

Cover sheet

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Assignment title and number: ECEY4010 Multilingual Practice in the Early Years.

AI Cover sheet

Section 1: 10-minute recorded activity link

Section 2: 1,500-word paper.

Reference list

AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>) on 25 July 2025 to check my work using the prompts:

1. Check the text for readability, grammar, and syntax.

I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Copilot (<https://www.microsoftcopilot.com/>) on numerous dates throughout the assignment to help search for related journal articles, using prompts such as:

1. Find me academic journal articles on the benefits of multilingualism.

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 as evidence.

Section 1: Link for video - https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/r/personal/2412700_student_uwtsd_ac_uk/Documents/YEAR%201%20UNI/Recordings/20250726_172706.mp4?csf=1&web=1&e=c3FgzT

Section 2: Multilingual practice in the early years.

Introduction

Multilingualism refers to the ability of a person or persons within a community to speak and understand two or more languages. Although not everyone will possess the same level of multilingualism, some may be able to read, write, and talk multilingually and use it in various contexts within their community, such as home, work, and educational settings. This is referred to as societal multilingualism (Clyne, 2017). However, it is common for an individual to be able to speak and understand multiple languages, typically only doing so at home or in school.

Alternatively, Bilingualism refers to a person's ability to use and communicate in only two languages proficiently (Solano, nd).

This paper will explore the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism in greater detail. Delving into the cognitive benefits of divergent thinking that is needed for language proficiency and how Welsh as an additional language (WAL) is embedded in the Early Years Frameworks.

Benefits of multilingualism and bilingualism

Multilingualism and bilingualism are becoming increasingly recognised as crucial components for an inclusive and practical education (Karpava, 2025). Bilingualism, which is the ability to use two languages proficiently and multilingualism, involving three or more languages, offer cognitive, cultural and social advantages. Both come with numerous benefits, as explored in research by Bialystock et al. (2016), which shows bilinguals demonstrate enhanced executive functioning, including improved attention control and problem-solving skills. However, these benefits do not stop there; instead, they extend across the lifespan, contributing to the delayed onset of dementia and offer greater mental flexibility (Bialystok, 2017). Although bilingual children may experience minor language delays due to learning two or more languages simultaneously or sequentially, this does not impact their verbal reasoning (Pena, *et al.* 2023). Research by Barac et al. (2016) suggests that, on the contrary, bilingual children develop these skills better than their monolingual peers.

Educational frameworks are increasingly reflecting these findings. The European Commission's Communication on European Education (2020) prioritises multilingualism as essential for cooperation and inclusion, thus helping promote early language learning. This is also supported by guidance from The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations (UNESCO) language matters guidance (2025), which urges ministries of education to embed multilingualism education into national policy, recognising it as a fundamental human characteristic

and a key strategy for equity and quality learning. Again, this is further highlighted by Devarakonda (2020), who also emphasises the importance of linguistic diversity in early years settings, advocating for culturally responsive teaching.

However, in Wales, there is already an integration of Welsh as an Additional Language (WAL) within the Early Years Framework, supporting cultural identity and inclusive pedagogy from the moment a child first embarks on their educational journey (Early Years Wales, 2025).

Welsh as an Additional Language/English as an Additional Language

Welsh as an Additional Language (WAL) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) are critical considerations in inclusive education policy and practice (Welsh Government, 2018). While both frameworks support learners acquiring a second language, the WAL provision faces its own unique challenges in Wales. The Welsh Government (2014) identified gaps in the support offered for minority ethnic pupils learning Welsh and recent scrutiny by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2023) highlights the lack of Welsh-medium provision for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), calling for a national review. Teachers of WAL learners often lack awareness of their specific needs and no standardised assessment framework currently exists. The five-stage model of EAL/WAL acquisition recognises that progress is non-linear, with learners often exhibiting traits from multiple stages simultaneously (Ofsted, 2013). Language acquisition theory, notably Chomsky's (2014) concept of the innate Language Acquisition Device, underpins pedagogical approaches that value home language, acknowledge silent phases and promote sustained interaction.). Although many Barriers to WAL support are present, including stigma, lack of guidance and cultural misunderstandings (Welsh Government, 2021), Gay (2018) suggests that effective pedagogy must address these challenges through a culturally responsive practice.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) also affirms children's linguistic rights, including the right to identity, cultural expression, freedom of expression, and non-discrimination.

However, the 1847 Blue Books report and the subsequent 1856 Education Act marginalised Welsh in education, contributing to its decline (Carradice, 20122), which is a concerning development when taken into account that Welsh is historically Britain's oldest language, having originally evolved from Indo-European roots over 6000 years ago (Davies, 2014).

