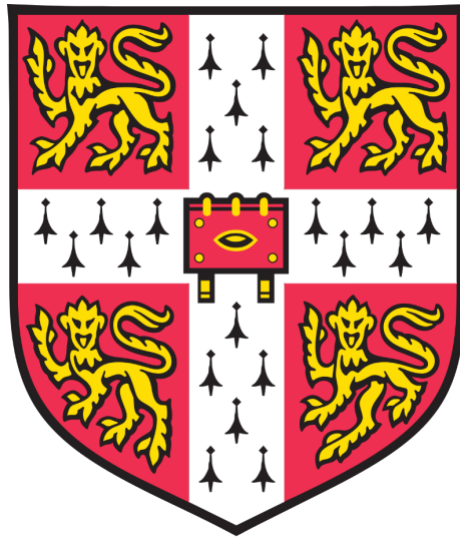# When bilingualism meets autism:
The perspectives and experiences of children, parents and educational practitioners

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Katie Beatrice Howard

January 2020

When bilingualism meets autism: The perspectives and experiences of children, parents and educational practitioners

Katie Beatrice Howard

Abstract

An increasing number of children on the autism spectrum are from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Despite a growing consensus among researchers that bilingualism is not detrimental to the social and linguistic development of autistic children, multilingual families are frequently advised by professionals to adopt a monolingual approach to raising their child. This multi-perspectival study set out to analyse and shed light on lived experiences of bilingualism in autism within familial and educational settings. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a methodological framework, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 bilingual autistic children aged between 7 and 14 in England and Wales, along with their parents (n=16) and educators (n=13). This thesis contributes a unique qualitative perspective to the nascent body of research investigating the relationship between autism and bilingualism.

Results indicate that while all three groups reported positive attitudes towards multilingualism in theory, many participants were sceptical about its benefits in practice. First, most children in the sample minimised the importance of their home language, despite acknowledging the value of bilingualism more broadly. Second, some educational practitioners raised concerns that bilingualism may impede autistic children's proficiency in their school's language of instruction (i.e. English or Welsh). Third, almost half of families opted for a more monolingual approach to raising their child, citing concerns about the severity of their child's symptoms and advice received by professionals as the primary reasons for their choice. Among the parents who adopted a more multilingual approach, the capacity to communicate with immediate and extended family members was reported as the principal factor driving their language decisions.

The thesis concludes by calling for greater support to be available to multilingual families as they make difficult choices about which, and how many, languages to use with their

child on the autism spectrum. Given the possible negative consequences of adopting a monolingual approach, advice to families should be responsive to changes in children's linguistic, developmental and educational needs, and allow sufficient time for the child to develop as a bilingual. This is particularly important as some parents and educators stressed that, while bilingualism may be more challenging for the child in the short term, it was likely to yield greater benefits – both for the child and their wider family – in the long run.

Publications

Elements of this thesis have been published or are under review as follows:

Howard, K., Katsos, N., & Gibson, J. (2019). Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in autism research. *Autism*, *23*(7), 1871-1876.

Howard, K., Katsos, N., & Gibson, J. (2019). The school experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, *87*, 9-20.

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Howard, K., Gibson, J. & Katsos, N. (2020). Awtistiaeth a dwyieithrwydd yng Nghymru: safbwyntiau plant, rhieni ac ymarferwyr addysg. [Autism and bilingualism in Wales: The perspectives of children, parents and practitioners]. *Gwerddon Fach*. Available from: https://golwg360.cymru/gwerddon/566336-cyfleoedd-blant-awtistig-mewn-iaith

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1. Introduction and Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

Being bilingual is an increasingly normative experience across the United Kingdom and around the world. Although it is thought that bilinguals now outnumber monolinguals among the world's population (Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2012; Grosjean, 2010), a 'monolingual mindset' (Clyne, 2005) is often pervasive in countries that emphasise educational provision in the majority or prestige language only. However, monolingual mindsets can deny children important opportunities to interact with family and communities, develop cultural awareness, and cultivate multilingual identities. This is true not only for typically-developing children, but also those with developmental conditions, whose status as multilinguals is frequently overlooked (Bird, Genesee, & Verhoeven, 2016a). One such condition that has been the focus of growing scholarly attention is autism. Characterised by challenges in social interaction and restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour (APA, 2013), autism is being increasingly identified and diagnosed around the world (Elsabbagh et al., 2012). Prevalence estimates in the UK suggest that approximately 1.7% of 5-9-year-olds may have an autism spectrum condition (Russell, Rodgers, Ukoumunne, & Ford, 2014). This increase in autism diagnoses runs parallel to an unconnected rise in multilingualism. As a result, there are inevitably more autistic children growing up in multilingual environments. It is within this context that this thesis is situated. Its aim is to shed light on the perspectives and experiences of children, parents and educational practitioners when bilingualism meets autism.

An emerging body of literature documents a tendency for practitioners to advise multilingual families to use just one language if their child is diagnosed with autism (Yu, 2013; Hampton, Rabagliati, Sorace, & Fletcher-Watson, 2017). This well-intentioned advice is often based on an assumption that bilingualism will exacerbate existing language difficulties for autistic children. In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that bilingualism is detrimental for individuals on the autism spectrum (Dai, Burke, Naigles, Eigsti, & Fein, 2018; Paradis & Govindarajan, 2018; Uljarević, Katsos, Hudry, & Gibson, 2016). Moreover, researchers are tentatively suggesting that raising an autistic child bilingually may positively impact upon their social and linguistic development (Jegatheesan, 2011; Lim, O'Reilly, Sigafoos, Ledbetter-Cho, & Lancioni, 2019). The experiences of parents facing difficult choices about which and how many languages to use with their autistic child have been well-documented (Hampton et al.,

2017; Ijalba, 2016; Yu, 2013, 2016) and recommendations for clinicians are beginning to emerge (Beauchamp & MacLeod, 2017; Lim, O'Reilly, Sigafoos, & Lancioni, 2018; Paradis, Govindarajan, & Hernandez, 2018; Uljarević et al., 2016). However, there are no studies to-date that trace the impact of bilingualism on autism from a child-centric, first-person perspective. Moreover, there is very little research that investigates the views of the educators supporting bilingual autistic children, or provides a detailed comparison between linguistically different educational settings. It is these gaps within the current literature that this thesis seeks to address.

1.1.1. Scope of the thesis

The thesis seeks to contribute a unique qualitative perspective to the nascent body of research investigating bilingualism in autism by providing a multi-informant, cross-contextual account of experiences within familial and educational settings. As such, it will investigate and synthesise the perspectives and experiences of twelve children, thirteen educational practitioners, and sixteen family members in England and Wales. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is increasingly recognised as a useful methodological framework in autism research (Howard, Katsos, & Gibson, 2019; MacLeod, 2019). In essence, IPA is concerned with individuals' lived experiences and their concomitant interpretations of these experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is particularly useful in the current study, which aims to give a much-needed voice to children who are 'doubly different' from their typically-developing monolingual peers, and as a result, are at risk of being 'doubly marginalised'.

The UK offers a curious case study for the increasingly common interaction between autism and bilingualism, due to differences between its various jurisdictions. The present research provides a useful comparison between the experiences of bilingual autistic children in two linguistically different educational settings: England and Wales. In England, the education system is almost entirely monolingual, despite an increasingly multilingual school population in which more than 1 in 5 (21.2%) primary-aged pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL) (DfE, 2018). In Wales, by contrast, many parents place a high value on learning Welsh (Hodges, 2012), and as a result, more and more children are educated bilingually through the medium of both English and Welsh. Despite a move towards bilingual education in Wales, concerns have been raised that Welsh-medium provision for children with additional learning needs, including conditions like autism, is insufficient (Roberts, 2017). Drawing on

comparisons between England and Wales on a micro- and macro-level, this thesis presents the findings of interviews both within and across the three participant groups (children, educators, and parents). In the light of these findings, recommendations will be provided to better support autistic children from linguistically diverse backgrounds.

