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I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on 13th March 2026 to research Multilingual practice.

I used the prompt(s):

1. I would like to research multilingual practice in Wales.
2. Where can I find credible sources of information within the last 10 years.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work

I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on 8th April2026 to proofread my work.

I used the prompt(s):

1. Proofread my work. Does it make sense?
2. Check my spelling and grammar.
3. I have made the changes. Check it again.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work

I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Hyperlink to recording - https://uwotd-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/2514677_student_uwotd_ac_uk/IQAwwBRDgsvNR7R0qmp1GzDNASKIzkJI_93VHf868dOQYZk?nav=eyJyZWZlcnJhbEluZm8iOmsicmVmZXJyYWxBcHAIoiJPbmVEcmI2ZUZvckJ1c2luZXNzliwicmVmZXJyYWxBcHBQbGF0Zm9ybSI6IldlYilsInJlZmVycmFsTW9kZSI6InZpZXciLCJyZWZlcnJhbFZpZXciOiJNeUZpbGVzTGlua0NvcHkifX0&e=Rd8l3h

Introduction

Within Wales, multilingualism is recognised as a vital aspect of education as Welsh and English mediums are promoted through curriculum frameworks and policy (Welsh Government, 2017; Welsh Government, 2021). This essay considers how these mediums are supported in practice, including the benefits, the knowledge of Welsh as an additional language (WAL), connection to brain development and creative thinking (Blom *et al*, 2017; ScienceDirect, 2021; National Literacy Trust, 2020). Consideration is also given to the idea of cultural value and how early exposure to Welsh may contribute to this (Early Education, 2023; Cultural Learning Alliance, 2023).

This paper draws on a planned Welsh language activity, as a basis to explore how young children begin to develop language, cultural awareness, and aspects of cognitive understanding (Welsh Government, 2021). It will also reflect on how far the activity connects with wider priorities, such as Cymraeg 2050 and the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2017; Welsh Government, 2021).

The activity consisted of a play-based circle time session introducing Welsh through songs, repetition and interactive tasks that used regular routines the children knew and were able to identify what was coming next (Bruce, 2012; Smidt, 2016). The children engaged in greeting routines, identifying emotions (e.g. hapus, trist), discussing the weather, and participating in a colour-matching game using physical resources.

Within the concept of play-based learning, children actively gain knowledge through interaction and involvement (Bruce, 2012). Bruce (2012) explains that children learn most effectively when they participate in meaningful, experiential activities. The use of movement, visual aids, and repetition, supports accessibility for a wide spectrum of learners, particularly those learning Welsh for the first time (National Literacy Trust, 2020). This approach is also linked to Piaget's constructivist theory that proposes children construct knowledge through experience attributing that collective activities offer substantial learning opportunities (McLeod, 2025).

Benefits of Bilingualism

Widely recognised cognitive benefits of bilingualism, particularly in relation to attention control, problem-solving, and executive function by managing to linguistic systems (Baker, 2011; García and Baetens Beardsmore, 2009; Blom *et al.*, 2017). It requires children to switch between languages that strengthens neural pathways associated with cognitive control and flexibility (Pliatsikas *et al.* 2020; ScienceDirect, 2021).

During the activity, the children were encouraged to respond to prompts such as “Sut wyt ti?” requiring them to process and recall Welsh vocabulary. This active engagement supports the development of metalinguistic awareness that enables children to reflect on how language functions (Blom *et al.*, 2017).

Studies have shown that there is no assurance that cognitive advantages connected to bilingualism will be well reached by every child. Evidence undertaken indicates that these cognitive advantages depend on the context of exposure to a language and the quality and quantity (Welsh Government, 2023; ScienceDirect, 2021).

A notable example of infrequent bilingual activities may not provide long-term significant benefit unless they are a part of an overall continual practice of bilingual activities (Welsh Government, 2023; Smidt, 2016). Therefore, although the activity provides meaningful exposure to the Welsh language, the effectiveness of the exposure will depend on the extent to which it is integrated on a continuous basis and into the overall curriculum (Welsh Government, 2023).

Brain Development

Brain development begins in early infancy, a critical period in which neural connections are rapidly formed (Center on the Developing Child, 2016; Pliatsikas *et al.* 2020). Research has shown that exposure to various languages at this period has

been found to improve cognitive skills such as attention memory and inhibitory control (Blom *et al*, 2017; ScienceDirect, 2021).

Whilst repetition does promote language acquisition, its influence on long-term cognitive development is contingent on meaningful and continuous exposure. An example of reinforced linguistic patterns, such as the song "Bore Da" greeting with interactive questioning, aids recollection and processing (National Literacy Trust, 2020; Blom *et al*, 2017; ScienceDirect, 2021). Research suggests that melodic and rhythmic features increased neuronal connections, hence improving language recall and retention (Pliatsikas *et al*. 2020).

It could also be argued that the relationship between bilingualism and cognitive development is complex, as some research suggests that advantages may vary depending on individual differences and the level of language proficiency achieved (ScienceDirect, 2021). This highlights that exposure alone may not be sufficient to produce measurable cognitive benefits without sustained and meaningful engagement.

