

Cover Sheet

For this assessment I have submitted the following:

Component 1: Bilingualism paper/ Reference list

Component 2: Activity- [https://uowtsd-](https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/my?id=%2Fpersonal%2F2511970%5Fstudent%5Fuwt%5Fdocuments%2FEYEC4010&viewid=3146cd50%2D1bef%2D4120%2Da4b3%2D5d6b52c634bd)

[my.sharepoint.com/my?id=%2Fpersonal%2F2511970%5Fstudent%5Fuwt%5Fdocuments%2FEYEC4010&viewid=3146cd50%2D1bef%2D4120%2Da4b3%2D5d6b52c634bd](https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/my?id=%2Fpersonal%2F2511970%5Fstudent%5Fuwt%5Fdocuments%2FEYEC4010&viewid=3146cd50%2D1bef%2D4120%2Da4b3%2D5d6b52c634bd)

I acknowledge the use of Copilot to support research and proof reading between 11th and 26th March 2026.

I used the prompts:

1. Please check this essay for spelling and grammatical errors
2. Please put these references in alphabetical order
3. Find me peer reviewed articles that explore how bilingualism supports brain development
4. Please type up all of my prompts

I can confirm that I have not presented AI generated work as my own.

Introduction

Bilingualism is the ability to use two languages, although individuals may vary in how well they can speak, understand, read, or write each language, and in the contexts in which they use them (Wright, 2025). In early childhood, bilingualism often develops when children are regularly exposed to and actively use two languages from a young age, typically before the age of five (Chanda, 2025). This paper will explore the significance of bilingualism in early years education, considering how educators can recognise and nurture children's dual language development to promote effective communication, explore identity, and support learning outcomes.

Benefits

Chanda (2025) explains that early exposure to multiple languages can shape not only language skills but also cognitive, social, and cultural understanding, highlighting the importance of supporting bilingual experiences in early years settings for brain development. Supporting this, Cambridge University Press (2022) highlights the impact of bilingualism on brain development, showing that people who grow up speaking two languages have more developed grey matter and stronger white matter, meaning their brains have more neurons, better connections, and improved communication between regions, which can enhance overall cognitive abilities.

The Welsh Government (2022) suggests that bilingual experiences can help children engage meaningfully with language and culture, supporting their sense of identity and belonging. National Day Nurseries Cymru (2022, p.3) describes *cynefin* (belonging) as "the place where we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar, and the sights and sounds are reassuringly recognisable," highlighting how language helps connect individuals to their community, heritage, and culture.

This can be further understood through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), which proposes that children must have their basic emotional and social needs met before they can fully engage in learning. A strong sense of belonging and identity, supported through the use of home and additional languages, helps children

feel secure and valued, enabling them to develop confidence, self-esteem, and ultimately reach their full learning potential.

Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) notes that being bilingual can help children maintain strong ties to family and culture while also enabling them to form friendships and relationships through a second language, skills that are increasingly valuable in diverse societies. Beyond childhood, bilingual and biliterate adults have more job opportunities and greater ability to access information and engage with people from different cultures, giving them advantages in today's global society (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Welsh as an Additional Language

Following the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in 2000, Wales developed a clear vision for early childhood education, placing increasing emphasis on promoting the Welsh language from the Foundation Phase onwards (Siencyn, 2018). This commitment reflects both national policy and children's rights, with Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stating that children have the right to learn and use the language and culture of their family or community, even when it differs from the majority language (UNICEF, 1989).

The Welsh Government continues to prioritise this goal through initiatives such as 'Cymraeg 2050', aiming to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050, and 'More Than Just Words', which extends proactive use of Welsh into health and social care, demonstrating the importance of the language's role in well-being and community identity (Welsh Government, 2017; 2022). However, a potential challenge lies in the shortage of highly skilled and experienced staff to deliver such programmes. To address this, initiatives such as the 'Welsh Language Sabbatical Scheme' support teachers and teaching assistants in improving their Welsh-language proficiency and teaching capacity. This demonstrates the government's commitment to enabling educators to deliver high-quality bilingual education (Welsh Government, 2023). Drawing on Bruner's theory, Olson (2014) emphasises the critical role of adults as scaffolds who guide, support, and extend children's learning, providing a theoretical explanation for why developing practitioners' skills is essential for effective language education. Together, these policies illustrate a clear strategy to embed the Welsh

language across learning, care, and professional practice, fostering both cultural identity and linguistic skills from early childhood through adulthood.