1.1.2. Thesis structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The first two chapters provide necessary context that frame the thesis by surveying the existing literature, identifying gaps in the research, and outlining the chosen methodological approach. Chapter 1 explores the respective literatures on autism and bilingualism, addressing terminological debates in both fields before considering research related to the home and school environments respectively. It then discusses existing research investigating bilingualism in autism and presents the rationale for the thesis and its guiding research questions. Chapter 2 provides a detailed analysis of IPA, the methodological framework adopted, and its place within broader phenomenological approaches. The chapter then delineates the procedures employed in the study, giving details of the participants, ethical considerations and issues surrounding research rigour.

Chapters 3 to 5 present the findings of interviews conducted with children, practitioners and parents in England and Wales. Chapter 3 considers the identity formation and school experiences of twelve bilingual children on the autism spectrum, and analyses the efficacy of computer-assisted interviewing for this population. Chapter 4 reports the experiences and perspectives of thirteen educational practitioners who work alongside bilingual autistic children. In particular, it focuses on their views of the possibilities and practicalities of bilingualism in autism within educational settings. Moving to the familial environment and building on previous work on parental perspectives by Hampton et al. (2017) in the UK and Yu (2013, 2016) in the United States, chapter 5 presents data relating to sixteen family member's experiences of raising a bilingual child on the autism spectrum. This chapter focuses primarily on the factors and consequences of parental language choices.

Chapter 6 draws together the findings from each of the three participant groups and analyses convergence and divergence across the groups and between the two linguistically different settings (i.e. England and Wales). In this chapter, the unique circumstances of triads of participants provide useful case studies of bilingualism in autism from different perspectives. Finally, chapter 7 discusses the implications of this research for children, families

and educators, and provides recommendations to improve the support given to multilingual families with a child on the autism spectrum, and to refine educational practice and policy for this group of pupils. The strengths and limitations of the methodology employed and avenues for future research will also be discussed. The final chapter, bolstered by the findings presented in chapters 3-6, argues that greater awareness of both linguistic and neuro-cognitive diversity in educational settings may improve the experiences of bilingual autistic children and the advice given to their families.

1.2. Literature review

The overarching aim of the literature review is to contextualise and critically analyse existing research in the fields of autism and bilingualism, and the interaction between them. First, the terminological trends in bilingualism will be discussed and a justification for the terms used in this thesis will be given. This will be followed by a consideration of research exploring bilingualism in familial and educational settings. Second, changes in understandings of autism, from a disorder to a difference, will be examined, along with extant literature documenting experiences of autism at home and in school from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Third, the small but growing body of research investigating bilingualism in autism will be explored, including children's social and linguistic development, families' language choices and educational policy and practice. Fourth, following the identification of the gaps and limitations of extant research, the rationale and research questions at the heart of the thesis will be introduced.

1.3. Understanding bilingualism
1.3.1. Terminological issues

Interaction in, or at least recognition of, two or more languages is a normative daily experience for the majority of the world's population (Goto-Butler, 2014), yet defining bilingualism is by no means a simple task. Instead, a series of nuanced, sometimes conflicting, and often contentious terms regarding the nature of bilingualism come to the fore. Given the scope of this thesis, I will focus primarily on the terms 'bilingualism', 'multilingualism', 'EAL' and 'home language', before turning to literature on bilingualism in familial and educational settings.

A widely-accepted definition of bilingualism is offered by Grosjean, who describes bilinguals as 'those people who need and use two or more languages (or dialects) in their

everyday lives' (2010, p.4). While the notion of bilingualism as a combination of 'two monolingualisms' is generally regarded as anachronistic among scholars (García, 2009; Grosjean, 1998), it is still a persistent belief amongst those for whom monolingualism is the norm. Accordingly, measurements of bilingual competence are frequently undertaken from a monolingual perspective, with the 'ideal native speaker' employed as the yardstick for comparison (Cenoz & Gorter, 2014, p.243). Such comparisons are often unhelpful as they fail to account for differences in the process of language acquisition that exist between monolinguals and bilinguals. To this end, deciding who is, or is not, bilingual may feel like an elusive and futile task.

Defining bilingualism is, in part, such a complex task because levels of linguistic input, use and competence inevitably fluctuate over time and so bilingualism is thus a 'moving target' (De Houwer, 2018, p.145). Several factors affect bilingual language acquisition, including, *inter alia*, the age of acquisition, the effect of the second language (L2) on the first (L1) or the effect of the concurrent acquisition of two L1s, the status of the various languages, and the cultural identities of the speaker (Goto-Butler, 2014). For this reason, the notion of a perfectly 'balanced bilingual', whose proficiency in both languages is completely equal, is no longer tenable (García, 2009); it is inevitable that one language will be used more than the other, due to differing exposure and contexts. 'Receptive' bilinguals, for example, will be capable of understanding a language whether through reading or listening, but will find its production, be it spoken or written, more problematic.

The terms 'bilingual' and 'multilingual' are often used interchangeably, referring to speakers of more than one language. Although 'bilingual' may refer literally to speakers of two languages and 'multilingual' to speakers of three or more languages, more subtle distinctions can be drawn between the two terms. Wei (2014) posits that while *multilingualism* is predicated on the coexistence of – and often interaction between – multiple languages within socio-geographic spaces, *bilingualism* is more indicative of an individual's linguistic profile. This is exemplified by theories of how bilingualism and multilingualism arise. Bialystok (2014), for instance, argues that individuals become bilingual for numerous reasons including communication with extended family members, education in a different language to the one spoken at home, or temporary residence away from their place of birth. These factors pertain specifically to the individual compared with Edwards' explanation (1994) of how

multilingualism occurs: through migration, territorial expansion, political union, and the blurring of national borders. In this sense, multilingualism is as much a social and political phenomenon as it is a linguistic one (Edwards, 1994), and public perceptions of multilingualism may, to some extent, be conditioned by its representation in the mainstream media (Jaworska & Themistocleous, 2018). Drawing these perspectives together, *bilingualism* could therefore be viewed as the individual manifestation of its panoptic counterpart, *multilingualism*. Any consideration of language use should therefore be prefaced by the social, cultural and political landscapes in which its users are operative.

Languages that differ from the dominant societal language or a country's official language(s) are often referred to as 'heritage languages' in North American discourses (Cummins, 2005; Montrul, 2012) and 'community languages' in the UK (Anderson, 2008; McPake, Tinsley, & James, 2007). Both terms may be problematic in their political disassociation between language and nationhood (Romaine, 2013). Equally, the term 'minority language' is ambiguous in that speakers may be in the linguistic minority within a country's entire population but in the linguistic majority within their local community (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998). Unlike 'community' 'heritage' and 'minority' languages, the terms 'home language' and 'first language' (L1) are less bound to a social, political or geographical context. 'First language' will not be used in this thesis, given that research suggests that many young bilingual children, including some of those in this study, acquire two languages simultaneously rather than sequentially (Montrul, 2012; Nicoladis, 2018). Instead, the term 'home language(s)' in the thesis refers to a language or languages 'acquired by the child through immersion at home, usually the language the child knows best before going through child care or school' (Eisenchlas, Schalley, & Guillemin, 2013, p.2). The home language(s) may start as the 'first' language(s) in early childhood but may become an 'incompletely acquired secondary language' (Montrul, 2012, p.184), replaced by the dominant societal language or the language of instruction (LoI) in school.

Within the UK educational context, the term 'English as an Additional Language' (EAL) is used more widely than *bilingual* and *multilingual* in recognition of the fact that English tends not to be the home language of most bilingual children in UK schools. Tracing the trajectory of different terms used within British education, Chen (2007) notes the terminological change from 'non-English speakers' in the Plowden Report (DES, 1967) to 'English as second language learner' in the Bullock Report (DES, 1975), then from 'bilingual

children' in the Cox Report (DES, 1989) to children with 'English as an Additional Language' (EAL) during the 1990s. These transitions have ultimately corresponded with contemporary political and cultural norms, and with societal attitudes towards speakers of languages other than English.

Although first introduced as a counterpoint to the term 'bilingual', which arguably does not manifest potential learning needs (Gregory, 1996), the term *EAL* is also contentious. Bracken, Driver, and Kadi-Hanifi (2017), for instance, argue that the term is overly broad; they suggest it is ambiguous in its assessment of the varying profiles of bilingual learners and fails to account for significant variation in pupils' literacies, previous educational experiences, and exposure to English. In their report into the educational achievement of EAL learners in England, Strand and Murphy (2015) suggest that the term is unsatisfactory because it does not demarcate the English proficiency of the individual learner. Equally, the term may be unhelpful in the way in which it prioritises English, rendering children's other languages invisible, and in-so-doing depriving them of status (García, Johnson, Seltzer, & Valdés, 2017). Conversely, Leung (2016) argues that the term 'additional' as opposed to 'second' language acknowledges that bilingual children are drawing on a wealth of linguistic resources.