Brain Development

Using more than one language during early development can positively shape the way children think, learn and interact with others (Chanda, 2024), with multilingual children often showing stronger problem-solving skills, mental flexibility and a better understanding of how language works (National Literacy Trust, 2022). Regular use of both the first language and any additional languages helps reinforce these skills.

However, it is especially important that children continue using their mother tongue consistently in the early years, because without ongoing use, they may experience language attrition, a gradual loss of their first language, which can make it harder to recall common words and lead to lower confidence in speaking (Schmid, 2016). This loss may result in children feeling isolated from their cultural identity and family connections. Cummins (2021) suggest that supporting the use of home language in early years settings is crucial for fostering emotional security and strong communication. In light of this, practitioners are encouraged to recognise the 'silent phase' many multilingual children experience when adjusting to a new language and keep interacting patiently and meaningfully (Pliatsikas, 2020). In Welsh-medium settings, this is particularly relevant as children may be balancing Welsh, English and a home language. Maintaining a child's linguistic identity supports not just academic progress but also self-esteem, social connections and future language learning (Jones *et al.*, 2024).

Divergent Thinking

Building on the cognitive benefits of multilingualism, divergent thinking provides another useful lens through which to understand how language can influence creativity. Divergent thinking can be described as the ability to generate a multitude of ideas or solutions to a single problem, often associated with creativity and flexibility in thought (Koutsaal *et al.*, 2024). It can also be characterised by imagination, spontaneity and the capacity to see things from different perspectives (Zheng *et al.*, 2023).

Play, in particular pretend play, is a key facilitator of divergent thinking. Children who engage in imaginative play scenarios tend to exhibit higher levels of creative problem-solving and cognitive adaptability (Russ and Wallace, 2013). Pickler's child-centred approach is an excellent example of this; it promotes free movement and independent exploration and supports the development of flexible thinking by allowing children to learn through autonomous play rather than structured play (Early Years TV, n.d.).

Bilingualism has also been linked to divergent thinking, although the findings are somewhat mixed. Some studies suggest that switching between languages supports cognitive flexibility and idea generation (Kharkhurin, 2017), while Booten *et al.* (2021) found very few significant advantages of divergent thinking among bilingual children compared to their monolingual peers. Nevertheless, bilingual children often show improved attention and concept formation, which indirectly supports their creative thinking.

Moreover, Ken Robinson's TED talk video, *Changing Education Paradigms* (2010), highlights how traditional schooling tends to suppress divergent thinking as children grow older. In light of this, he advocates for an educational shift that nurtures creativity through play, curiosity and child-led inquiry. In early years settings, supporting multilingual play and imaginative experiences can help all children,

whether bilingual or not, develop the flexible thinking skills that underpin innovation, communication, and problem-solving (Sofija *et al.*, 2023).

Links with Early Years' Frameworks and Programmes

Welsh language provision within early years settings is an integral part of inclusive pedagogy and cultural identity and it aligns with Wales' ambition to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050 (Welsh Government, 2022). The vision is embedded in the Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nurseries, which places an emphasis on Welsh development through play, communication, and belonging, offering culturally rooted learning experiences (Welsh Government, 2022). A particular area of the curriculum that uses language as not just a communicative tool but as a profound cultural medium is the Expressive Arts Area of Learning and Experience. Through channels such as nursery rhymes, music, storytelling and visual arts, children will encounter culturally rooted narratives that help foster expressive confidence and social belonging. Thus, enabling children to explore their identity, emotion and community (Welsh Government, 2022; Zhong and Guo, 2023).

However, some challenges still persist. This is highlighted in a study by Rhys and Thomas (2013), which found that due to ongoing parental misconceptions about concerns related to bilingual delay, the uptake of families sending their children to Welsh-medium settings remains relatively low, primarily due to these perceived barriers. Although the findings also showed that children who attended Welsh medium settings from primarily non-Welsh speaking homes are able to achieve age-appropriate literacy and vocabulary outcomes in both Welsh and English, this challenges the notion of the possibility of a bilingual delay (Rhys and Thomas, 2013).

Conclusion

In summary, both bilingualism and multilingualism can offer a wide array of benefits, including educational, cognitive and cultural benefits that are all becoming increasingly embedded within both international and Welsh policy contexts. The integration of Welsh as an Additional Language within the early years frameworks highlights Wales' commitment to an inclusive and linguistically rich pedagogy. However, while some evidence demonstrates that bilingual children can thrive socially and cognitively, the persistent misconceptions continue to affect the uptake and provision. If these issues were addressed through robust policy, practitioner development and a culturally responsive engagement, it could be assured that all children, regardless of their linguistic abilities and background, could flourish in their early educational journey.

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