wider understanding of language. This allows children to have more confidence with communicating and express themselves more clearly. Research shows that "infants learn language through listening to and interacting with different speakers" (Byers-Heinlein, 2023). This highlights the importance of interactions when supporting language development. Research also shows that bilingualism can support "cognitive development, including memory, attention and executive function" (Biyalstok, 2017), showing that learning more than one language can benefit children's thinking skills as well as communication. Bilingualism can also support children's confidence, as they are able to communicate with a variety of people using different languages. This allows children to feel more included in situations where more than one language is being spoken. Having the skill of bilingualism supports children to develop listening

skills, as children learn to recognise different sounds and words. Research also suggests that bilingual children can develop a stronger understanding of effective communication and conversation (Siegal et al., 2010) which can further support their social interactions. Overall, bilingualism has been shown to support children's linguistic, cognitive and social development, highlighting its wide ranging benefits in early childhood (Padilla and Chen, 2025). These benefits can also support children's readiness for school, as strong communication and cognitive skills are essential for engaging in learning and building relationships with others. In addition, being exposed to more than one language from an early age can help children develop a greater awareness of different cultures and perspectives, further supporting their social and emotional development.

Brain development

Bilingualism can also support children's brain development. Research shows that the brain can change and develop in response to learning experiences such as language (Berken et al., 2017), highlighting the impact bilingualism can have on brain structure and function. Hernandez (2012) also suggests that learning more than one language can strengthen cognitive processes such as attention and memory, further supporting brain development in early childhood. Similarly, Ramirez-Esparza et al. (2009) highlights the role of environmental exposure in shaping development. Further research by Pliatsikas et al. (2020) found that bilingual children show different patterns of brain development compared to monolingual children, including increased grey matter and stronger white matter connections in areas linked to language and cognitive processing. Barac and Bialystok (2011) also found that bilingual children often demonstrate stronger executive functioning skills, such as attention, flexibility and inhibitory control, which are essential for learning. These skills are essential for learning and everyday functioning in early childhood. Similarly, research suggests that bilingualism can enhance mental flexibility and working memory, further supporting problem solving abilities in children (Westly, 2011). Research also suggests that bilingual individuals demonstrate improved reasoning and multitasking abilities, highlighting wider cognitive benefits of bilingualism (Kluger, 2023).

WAL/EAL

WAL/EAL refers to children who speak a language other than English or Welsh as their first language and are learning one or both as an additional language. This happens when children are raised in households where another language is spoken or they have moved from another country. Children with WAL/EAL may require additional support as they can face challenges in understanding classroom routines and communicating effectively with peers and practitioners, particularly when they are new to language or education system (Welsh Government, 2014). As a result, practitioners play an important role in supporting these children by creating inclusive and language rich environments. This can include visual aids, gestures, repetition and modelling language to support understanding and communication. In Wales, all children are required to learn Welsh either as a first or second language from ages 3-16, highlighting the importance of developing bilingual skills from an early age (National Assembly for Wales, 2016). This supports the inclusion of learners with Welsh as an additional language, as schools are expected to provide opportunities for children to develop their language skills regardless of their linguistic background. Learners with Welsh as an additional language require appropriate support to develop their language skills, highlighting the importance of inclusive teaching approaches that meet the needs of children from different linguistic backgrounds (Welsh Government, 2014). In addition, supporting children with WAL/EAL can have a positive impact on their confidence and sense of belonging within the classroom. When children feel understood and included, they are more likely to engage in learning and participate in social interactions. Practitioners can further support this by using strategies such as scaffolding language, encouraging peer support, and providing opportunities for children to use both their home language and the new language. This helps to create a supportive environment where children can develop their language skills at their own pace while still accessing the curriculum.

Divergent thinking

Bilingualism can also support the development of divergent thinking, which refers to the ability to generate multiple ideas or solutions. Some research suggests that bilingualism may support divergent thinking due to increased cognitive flexibility. This may be linked to the development of executive functioning, as switching between two

languages can strengthen cognitive control processes (Zheng et al., 2022). Additionally, research has found that bilingual children may demonstrate higher levels of creative ability compared to monolingual children, although this advantage can vary depending on the task (Leikin et al., 2014). More recent research also suggests that exposure to bilingual education can lead to improvements in creative fluency and flexibility over time, with bilingual children outperforming monolingual peers in divergent thinking tasks (Agostini et al., 2024). However, findings are not consistent. For instance, a study by Booton et al. (2021) found no significant difference in divergent thinking between bilingual and monolingual children, suggesting that the relationship between bilingualism and creativity may be more complex. This is supported by further research, which suggests that bilingualism may benefit convergent thinking rather than divergent thinking (Hommel et al., 2011). This indicates that while bilingualism supports cognitive skills, its impact on creativity and divergent thinking is still debated.

Frameworks and programmes

Frameworks and programmes play an important role in supporting bilingualism within early years settings. Welsh Government guidance highlights the importance of supporting children's Welsh language development from an early age, particularly through everyday interactions and play (Welsh Government, 2008). This supports bilingual development by encouraging children to develop communication skills in both Welsh and English. In addition to this, programmes such as Flying Start provide targeted support for children's speech, language and communication development in early years settings. This guidance highlights the importance of supporting communication skills through early intervention and interaction (Flying Start, 2024). This links to the benefits of bilingualism, as developing strong communication skills from an early age supports both language development and cognitive growth. This is further supported by Siencyn et al. (2009), who highlight how the Welsh education system promotes bilingual and multilingual language development through the Curriculum for Wales. In addition, the Curriculum for Wales emphasises the use of play and meaningful experience to support children's bilingual language and development (NDNA, 2022). Furthermore, Welsh Government guidance highlights the importance of developing learners' Welsh language skills through structured frameworks in English medium education (Welsh

Government, 2022). Similarly, Estyn highlights the importance of providing regular opportunities for children to develop their speaking and listening skills in Welsh, supporting effective language development from an early age (Estyn, 2021). These frameworks and programmes ensure that bilingualism is consistently supported across early years settings, providing children with regular opportunities to develop both languages and meaningful contexts. Thus not only supports language development but also promotes inclusion, ensuring that all learners, including those with welsh or English as an additional language, are able to to access the curriculum. By embedding bilingual practices into everyday learning, practitioners can create rich language environments that support both communication and cognitive development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, bilingualism plays a significant role in supporting children's overall development in early childhood. It can enhance speech, language and communication skills, as well as support cognitive development, including memory, attention and problem solving. Research also highlights the impact of bilingualism on brain development, showing how early language experienced can shape brain structure and function. In addition, children with welsh or English as an additional language may require additional support, and it is importing that practitioners create inclusive environments to meet their needs. Frameworks and programmes such as the Curriculum for Wales and Flying Start further support this by promoting bilingual development from an early age. Overall, supporting bilingualism in early years settings is essential in helping children to develop key skills, access learning and feel included within their environment.

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