It is important to note, therefore, that the terms discussed above are not necessarily interchangeable. *EAL* is a label used to classify children in the UK school setting, *home language(s)* refer to specific languages acquired in the familial setting, and *bilingual* and *multilingual* are broader concepts related to multiple language use. In light of the above discussion, this thesis refers to individual children as *bilingual* for three key reasons: (1) in recognition of their varied linguistic repertoires; (2) in convergence with existing literature in the field of bilingualism in autism; and (3) given that children in Wales who attend Welsh-medium schools do not necessarily have English as an additional language, for many it is their first language, therefore the term EAL is not applicable to all in the study. However, when referring specifically to literature on the school experiences of bilingual children in the UK and school policy in the UK, the term EAL will be used in keeping with current trends in the literature in order to engage educational practitioners in the implications of this research. Finally, the term *multilingual* will be used when describing multiple language use within collective or societal contexts, e.g. multilingual families, environments or approaches.

1.3.2. Bilingualism at home

Families in which parents speak different languages to each other, or in which parents speak a different language to the dominant societal language, have more complex decisions to make about their language practices than monolingual families. As maintaining the home language is largely considered to be the sole responsibility of parents (Gkaintartzi, Kiliari, & Tsokalidou, 2016; Lee & Oxelson, 2006), parental attitudes towards bilingualism are crucial to family language planning and practices (Wesely, 2018). Some parents have concerns that bilingualism may cause cognitive or linguistic delay (King & Fogle, 2006a). However, there is no evidence to suggest that bilingualism is harmful to any domain of a child's development (Bayram, Miller, Rothman, & Serratrice, 2018). In fact, maintaining the home language is important for identity formation (Park & Sarkar, 2007), maintaining relationships with family members and communities of speakers (Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Mills, 2001), and enriching cultural knowledge (Molyneux, Scull, & Aliani, 2016). Moreover, research suggests that bilingualism may engender cognitive benefits such as enhanced executive control (Bialystok, 2011; Bialystok & Craik, 2010).

Home language maintenance also plays a key role in familial and child well-being (De Houwer, 2015; Müller, Howard, Wilson, Gibson, & Katsos, under review; Wang, 2012). Maintaining the home language may reduce the risk of emotional distance between family members as well as feelings of exclusion or insufficiency (De Houwer, 2006). Described as 'the experience of well-being in a language contact situation involving young children and their families' (2015, p.169), De Houwer contends that 'bilingual harmonious development' is optimised when children receive high input frequency in both languages and are given opportunities to develop proficiency in both languages. Along similar lines, Müller et al. (under review) conclude that children's knowledge of their home language has a positive impact on family cohesion, their identity formation, and in turn, their subjective well-being. By contrast, insufficient time for home language development can have a detrimental effect on family welfare (Wang, 2012). Accordingly, Wang (2012) proposes a process of careful planning and negotiating between family members' linguistic preferences in order to improve well-being among multilingual children and families.

Despite the benefits of home language maintenance, there are individual and societal reasons why language attrition occurs. Although parents may seek to establish language practices that prioritise the home language, children's own attitudes also impact their home

language use and proficiency. For example, when children are increasingly exposed to the dominant language in their school environment, it is common for them to be less inclined to use their home language (Liu & Evans, 2016; Slavkov, 2017). For instance, O'Rourke and Zhou (2018) found that heritage language learners (HLLs) were less motivated to continue learning the home language and saw less value in bilingualism than second language learners (SLLs). Children's linguistic attitudes and behaviours may in turn affect parental language decisions and practices (De Houwer, 2018). Societal factors also influence home language attrition such as certain languages being deprived of status (Baker, 2011) and the prioritisation of high-status national languages that are 'commodified as "proper" multilingualism' (Jaworska & Themistocleous, 2018, p.62).

1.3.3. Bilingualism in school

Striking the balance between promoting the home language and developing the language of instruction is an important but difficult task within educational settings, especially in school environments that are primarily monolingual (Robertson, Drury, & Cable, 2014). To better understand the role of bilingualism in schools, we must first draw on Bialystok's distinction (2018) between 'the education of bilingual children' and 'bilingual education'. The linguistic differences between education in England and Wales exemplifies this distinction. In England, the education system itself is almost entirely monolingual. Research therefore focuses on 'the education of bilingual children', or more specifically, children who have EAL. By contrast, in Wales, around 25% of children attend a Welsh-medium school (Welsh Government (WG), 2018), in which instruction is bilingual (English and Welsh) and many more are taught Welsh as a second language. As such, research in Wales focuses less on 'the education of bilingual children' – pupils whose first language is neither Welsh nor English make up around 7% of the school population (WG, 2015) – but rather on 'bilingual education'. What follows will first discuss research investigating EAL policy and practice in England, along with the experiences of EAL pupils, before turning to the less developed literature on bilingual education in Wales.

Hélot describes schools as 'linguistically and culturally homogenous spaces' (2012, p.214). It is within these spaces that the number of EAL pupils in England is rising. A striking paradox thereby exists in English schools whereby multilingualism is an increasingly present phenomenon among the student population yet an increasingly invisible reality in the classroom. Strand and Murphy (2015) report that the number of EAL pupils more than doubled between 1997 and 2013, with over 300 languages spoken by school students in London alone

(Von Ahn, Lupton, Greenwood, & Wiggins, 2010). Despite growing multilingualism in the classroom, educational policy and provision for EAL pupils has been characterised as 'consistently inconsistent' (Costley, 2014, p.289). Prior to a significant increase in Britain's migrant population in the 1950s, UK schools were viewed as 'monolingual, monocultural institutions' (Edwards, 1984, p.49). Between the 1950s and 1970s, EAL students were either treated as their monolingual counterparts and expected to assimilate to the linguistic practices of their peers and teachers, or separated from their monolingual classmates. A decade later, the Swann Report (DES, 1985) stated that 'the needs of learners of English as a second language should be met by provision within the mainstream school as part of a comprehensive programme of language education for all children' (1985, p.426). It was not, however, until the turn of the century that specific pedagogy, training and teaching strategies for teachers of EAL pupils have come to prominence.

Although the profile of EAL has been raised in schools across the UK in recent years, issues of funding, adequate support and a lack of teacher education regarding EAL persist (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016). Teachers in England report feeling underprepared to support bilingual pupils and EAL provision consistently ranks among the main insecurities of new teachers (Cajkler & Hall, 2009; TDA, 2010). More broadly, changes to educational structures and funding streams in the UK have given schools more autonomy but less accountability when it comes to supporting their EAL pupils; as a result, there is greater disparity in the quality of EAL provision across the country (Evans et al., 2016). Moreover, schools have concerns that having a higher proportion of EAL pupils may negatively affect attainment results and league tables (Strand & Demie, 2005). These concerns stand in contrast to Strand and Murphy's finding (2015) that EAL pupils are more likely to achieve the English Baccalaureate, a performance measure at age 16, than their first language English (FLE) peers.

Contrary to the myriad benefits of multilingualism, EAL is frequently viewed from a deficit position (Conteh, Martins, & Robertson, 2007). Many EAL pupils undergo a process of 'linguistic mainstreaming', in which they are assimilated to the majority language (i.e. English) and the majority culture as soon as possible (Bracken et al., 2017). Although this is a judicious aim in some respects, considering that the achievement of EAL pupils relies on their success at learning English (Strand, Malmberg, & Hall, 2015), 'linguistic mainstreaming' may endanger the maintenance of EAL pupils' home language(s) (Little, 2017; Molyneux et al., 2016) and devalue their cultural identities (Blackledge, 2000). Franson raises concerns that

while this type of inclusion and linguistic assimilation may secure an 'equality of presence', it by no means guarantees an 'equality of participation' (1999, p.70).