Brain Development

The University of Reading (2015) presents research demonstrating that bilingualism has a significant impact on brain development across a person's life. Bilingual children show enhanced cognitive and language abilities, particularly in attention, problem-solving, and flexible thinking. In young adults, bilinguals engage different brain networks compared to monolinguals during tasks requiring executive control, indicating greater cognitive flexibility. In older adults, lifelong bilingualism has been linked to a delayed onset of dementia symptoms, highlighting its role in supporting mental abilities and long-term brain health (University of Reading, 2015).

Supporting this, the Literacy Trust (n.d.) emphasises that multilingualism stimulates brain development and helps children learn by allowing them to process ideas in two or more languages. Babies are naturally equipped to acquire multiple languages, and developing a strong home language supports later literacy and proficiency, whereas neglecting the first language may hinder development in both languages. Maintaining a child's home language is also central to their communication, social, and emotional development, feeding their sense of identity and linking them to family, community, and friends (Literacy Trust, n.d.).

Further evidence comes from recent research by Chanda (2025), which suggests that children raised in bilingual environments often show stronger executive functioning, working memory, and problem-solving skills compared to monolingual peers. These cognitive advantages arise from the brain's continual practice in managing and switching between two languages, which promotes attentional control, cognitive flexibility, and a deeper understanding of the structure of language. These findings have contributed to the growing offer of bilingual education programmes in early childhood settings worldwide (Chanda, 2025).

Divergent Thinking

Robinson (2017) describes divergent thinking as the ability to generate multiple possible answers to a problem, approaching challenges with flexibility and

considering a range of potential solutions. Booton *et al.* (2021) suggest that bilingualism may be linked to divergent thinking, as managing two languages can enhance executive functions such as task switching. They also highlight the cultural diversity hypothesis, which proposes that bilingual individuals may demonstrate greater creativity due to their exposure to multiple languages and cultural experiences.

In addition to bilingualism, research indicates that individual beliefs and attitudes, such as a growth creative mindset, can influence divergent thinking. Su, Wei, and Chuang (2026) found that a growth creative mindset, the belief that creativity can improve through effort and practice, can enhance divergent thinking by fostering multicultural attitudes and openness to experience. These factors increase cognitive flexibility and the ability to generate original ideas, highlighting the role of mindset and cultural openness in creative development.

However, Booton *et al.* (2021) note that research findings on bilingualism and creativity are inconsistent. Some studies indicate that bilingual children outperform monolinguals in certain aspects of creativity, while others find no difference or mixed results depending on the task type or how outcomes are measured. These inconsistencies may be due to small sample sizes or the failure to control other variables, such as intelligence. Including key aspects like growth mindset and multicultural attitudes helps explain how experiences and beliefs shape divergent thinking beyond language or culture alone.

Policies and Frameworks

Building on national and regional policies, a range of educational frameworks and programmes have been developed to support bilingualism in early years settings. For example, the Curriculum for Wales (2022) explicitly integrates bilingual learning objectives across all areas, encouraging children to engage with Welsh while recognising the value of multiple languages (Welsh Government, 2022).

Similarly, Te Whāriki, the Aotearoa New Zealand early years curriculum, places strong emphasis on children's language, culture, and identity, embedding multilingualism within a play-based and culturally responsive framework (Ministry of

Education, 2017). Crucially, this approach not only values bilingualism but actively promotes language as central to children's sense of belonging and wellbeing, reinforcing how policy can shape inclusive, language-rich environments in practice.

To support the implementation of these frameworks, targeted professional development programmes are essential. In Wales, initiatives such as the Welsh Language Sabbatical Scheme upskill teachers and teaching assistants through in-depth training, building confidence in delivering bilingual education effectively. This ensures that policy intentions are delivered through meaningful classroom practice. This demonstrates that sustained investment in professional learning is key to embedding bilingual and multilingual approaches in early years settings (Welsh Government, 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, bilingualism in early years education is a significant factor in supporting children's development. Research highlights that early exposure to more than one language can enhance cognitive abilities such as problem-solving, attention, and cognitive flexibility, while also contributing to long-term brain health (Chanda, 2025). Alongside these cognitive benefits, bilingualism plays an important role in shaping children's identity, helping them build a sense of belonging and maintain connections with their family, culture, and community.

Within Wales, there is a strong policy commitment to promoting bilingualism, with initiatives such as Cymraeg 2050 and the Curriculum for Wales (2022) embedding the Welsh language across education and care. These frameworks recognise that language is central not only to communication but also to wellbeing and cultural identity. However, the successful implementation of these policies depends on skilled practitioners who can effectively support children's dual language development in everyday practice.

Therefore, early years practitioners play a crucial role in creating inclusive environments that value and nurture all languages. In doing so, they can support children to become confident communicators, successful learners, and active participants in a diverse and multilingual society.

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