

Bilingualism's brain benefits will boost Gaelic

Study sheds new light on minority languages of Scotland and Sardinia

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New Scottish research has made a strong case for the cognitive benefits of bilingualism and, in doing so, bolstered the case for Gaelic education in Scotland.

The study by the University of Strathclyde differs from most research into bilingualism by focusing on "minority" languages, in this case Gaelic and Sardinian, and shows Gaelic-speaking children performing particularly well in a range of tests.

The research set four tests of cognitive ability for 121 children aged around nine, 60 of them monolingual and 61 bilingual.

The bilingual children performed better but the differences were most marked in Gaelic speakers, based in Stornoway, who speak their language at school. The performance of the Italian children, who speak Sardinian

only when out of school, was not as markedly superior.

"The results represent clear evidence regarding the cognitive advantages of being bilingual and reinforce previous research that has outlined the potential cognitive benefits to speaking two languages," say researchers.

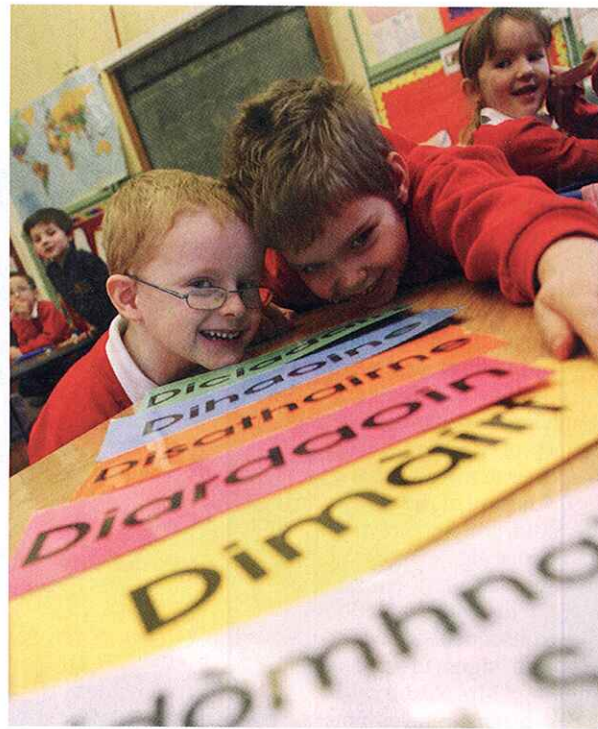
The particularly impressive performance of the Gaelic speakers was attributed in part to the mental alertness required in switching between languages, which could hone skills useful in other types of thinking.

The formal teaching of Gaelic and its extensive literature are highlighted as other important differences; previous research has suggested it is crucial to be equally proficient in both languages to gain the advantages of bilingualism.

Sardinian, in contrast, is not taught widely in schools on the Italian island, has a largely oral tradition and



There was a marked difference in the level of detail



Gaelic-speaking children perform well in a range of tests.

TWO LANGUAGES ARE TWICE AS GOOD

Research in the post-war years often identified potential harm in raising children to speak two languages, but it has been much criticised by contemporary researchers.

International research has consistently indicated that pupils involved in language immersion and partial-immersion programmes perform as well as, and sometimes better than, their peers.

Evidence has pointed to

benefits in areas such as cognitive control – bilingual children appear better at picking out important information and ignoring misleading cues – problem solving and creative thinking.

Very few studies in recent times have identified disadvantages to bilingual immersion. Those that do have tended to focus on practicalities such as finding suitable accommodation or qualified teachers.

has no standardised form.

"Bilingualism is now largely seen as being beneficial to children but there remains a view that it can be confusing, and so potentially detrimental to them," said research leader Fraser Lauchlan, an honorary lecturer at the University of Strathclyde's school of psychological sciences and health.

"Our study has found that it can have demonstrable benefits, not only in language but in arithmetic, problem-solving and enabling children to think creatively.

"We also assessed the children's vocabulary, not so much for their knowledge of words as their understanding of them. Again, there was a marked difference in the level of detail and richness in description from the bilingual pupils."

An article by the researchers, published in the *International Journal of Bilingualism*, highlights the difficulty in establishing clear causal links between such results and the ability to speak two languages, but concludes: "It is clear from the current research that the speaking of...minority languages, whether it be at home or in a school setting, but preferably both, should be encouraged."

The study was carried out with researchers Marinella Parisi and Roberta Fadda, from the University of Cagliari, where Dr Lauchlan is a visiting professor.

PRESS CATCH-UP

Teacher stress toll revealed

THE HERALD

More than one-fifth of sick days taken by Scottish teachers last year were due to stress-related illness, new figures have revealed. Health experts and union leaders have blamed this figure on the pressures that teachers are being put under as they

implement the new Curriculum for Excellence.

Thousands contact council in blog row

THE HERALD

Almost 4,000 people contacted a council after it banned a schoolgirl from taking pictures for a blog documenting the state of her school dinners. A Freedom of



Ban left a bad taste.

Information request revealed that Argyll and Bute Council received 3,894 comments. It was flooded with emails, letters and phone calls.

Take it as read: e-books outsell real thing

THE SCOTSMAN

More readers are now buying e-books than paper versions in the UK, according to the world's largest online retailer. Amazon has revealed it now sells 114 e-books for use on its Kindle device for every 100 printed books, both paperback and hardback. The online retail giant began selling e-books two years ago.

Nine-year-old busker earning £560 a day

THE SUN

Pint-sized busker Kris McDowall (pictured right) is taking the streets of Glasgow by storm – and he's only nine years old. Little Kris, from Saltcoats, Ayrshire, is raking in up to £560 a day playing tunes by Guns N' Roses, Justin Bieber, Eric Clapton and Tom Petty to shoppers. And the talented singer is planning to release his debut single this week.



Busker Kris McDowall.

Teacher sues internet bigot over insults

DAILY RECORD

Police are investigating an anti-gay hate campaign

being waged on the internet by a Scots antique dealer. And in a case that could make legal history in Scotland, a defamation action is being raised against David Shuttleton by teacher Jaye Richards Hill, who has fallen foul of his rants. He referred to lesbian Jaye, 48, as a "paedophile" purely because she advocates equal rights for gay couples.