Despite calls for first-person research, the experiences of EAL learners themselves remains a relatively under-examined area. Reports conducted under the aegis of the Bell Foundation by Arnot et al. (2014), Evans et al. (2016), and Anderson, Foley, Sangster, Edwards, and Rassool (2016) provide important insights into the experiences of EAL pupils. These reports found that many newly-arrived EAL students experience high levels of anxiety in school and often feel isolated from their peers by dint of linguistic and cultural barriers. However, feelings of isolation and anxiety may be alleviated over time through effective and consistent peer and teacher interaction and language exchange (Anderson et al., 2016; Wardman, 2013). Anderson et al. (2016), for example, found that students' social and linguistic integration developed in tandem, and that buddying support systems facilitated their sense of inclusion. Liu and Evans (2016) found that EAL students tended to hold more positive attitudes towards learning English than using and maintaining their home language. This chimes with current research suggesting that constant comparisons to monolingual English speakers can make classroom learning alienating and discouraging for EAL speakers (García et al., 2017; Safford & Drury, 2013). Multilingual children are also frequently put in lower sets that may not be commensurate with their academic ability or potential (Strand, Lindsay, & Pather, 2006). To counter these issues, research is increasingly underscoring the importance of recognising the hugely diverse profiles of EAL learners and avoiding homogenising their experiences, language backgrounds and academic capabilities (Evans et al., 2016; Hall, 2019).

Recommendations to improve support for EAL pupils include developing a consistent school-wide language policy, gathering more detailed information about students' cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds on admission, and improving communication with parents of EAL pupils (Arnot et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2016; Schneider & Arnot, 2018). Parents of EAL pupils are significantly under-represented in school structures (Arnot et al., 2014), therefore developing stronger partnerships between schools and families is essential in understanding the needs of individual pupils (Wesely, 2018). Further training is required to increase teachers, trainee teachers and teaching assistants' understanding of pedagogy and policy in relation to EAL pupils, and to raise awareness in schools about the multiple benefits of bilingualism (Evans et al., 2016). This is particularly important to counter unrealistic expectations routinely placed on teachers to simply 'learn on the job' (Murakami, 2008, p.268).

Opportunities to celebrate students' linguistic diversity and to make effective use of students' home languages in the classroom are encouraged (Karrebæk, 2013; Liu, Fisher, Forbes, & Evans, 2017). The introduction of EAL stages (DfE, 2015a) and the requirement of schools to collect language data about their pupils (DfE, 2017) have marked important steps in the attempt to ensure that sociolinguistic diversification within schools is more widely acknowledged, and the needs of learners more satisfactorily met.

In Wales, a quite different linguistic picture emerges despite its geographical, social and political proximity to England. One difference is that fewer children speak English as an additional language in Wales than in England (WG, 2015). However, the more striking distinction between the two jurisdictions is that Wales is a bilingual country, with Welsh and English as official languages, while England is officially monolingual, despite its increasingly multilingual population. This difference is reflected in disparities between the two countries' education systems. Around a quarter of children in Wales attend a Welsh-medium (WM) school with many more attending schools where Welsh is used a significant proportion of the time (WG, 2018). Behind this growth in bilingual education in Wales is the Welsh Language Strategy, in which the Welsh Government are aiming to reach one million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050 (WG, 2017). The vehicle for achieving this target is the Welsh-Medium Education Strategy, which is committed to a 'continuing growth of Welsh-Medium education' (WAG, 2010, p.7).

Research suggests that parents choose a WM education for their children for cultural, educational, and employment reasons (Hodges, 2012; O'Hanlon, 2014). Others are keen for their children to have a bilingual education in order to promote their children's membership of what Dagenais calls 'imagined communities' (2003). Given that many pupils who attend WM schools come from families where no Welsh is spoken (Lewis, 2006), the school environment provides children with their primary exposure to Welsh. A major challenge for WM teachers is therefore encouraging children to use Welsh with their peers (Thomas, Lewis, & Apolloni, 2012), especially as the language is often associated with more formal domains (Price & Tamburelli, 2016). Even in Welsh-medium schools, English is often the language of the playground (Price & Tamburelli, 2016; Thomas & Roberts, 2011).

Bialystok (2018) argues that there is no evidence that a bilingual education is harmful to children's development or academic achievement. Instead, she outlines potential cognitive

advantages together with 'intangible benefits' (p.675), such as communicative, cultural and employment opportunities. Although there is some consensus among researchers that bilingualism does not educationally disadvantage children, it is important to bear in mind Bialystok's distinction (2018) between 'bilingual education' and 'the education of bilingual children' when comparing the experiences of bilingual children in England to those in Wales. One aim of this thesis is to draw out these differences in relation to children on the autism spectrum. As such, our attention now turns to understandings of autism, with a keen focus on research undertaken in familial and educational settings.

1.4. Understanding autism

1.4.1. From disorder to difference

Deriving from the Greek term 'autos', meaning 'self', the label of autism was first coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1916. However, it was almost three decades later that the term was given concrete clinical expression in the controversial but seminal works of Leo Kanner (1943) and Hans Asperger (1944). In the 75 years since, understandings and perceptions of autism have undergone multiple iterations. Moving away from the previously held categorical, unitary view, Wing was the first researcher to describe autism as a 'spectrum disorder' (1988). Autism research in the 1990s was consequently marked by an understanding of autism as 'a continuum of impairments of the development of social interaction, communication and imagination and consequent rigid, repetitive behaviour' (Wing, 1991, p.111). This definition has largely influenced the current diagnostic criteria of 'autism spectrum disorder' (APA, 2013), which subsumed the former label of 'Asperger's Syndrome'.

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) describe the symptoms of autism as: 'persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts' and 'restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour' (2013). Challenges with social interaction intrinsic to autism may include initiating social interactions (Müller, Schuler, & Yates, 2008) as well as difficulties in recognising emotions (Uljarević & Hamilton, 2013) and reciprocation (Baron-Cohen, 2008). Communication and language difficulties may be present and may appear across different language skills (phonology, syntax, semantics), especially in pragmatics (Naigles & Chin, 2015). Linguistic challenges include echolalic, delayed, and neologistic speech (Baron-Cohen, 2008), and around 25% of autistic individuals are non-verbal (Tager-Flusberg, Paul, & Lord, 2005). Behavioural symptoms include resistance to change (Mazefsky, Conner, & Oswald, 2010) and repetitive patterns of behaviour (Wing, 1996). It is also common for autistic

individuals to be diagnosed with co-occurring conditions, such as specific language impairment (SLI; more recently known as developmental language disorder [DLD]) (Leonard, 2014), dyslexia (Frith, 2013) and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Johnston et al., 2013). Individuals on the autism spectrum are also more likely to experience mental health issues, such as depression (Stewart, Barnard, Pearson, Hasan, & O'Brien, 2006), anxiety (Kerns & Kendall, 2012) or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) (Meier et al., 2015). Indeed, Simonoff et al.'s study (2008) into the prevalence of psychiatric comorbidity in autistic children aged between 10 and 14 in the UK found that 70% of participants had at least one diagnosed psychiatric condition.

In recent years, concerns have been raised around representations of autism in the media and research. Autism research is gradually moving away from a uniquely medical framework in which the condition is 'judged from the outside, by its appearances, and not from the inside according to how it is experienced' (Williams, 1996, p.14). Instead, there is a much greater emphasis on research that considers the emotional (Jones et al., 2011; Samson, Wells, Phillips, Hardan, & Gross, 2015), economic (Lavelle et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2015) and social (Cunningham, 2012; Walton & Ingersoll, 2013) facets of the lives of autistic individuals. Despite speculation of an 'autism epidemic' (Handley, 2018; Oller & Oller, 2010), researchers tend to attribute the rising prevalence of autism to the greater accuracy and speed with which individuals are diagnosed (Baird, Douglas, & Murphy, 2011; Baron-Cohen et al., 2009), the broader definition of the term (Fombonne, 2003) and an enhanced public awareness (Newschaffer, 2006).