Divergent thinking

The ability to develop multiple concepts and think creatively that has been associated with bilingualism, has been defined as divergent thinking (García and Baetens Beardsmore, 2009). Exposure to multiple languages promotes flexible thinking and problem-solving from various perspectives (ScienceDirect, 2021).

Problem-solving activities such as matching colours to objects and responding to Welsh prompts, encouraged children to apply their knowledge in many circumstances which encourage flexible innovative thinking (García and Baetens Beardsmore, 2009; Blom *et al*, 2017; ScienceDirect, 2021).

Nonetheless, the formation of diverse reasoning is dependent on opportunity for open-ended investigation. While organised activities may be beneficial, they may also inhibit creativity if they are intensely directed (Blom *et al*, 2017). Incorporating more child-led aspects might therefore increase the potential for varied cognition.

Furthermore, while bilingualism has been associated with increased creativity, it is important to recognise that such outcomes are influenced by the learning environment (ScienceDirect, 2021). If activities remain highly structured, opportunities for genuine creative expression may be reduced, potentially limiting the development of divergent thinking skills (Bruce, 2012).

Cultural capital

Language, shapes, identity, and access to opportunities makes it an essential part of cultural capital (Early Education, 2023; Cultural Learning Alliance, 2023). The skills, information and experiences that help people succeed in society are referred to as cultural value (Early Education, 2023; Cultural Learning Alliance, 2023).

By exposing children to Welsh vocabulary, cultural customs and music, the Welsh language activity aided in the development of their heritage. This promotes national initiatives of preserving and to also enhance the use of the Welsh language (Welsh Government, 2017; Welsh Government, 2021). Additionally, early exposure ensures that all children have access to critical cultural knowledge, irrespective of their place of origin (Early Education, 2023).

The theory of cultural capital however has come under criticism for upholding pre-existing cultural standards (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2023). It should be noted that practitioners promote Welsh as a vital standpoint culturally however, practitioners should additionally respect other languages and identities (García and Baetens Beardsmore, 2009). To better reflect the diverse experiences of children within contemporary settings, a more inclusive multilingual approach would be beneficial (García and Baetens Beardsmore, 2009; National Literacy Trust, 2020; Blom *et al*, 2017).

Policy and Curriculum Links

The curriculum promotes an integrated approach to language education, that combines multiple languages within meaningful contexts (Gorrara *et al.*, 2020). Frameworks such as Cymraeg 2050 emphasise the significance of promoting Welsh language use from an early age (Welsh Government, 2017; Welsh Government, 2021). The activity is in alignment with the Curriculum for Wales, which places a significant emphasis on communication skills and multilingual competency, notably the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning and experience (Welsh Government, 2022; Gorrara *et al.*, 2020). By incorporating Welsh into routine conversations, it demonstrates the promotion of various languages as opposed to treating it as a distinct topic (Welsh Government, 2021; Gorrara *et al.*, 2020).

However, there does remain some challenges to implementing policy within practice. The efficiency of language provision may be limited by practitioners' confidence in their ability to employ Welsh or lack of training. This underscores the significance of professional development and sufficient support to guarantee that goals are fulfilled. (Welsh Government, 2021; Smidt, 2016).

Additionally, immersion approaches have been identified as particularly effective in supporting acquisition of the Welsh language, when children are exposed consistently with meaningful context to the language (Welsh Government, 2023). However, the activity represents a more introductory approach rather than full immersion, which does limit the depths of language development if not reinforced through continued exposure.

Critical reflection

The activity produced numerous benefits, including elevated levels of engagement, the use of varied teaching strategies, and satisfying children's developmental requirements.

The incorporation of music, movement and pictures fostered varied learning styles and provided opportunities for participation, regularity and repetition assisted children to gain confidence in utilising simple Welsh words in an atmosphere that

was supportive (Bruce, 2012; National Literacy Trust, 2020; Blom *et al*, 2017). This also increased the possibilities for social connection as children could respond to peers and share their linguistic experiences (ScienceDirect, 2021).

However, there were limitations due to the activity relying heavily on adult support. It may have created less opportunity for exploration independently by increasing the number of child-initiated components within the activity would have led to greater participation and developed a deeper learning experience (Smidt, 2016).

The activity would support children to participate; however, it may not develop sustained knowledge or independent use of the Welsh language beyond the activity. Also, the reinforcement of the learning opportunities for children in this activity relies on repeated use of Welsh within each area of learning at the setting and children may find it difficult to retain and use what they learned from the activity without this reinforcement (Welsh Government, 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the activity demonstrates how effective base learning can encourage bilingualism in early childhood education. The exercise provides a solid foundation for promoting cognitive skills, the development of both languages, as well as raising an awareness of the necessity of understanding and contributing to both cultures.

Bilingualism provides cognitive, social and cultural benefits (ScienceDirect, 2021; Early Education, 2023). Being bilingual is also crucial for a sense of national identity and belonging (Welsh Government, 2017). However, realising these benefits requires sustained implementation by practitioners (Welsh Government, 2023; Baker, 2011).

To maximise the benefits, practitioners should take an inclusive approach to implement the Welsh language into all areas of the curriculum daily. By providing ample opportunities for meaningful usage, practitioners will play a key role in developing bilingualism and supporting the Welsh language in Wales (Welsh Government, 2021).

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