Recasting autism from a 'disorder' to a 'difference' has been essential in removing stigma and promoting the notion of neurodiversity, that is, the idea that 'the "Neurologically Different" represent a new addition to the familiar political categories of class/gender/race' (Singer, 1999, p.64). Along similar lines, Milton (2012) cautions of a 'double empathy problem' whereby neurotypical researchers in the field of autism and autistic people have difficulty understanding each other, an idea reinforced by the notion of empathy as a 'two-way street' (Martin, 2009, p.149). This 'double empathy problem' challenges the notion that a lack of empathy resides within autistic cognition, and instead suggests that non-autistic people, including researchers, may have difficulties in understanding the experiences of autistic individuals. Building on this work, a 'new era in autism research' (Pellicano et al., 2018) promotes participatory methods so that research is not only informed by, and responsive to, the

experiences of autistic individuals, but also co-produced with them at every stage of the process (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2018; Iemmi, Knapp, & Ragan, 2017).

This important paradigm shift reflects a move towards viewing autism through the social model of disability, a term first coined by Oliver (1983). Within this model, autistic people are viewed as experts of their condition, leading to calls for autistic individuals to 'own the languages of autism' (Dekker, 2011). For example, the commonly-used descriptors 'high-functioning' and 'low-functioning' autism are increasingly seen as inaccurate and unhelpful (Alvares et al., 2020; Kenny et al., 2016). In this vein, important efforts have been made by some autism researchers to eschew previously used diagnostic labels and terms, such as 'disorder', 'deficit' and 'impairment', and inverse limitations into potential strengths, e.g. 'a triad of advantages' rather than 'a triad of impairments'. While this shift rightly gives prominence to autistic strengths, the danger with recasting autism as a collection of solely advantageous traits is that the challenges faced by autistic people may be overlooked or misinterpreted. It is within this context that debates continue about the terminology used to describe autism.

Kenny et al.'s study (2016) explores the varying perspectives on autism terminology among different stakeholders. The authors found that the autistic community preferred identity-first language such as 'autistic', while professionals were much more reluctant to use the term 'autistic', and tended to use person-first language (e.g. 'person with autism'). Kenny et al. (2016) found some consensus, however, in that the term 'on the autism spectrum' was highly endorsed by a range of stakeholders. As their study reports the views of adults, it may be injudicious to assume the terminological preferences of children with an autism diagnosis without consulting them. Nevertheless, Gernsbacher (2017) argues that person-first language is more commonly used with children than with adults, and more frequently used to describe children with the most stigmatised conditions. As such, she suggests that identity-first language is more commonly used to describe children without disabilities, e.g. 'typically-developing children'. She therefore concludes that instead of its aim to attenuate stigma, the practice of person-first language may in fact accentuate stigma. This reflects Andrews et al.'s view (2013) that person-first language 'may have overcorrected to the point of further stigmatizing disability' (p.237). While acknowledging the sensitivity of these terminological issues, in line with the findings and views expressed by Kenny et al. (2016) and by Gernsbacher (2017), this

thesis uses the terms 'on the autism spectrum' and 'autistic' interchangeably, and thereby seeks to avoid person-first language where possible.

1.4.2. Autism at home

While it is possible to diagnose autism in children as young as 18 months (Baron-Cohen, 2008), the average age for a diagnosis in the UK is 55 months (Brett, Warnell, McConachie, & Parr, 2016). Surveying over 1000 parents in the UK, Crane, Chester, Goddard, Henry, and Hill (2016) found that, on average, families experienced a 3.5-year period between first approaching healthcare professionals and their child receiving a formal diagnosis. Obtaining an autism diagnosis can be a lengthy, complicated and stressful process (Connolly & Gersch, 2016; Crane et al., 2016; Osborne & Reed, 2008). Females are far more likely to be diagnosed later, misdiagnosed or undiagnosed (Carpenter, Happé, & Egerton, 2019; Lai & Baron-Cohen, 2015). For some adolescents, having a diagnosis is important for their understanding of previous and current life experiences, while others believe that a diagnosis may lead to stigmatisation (Huws & Jones, 2008). Professionals cite inadequate diagnostic tools and a lack of time and resources as barriers to improving the quality of the diagnostic process (Crane et al., 2018; Rogers, Goddard, Hill, Henry, & Crane, 2016). In a recent survey in the UK, General Practitioners (GPs), who are often at the front line in identifying autism, demonstrated a strong knowledge of the core features of autism but lacked confidence in diagnosing autism and understanding referral pathways (Unigwe et al., 2017). Clinicians recommend increasing knowledge about referrals through training, developing better multi-disciplinary approaches to diagnosis, and improving post-diagnostic support (Crane et al., 2018; Rutherford et al., 2016).

Along with the diagnostic process, parents also describe the period following a diagnosis as stressful, citing feelings of isolation and difficulties accessing support and services (Carlsson, Miniscalco, Kadesjö, & Laakso, 2016). Unsurprisingly, then, parents routinely report the need for more information and support following their child's diagnosis (Crane et al., 2018; Mansell & Morris, 2004). Beyond the diagnosis, studies suggest that parents of autistic children are more at-risk for poor mental health and higher levels of stress than parents of non-autistic children (Estes et al., 2013; Zablotsky, Bradshaw, & Stuart, 2013). This may be due to potential emotional, social and financial challenges associated with raising a child on the autism spectrum (Nealy, O'Hare, Powers, & Swick, 2012). These include: decreased time for parents to spend with their spouse and other children or for leisure activities (Smith, Edelstein, Cox, & White, 2010); the significant economic cost of caring for an autistic child

(Saunders et al., 2015), and; parental concerns about their child's future (Ilias, Liaw, Cornish, Park, & Golden, 2017). A lack of public understanding about autism – and associated stigma – may also have a negative impact on families' well-being (Kinnear, Link, Ballan, & Fischback, 2016; Woodgate, Ateah, & Secco, 2008). Nevertheless, despite the challenges, parents also describe positive experiences of raising a child on the autism spectrum (Altiere & von Kluge, 2009; Neely-Barnes, Hall, Roberts, & Graff, 2011), citing online groups and the support of informal social networks as particularly useful (Reinke & Solheim, 2015).

A wide range of studies investigate the lived experiences of parents and family members of autistic children, but far fewer explore the experiences of autistic individuals themselves, especially children of primary school age. DePape and Lindsay's meta-synthesis (2016) of studies examining the lived experiences of children (n=4), adolescents (n=10) and adults (n=15) provides a useful window into autism from a first-person perspective. Some children report positive experiences of social interaction, especially when interests could be shared with others (Daniel & Billingsley, 2010). In Preece and Jordan's study (2010), children tended to express positive attitudes about family life despite stating a preference for solitary activities. However, many autistic young people reported negative social experiences, punctuated by feelings of difference or being treated differently by others (Calzada, Pistrang, & Mandy, 2012; Marks, Schrader, Longaker, & Levine, 2000). Social comparisons often lead autistic children to consider themselves as different (King, Williams, & Gleeson, 2019) and autistic adolescents desire acceptance of these differences by peers (Cage, Bird, & Pellicano, 2016). Only 23% of participants in DePape and Lindsay's meta-synthesis were female, which adds further weight to the need for more research into the experiences of girls on the autism spectrum. Existing research suggests that autistic girls desire friendship but find maintaining friendships more challenging in adolescence (Tierney, Burns, & Kilbey, 2016), often mask their autistic traits (Moyse & Porter, 2015), and feel that services do not adequately address their needs (Cridland, Jones, Caputi, & Magee, 2014).

In a study investigating autistic stereotypes, Treweek, Wood, Martin, and Freeth (2019) found that negative stereotypes failed to account for the heterogeneity of autistic individuals and had a detrimental effect on autistic people's lives, which in some cases led to social exclusion. Policies and campaigns run by autism organisations have aimed to change public perceptions of autism. The National Autistic Society (NAS), for instance, spearheaded *Think*

Autism, which sought to reverse societal stereotyping and discrimination of autistic individuals and promote 'communities that are more aware of and accessible to the needs of people with autism' (DoH, 2014, p.9). Later, a National Autistic Project report (Iemmi et al., 2017) called for greater public awareness about autism, more support and services for autistic individuals, and more funding for evidence-based research into autism. The report signals that there are more than simply financial barriers, concluding that: 'the Autism Dividend will not be realised fully until major deficiencies in our knowledge of autism and of the effectiveness of interventions are remedied' (2017, p.44). Despite well-intentioned policies, many autistic children and adults still remain on the periphery of society (McCall, 2017). Understanding the experiences of autistic individuals and raising public awareness about autism are thus crucial in changing perceptions and promoting inclusion.

1.4.3. Autism in school

Around 70% of children on the autism spectrum are educated in mainstream schools in the UK, a figure that has grown significantly in the last two decades (DfE, 2019). Understanding the concerns and experiences of autistic learners and their educators is critical in addressing issues of social and academic inclusion. Research into the school experiences of autistic pupils indicates that educational settings can be catalysts for intense anxiety for some pupils, and spaces to excel for others. Although studies show that autistic children may have significant concerns and anxiety about their academic performance (Poon et al., 2014; Saggers, 2015), the majority of studies into the school experiences of autistic pupils focus on children's social interaction and development. These studies have found that forming and maintaining friendships is often challenging for autistic children both in mainstream (Rowley et al., 2012) and special education schools (van Roekel, Scholte, & Didden, 2010). Research also suggests that children on the autism spectrum typically have reduced social networks (Wainscot, Naylor, Sutcliffe, Tantam, & Williams, 2008), can feel socially ostracised in school settings (Symes & Humphrey, 2010), and are more vulnerable to bullying than non-autistic children (Maïano, Normand, Salvas, Moullec, & Aimé, 2016). In their meta-synthesis, Williams, Gleeson, and Jones (2017) found that many autistic pupils describe themselves as 'different' to their peers and their attempts to negotiate these differences and 'pass as normal' can compromise their identities which subsequently causes significant stress. As such, students often mask their autistic traits in school, which may have negative implications for their well-being (Carrington & Graham, 2001; Moyse & Porter, 2015).

In view of these findings, it is unsurprising that teachers describe facilitating the social interaction of their autistic pupils as a major challenge (Lindsay, Proulx, Scott, & Thomson, 2014). Noting a rise in the number of children on the autism spectrum in mainstream classrooms, Olley, Devellis, Devellis, Wall, and Long developed the Autism Attitude Scale for Teachers (AAST) in 1981, in an attempt to uncover the range of reactions teachers experienced 'from enthusiasm to apprehension to hostility' (1981, p.371). Park and Chitiyo (2011) sought to compare the findings of Olley et al.'s study with more contemporary attitudes, concluding that practitioners' views were now more positive towards autistic pupils. Nevertheless, teachers and teaching assistants are cognisant of the ongoing need to raise awareness about autism within school communities, with many citing a lack of awareness as the greatest barrier to inclusion (Iadarola et al., 2015; Iemmi et al., 2017; Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012). Investigating the experiences of teaching assistants working with autistic children, Symes and Humphrey (2011) found that staff believed that more expertise and training on autism would greatly enhance the learning of their autistic pupils. This finding resonates with teachers' comments that a lack of resources and training hinders their ability to teach children on the autism spectrum (Iadarola et al., 2015; Roberts & Simpson, 2016). Conversely, Hinton, Sofronoff, and Sheffield (2008) tested and supported the hypothesis that increasing teachers' knowledge and understanding of autism results in more successful inclusion of autistic pupils.

Another contentious issue in autism research is the suitability of different educational environments for autistic pupils. Given the significant heterogeneity in the academic achievement of autistic children (Keen, Webster, & Ridley, 2016) and individuals' varying social and sensory profiles (Ben-Sasson et al., 2009) ensuring that autistic children are placed in a suitable school environment can be problematic. Little consensus exists about the impact of school type on the academic achievement of autistic children, with some studies suggesting that children attain similarly between mainstream and special school environments (Waddington & Reed, 2017), and others indicating that a mainstream environment may lead to significantly better academic outcomes (Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). Jones (2013) agrees that including autistic children in mainstream school settings may facilitate their social development and give them more comprehensive access to the mainstream curriculum.

Although educators tend to be in favour of inclusive education for children on the autism spectrum (Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012; Segall & Campbell, 2012), some key challenges emerge in both creating and sustaining an inclusive learning environment. First and foremost,

striking a balance between a whole-school ethos of inclusion and the inclusive practices of individual teachers in individual classrooms is a complex task (Iadarola et al., 2015). Moore argues that the needs of autistic learners can be 'diametrically opposed to the needs of the mainstream majority' (2007, p.35). She suggests that a mainstream environment in which changes to routine, sensory conditions and displays are commonplace may be anathematic to the needs of many autistic children. In some cases, a special school environment may provide autistic learners more one-to-one attention with specially trained staff and more resources to mitigate the risk of bullying (Cook, Odgen, & Winstone, 2016; Moore, 2007).

Whether in a mainstream or special school environment, fostering a sense of inclusion is key to enhancing the school experiences of autistic pupils (Danker, Strnadová, & Cumming, 2016; Williams et al., 2017). There is little doubt in the literature that educators can have an extremely positive impact on the self-esteem and learning potential of autistic pupils (Rubie-Davis, 2007; Sciutto, Richwine, Mentrikoski, & Niedzwiecki, 2012). Family-school partnerships are also essential in improving educational inclusion for autistic children, with consistency between home and school leading to better educational outcomes (Azad, Reisinger, Xie, & Mandell, 2016). Although parents of autistic children are more likely to be engaged in collaboration with teachers, they also report feeling less satisfied with the quality and quantity of school communication than parents of neurotypical children (Zablotsky, Boswell, & Smith, 2012). As well as strengthening home-school partnerships, recommendations for improving the school experiences of autistic pupils include: being responsive to their potential sensitivity to noise and crowds (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Preece & Jordan, 2010); subtle and discrete support that does not exacerbate their sense of difference (McLaughlin & Rafferty, 2014; Saggers, Hwang, & Mercer, 2011); increasing targeted social skills interventions that are culturally and linguistically appropriate (Davenport, Mazurek, Brown, & McCollom, 2018), and; helping children to develop coping strategies to minimise anxiety (Williams et al., 2017). Finally, as with research into students who speak English as an additional language, within the autism literature there has been a gradual but important shift away from a deficit-model that characterises autism as a problem, towards positive paradigms of autism that highlight children's strengths (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2018).

1.5. Bilingualism in autism

1.5.1. Bilingualism within special educational needs and disability

To fully understand extant research investigating bilingualism in autism, it is important to first contextualise it within the broader landscape of bilingualism in special educational needs and disability (SEND). The notions that only neurotypical children can be bilingual or that bilingualism somehow causes developmental conditions or SEND are deeply misleading (Baker, 2011; Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004). In reality, however, the language needs of bilingual children are often unhelpfully conflated with special educational needs. This has resulted in bilingual children being both over- and under-diagnosed with neurodevelopmental conditions in clinical settings and under- or over-identified as having additional needs in educational environments (Morgan et al., 2018; Paradis & Govindarajan, 2018; Yamasaki & Luk, 2018). Research suggests that some bilingual students may be mistakenly diagnosed with a condition or special educational need, which is, in fact, a language barrier (Baker, 2011; Frost, 2000). Other children, by contrast, may go undiagnosed because it is assumed that their language delay is the result of being new to English rather than being due to an underlying condition (Strand et al., 2006). The disproportionate representation of bilingual children in the SEND population may arise because diagnostic assessments tend to be designed with monolinguals in mind (Paradis, 2016). The consequences of this paradoxical under- and over-diagnosis of bilingual children with special educational needs are twofold: a child who is erroneously diagnosed may not receive a level of academic challenge commensurate with their academic potential or ability, while a child who goes undiagnosed may miss out on crucial speech and language therapy, support and educational intervention (Strand et al., 2006).

It is clear that distinguishing between the different needs of bilingual children and pupils with SEND is complex (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). This task is perhaps further hindered by the fact that special educational needs and disability co-ordinators (SENDCOs) are frequently given responsibility for EAL pupils too. This can lead to a blurring of the lines between SEND and EAL policy and a lack of specialised training, which means that support for bilingual children with SEND is often lacking (Tan, Ware, & Norwich, 2017). Paradis and Govindarajan (2018) and Pesco et al. (2016) express concerns that bilingual children with developmental conditions may have fewer opportunities to maintain their home language in educational settings, with priority given to the dominant societal language. In response to this issue, Yu and Hsia (2018) recommend increasing the linguistic diversity of staff working in the field of special education and providing more training to educators. They believe these

steps would contribute to greater differentiation between bilingualism and special educational needs, as well as more individualised support.

In England, 12.6% of primary-aged EAL pupils have been identified as having special educational needs or disabilities, compared with 14.6% of pupils who have their first language as English (FLE) (DfE, 2019). The gap widens in secondary schools with 9.4% of EAL pupils registered with SEND, compared to 13.1% of FLE children (DfE, 2019). However, in special schools, the multilingual population is much higher at around 20% (DfE, 2019). This figure is much more in line with the total school population of EAL learners (21.2% for primary-aged children [DfE, 2018]), which may well suggest that special educational needs are going unidentified among some EAL pupils, particularly in mainstream secondary schools. In Wales, the provision of Welsh-medium (or bilingual) education for children with special educational needs is insufficient (Roberts, 2017; Ware, 2014). For instance, only 3 out of 42 special education schools in Wales provide education through the medium of Welsh (Ware, 2014), which means that parents who have a child with SEND often face a difficult choice between an English-medium special school or a Welsh-medium mainstream school. For some children, it is thus unlikely that both their linguistic and educational needs will be adequately met at the same time.

1.5.2. Current research trends

Before examining the findings of literature on bilingualism in autism, it should also be noted that this field of research is still in its infancy. With very few exceptions (Kremer-Sadlik, 2005; Seung, Siddiqi, & Elder, 2006), studies investigating the interaction between autism and bilingualism have been undertaken in the last decade, demonstrating that research in this area has only recently started to receive critical attention. In addition, the location of studies reflects a wider trend in which autism research has disproportionately taken place in western – and often more monolingual – countries (Freeth, Milne, Sheppard, & Ramachandran, 2014). The majority of studies investigating bilingualism in autism have been carried out in North America, with the exceptions of Hampton et al. (2017) and Fox, Aabe, Turner, Redwood, and Rai (2017) in the UK, and the studies central to the *Journal of Communication Disorders'* special issue (2016), which were carried out in the UK and the Netherlands, along with Canada and the United States. Research in this field has tended to have a clinical focus, emerging from disciplines such as applied psychology, psychiatry, communication disorders, and speech and

language pathologies, rather than those with a socio-linguistic or pedagogical focus. As a result, current literature offers far greater insight for clinicians than it does for educators. Consequently, the terms 'autism spectrum disorder' and 'bilingual' are much more frequently used in the current literature than the terms 'autistic' and 'EAL', and there is little research that provides recommendations for educational practitioners.

A number of systematic, narrative and scoping reviews have been conducted in recent years that help to delineate current research trends and findings in this area. These can be separated into reviews that explore bilingualism and neurodevelopmental conditions (Bird et al., 2016a; Lim et al., 2019; Uljarević et al., 2016) and those that focus on bilingualism in autism specifically (Drysdale, van der Meer, & Kagohara, 2015; Lund, Kohlmeier, & Durán, 2017; Wang, Jegathesan, Young, Huber, & Minhas, 2018). With regards to the first type of review, a special issue in the *Journal of Communication Disorders* was published in 2016, which aimed to raise pertinent questions about the policies, practices and contextual factors regarding bilingualism among children with developmental conditions, including specific language impairment (SLI), Down syndrome (DS) and autism. In this special issue, Bird et al. (2016a) highlight the value of interventions in both languages to alleviate the common risk of language attrition in the minority language. Also in the special issue, Paradis (2016) recommends that current research moves away from the use of monolinguals as a comparative 'yardstick' (Muñoz & Singleton, 2011). Instead, she suggests that bilingual children with developmental conditions are more akin to their neurotypical bilingual counterparts than their monolingual peers with developmental conditions, by dint of their language experiences and exposure.

Uljarević et al.'s review (2016) also offers valuable recommendations for professionals working with bilingual children with developmental conditions, including: increasing dialogue with families and raising awareness of the potential disadvantages of monolingualism, considering the language use of the multiple speakers who interact with the child, and incorporating multilingualism into public policy for children with neurodevelopmental disabilities. In like manner, in their review of eight studies that explore bilingual language development in children on the autism spectrum, Drysdale et al. (2015) found that parents' language ability can play as important a role as their child's language proficiency when weighing up bilingual and monolingual options for autistic children. Whether focused on neurodevelopmental conditions generally, or on autism specifically, these reviews draw two

firm conclusions: (1) that there is no evidence to suggest that bilingualism is harmful for atypically-developing children; (2) despite this research finding, parents are frequently advised to adopt just one language. These two conclusions will now be discussed with reference to studies investigating bilingualism in autism in sections 1.5.3. and 1.5.4. respectively.

1.5.3. Linguistic and social development

The predominant consensus among studies examining the impact of bilingualism on autism is that children on the autism spectrum have the capacity to grow up as bilinguals (Peterson, Marinova-Todd, & Mirenda, 2012; Valicenti-McDermott et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2019). Further, there is no evidence to suggest that bilingual maintenance is detrimental to the social, cognitive and linguistic development of children on the autism spectrum (Drysdale et al., 2015; Lund et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018). Indeed, a number of studies have found that bilingual children on the autism spectrum perform similarly to their monolingual counterparts with regards to expressive and receptive vocabulary and language (Dai et al., 2018; Hambly & Fombonne, 2012; Ohashi et al., 2012), pragmatic abilities (Reetzke, Zou, Sheng, & Katsos, 2015) and cognitive functioning (Valicenti- McDermott et al., 2013). Employing a longitudinal design, Zhou et al. (2019) found no differences in language development between autistic children raised in a bilingual home compared to those raised in a monolingual home. Similarly, with a much larger sample than in previous studies (n=174), Iarocci, Hutchison, and O'Toole (2017) found that exposure to a second language did not negatively impact the executive function and functional communication of autistic children. Taken together, these findings consistently suggest that exposure to more than one language is not detrimental to autistic children's development. It is important to note that all the studies mentioned in this section took place in North America, with the exception of Reetzke et al. (2015), which took place in China. This implies a need for research in this area in different linguistic contexts.

Although most existing research has found that monolinguals and bilinguals on the autism spectrum perform comparably on language measures, some studies indicate that bilingualism may confer specific advantages for autistic children. For instance, Lang et al. (2011) employed an alternating treatments design to assess whether the language of instruction (LoI) can affect linguistic and behavioural outcomes. They found that "Maria", a four-year-old girl on the autism spectrum, demonstrated fewer challenging behaviours and gave more correct responses when instructed in her home language (Spanish) rather than the dominant societal language (English). Moreover, Lim et al.'s review (2019) of 18 studies into bilinguals with

neurodevelopmental conditions – nine of which focused on autism – found a small effect favouring the use of the home language rather than the majority language in interventions and instruction. These examples give credence to the view that assessments and intervention-based practices with bilingual autistic children are generally most effective in the child's dominant language (Beauchamp & MacLeod, 2017). In like manner, Seung et al. (2006) outline a case study in which a bilingual Korean-English speech and language therapist provided a bilingual language intervention to a child on the autism spectrum. Rather than negatively affecting the child's acquisition of English, they found that the bilingual intervention supported the child's development of both languages and improved his social skills.

Studies also show that bilingualism may help autistic children's social development by reducing difficulties with functional communication associated with autism (Iarocci et al., 2017). Zhou et al. (2019) and Valicenti-McDermott et al. (2013) both documented increased gesture production among bilingual autistic children compared to their monolingual autistic peers. This finding is consistent with research in typically-developing children suggesting that bilinguals use gesture more than monolinguals (Pika, Nicoladis, & Marentette, 2006). Valicenti-McDermott et al. (2013) also found that bilingual autistic children showed better pretend play than monolingual autistic children, while Özerk and Özerk (2017) demonstrated that bilingual autistic children can transfer learned social and communication skills from one language to another. By maintaining both languages, children also have more opportunities for social interaction with family and community members (Anderson, 2012). In this vein, parents' use of the home language improves the child's socialisation within the family (Kremer-Sadlik, 2005), increases the child's vocabulary (Fahim & Nedwick, 2014) and may afford them a sense of cultural identity (Jegatheesan, 2011).

1.5.4. Parental language choices

Despite a growing body of evidence in recent years suggesting that bilingualism is not detrimental for children on the autism spectrum, multilingual families are routinely advised to speak one language – rather than the two or more available to them – if their child has autism (Hampton et al., 2017; Uljarević et al., 2016; Yu, 2013). This advice, although well-intentioned, may be based 'more on logical arguments than empirical evidence' (Lim et al., 2018, p.2890). That is to say, it is premised on the assumption that bilingualism confuses autistic children or worsens potential language delays (Hampton et al., 2017; Ijalba, 2016;

Jegatheesan, 2011). Exploring the factors influencing the language choices of 15 Chinese-English bilingual parents of autistic children, Yu (2009) found that they unanimously perceived bilingualism to be detrimental to their child's development and were discouraged by educational and healthcare professionals to maintain their heritage language. Such conclusions resonate with the findings of Baker (2013), Y'Garcia, Breslau, Hansen, and Miller (2012), and Yu (2016). What emerges then is a significant incongruity between the professional advice given to parents to use one language and the findings of recent studies that bilingualism is not detrimental for autistic children.

To a lesser extent, an incongruity also emerges in the current literature between parents' perceptions of bilingualism and their actual language practices (Ijalba, 2016; Yu, 2016). For instance, even though parents often highly value bilingualism in theory, many feel that monolingualism is the only option available to their family given the severity of their child's symptomatology (Hampton et al., 2017; Yu & Hsia, 2018). The choices they make are often restricted by the lack of support available to help the child to maintain both languages (Yu & Hsia, 2018). Although it is acknowledged that advice to parents should be given on a case-by-case basis, generic recommendations to adopt a monolingual approach may have unintended negative implications for children's linguistic, social and cultural development (Uljarević et al., 2016). Above all, 'forced monolingualism' is likely to isolate the child and restrict their perhaps already limited opportunities for social interaction with family and community members (Baker, 2011; Peña, 2016). This is especially concerning as parents of autistic children often continue to provide care into adulthood (Paradis & Govindarajan, 2018). As such, speaking the non-dominant language may have a negative effect on family well-being; an emotional distance may emerge between the parent and child if the parent is advised to no longer use their own first language (Hampton et al., 2017; Tseng & Fuligni, 2000; Y'Garcia et al., 2012). In turn, this may also exclude families from their linguistic communities (Yu & Hsia, 2018). Indeed, Yu argues that it is unrealistic to expect parents to reduce, or worse still abandon, the use of their own native language, suggesting that such advice is not only untenable, but 'at odds with their ways of life' (2016, p.425).

Asking parents to use their non-native language may be unhelpful if they lack fluency and are incorrectly modelling it (Drysdale et al., 2015), given that non-native input can result in the child hearing inconsistent morphology and fewer grammatical constructs (Altan & Hoff, 2018). Peña (2016) also highlights the fact that once a language is no longer used, the child's

ability to learn it later on is rapidly diminished, which may have adverse effects on their relationships with extended family. Finally, no evidence suggests that reducing the child's linguistic exposure removes the challenges associated with autism; it only turns a bilingual autistic child into a monolingual autistic child.

Conversely, certain studies outline the myriad benefits of bilingual exposure for children on the autism spectrum. These include: developing multicultural identities and the preservation of heritage (Yu, 2013); participation in religious life (Jegatheesan, 2011); enriched relationships with, and access to, immediate and extended family members (Bird et al., 2016b; Hampton et al., 2017; Yu, 2016); and cognitive skills related to attention (Gonzalez-Barrero & Nadig, 2019). Underlying much of the existing literature in this area is an acknowledgement that language choices and practices should be made on a case-by-case basis (Baker, 2013; Hampton et al., 2017). In the UK context, Hampton et al. (2017) posit that bilingualism would become less of a stumbling block to families with autistic children were there better provision of bilingual resources and interventions. Fox et al.'s study (2017) into parental attitudes about autism among the Somali migrant community in the UK found that access to health and education services post-diagnosis was all the more challenging given certain language barriers and unfamiliarity with the system. In light of these issues, existing studies provide recommendations that counter the misleading advice that 'one language is best'. To ensure bilingualism is a viable possibility, autistic children may require more opportunities to hear and use their home language than neurotypical children, especially those who receive more exposure in the dominant language (Hambly & Fombonne, 2014; Paradis et al., 2018). Accordingly, providing speech and language interventions in both languages may help to alleviate the common risk of language attrition in the home language (Bird et al., 2016a).

Calls have been made for more support and advice for multilingual families prior to, during, and after an autism diagnosis (Beauchamp & MacLeod, 2017; Lim et al., 2018). Such support could be possible through increased dialogue between families and practitioners, with particular attention given to parents' existing language practices (Uljarević et al., 2016). A greater awareness among practitioners about the nature of intergenerational language practices is also essential (Yu, 2016). By understanding families and children's experiences and perceptions, along with the barriers that prevent them from choosing a multilingual approach, researchers and practitioners will be better placed to provide evidence-based recommendations and policies. Little (2017) recommends that parents and children actively discuss the role of

the home language in their family life and their motives for maintaining it. Such dialogues are also essential between families, professionals and researchers in order to gain a clear understanding of how the home language is perceived, which, in turn, has the potential to inform policy and practice.

1.5.5. Policy and practice

Most research investigating bilingualism in autism considers either children's capacity to become bilingual (see 1.5.3.) or parental perspectives and experiences of raising an autistic child in a multilingual family (see 1.5.4.). Paradis and Govindarajan (2018) therefore call for the field to shift its attention towards clinical and educational policy and practice. In her study into Hispanic mothers' attitudes towards raising an autistic child, Ijalba (2016) integrates the notion of parental language choice with wider issues of the cultural stigmatisation of an autism diagnosis and what she defines as 'antibilingualism policies' that advocate an 'English-first' approach, such as the 'No Child Left Behind Act' (2002) in the United States. García (2009) denounces such policies for the way in which they replace the term 'bilingual' with 'English language learner', and have diminished funding for bilingual education programmes. Ijalba and García's findings are emblematic of Peña's conclusions (2016) that policies relating to bilinguals on the autism spectrum vary significantly across countries and regions. Across contexts, areas in need of further investigation include assessment and diagnostic tools, support for families, and educational provision, each of which will be discussed in turn.

Finding more appropriate assessment and diagnostic tools for linguistically and culturally diverse children is a major priority, given that they are under-represented in the diagnosed population (Yamasaki & Luk, 2018), and tend to be diagnosed later, therefore precluding them from all-important early intervention (Mandell et al., 2009). For example, Strand et al.'s analysis (2006) of census data revealed Asian pupils were less likely than White British children to be diagnosed with autism in the UK. Despite increasing linguistic diversity, Clifford, Rhodes, and Paxton (2014) found that information about bilingualism is conspicuously absent from paediatric training. Informing clinicians about the emergent evidence-base on bilingualism for children with developmental conditions would be a useful first step in improving the advice given to families (Clifford et al., 2014). Equally, ensuring that clinicians enquire about the language backgrounds of their patients may improve the identification of conditions such as autism in multilingual populations (Lim et al., 2019).

Improved parent-clinician consultation and a more holistic approach to families' language histories and use across different settings may lead to more appropriate and individualised advice (Anderson, 2012; Medina & Salamon, 2012; Seung et al., 2006). Lim et al. (2018) recommend that clinicians allay parents' concerns about bilingualism in autism by presenting them with the current evidence-base, which suggests that there are no adverse effects to raising an autistic child bilingually. Uljarević et al. (2016) also argue that the lack of evidence to support a monolingual recommendation for multilingual children with developmental conditions requires further reinforcement in language policy. Nevertheless, Lim et al. (2018) still caution that professionals should be wary of making conclusive statements about bilingualism in autism, and instead take into account the child's and family's unique circumstances. Where possible, clinicians should offer interventions and services in both languages or the home language, rather than the default position of only providing services in the dominant societal language (Dai et al., 2018; de Valenzuela et al., 2016).

Research into educational provision tends to focus on bilingualism for children with developmental conditions, rather than autism specifically (de Valenzuela et al., 2016; Marinova-Todd et al., 2016; Pesco et al., 2016). Pesco et al. (2016), for example, examine whether recent special education policies reflect the finding that bilingualism is not detrimental for children with developmental disabilities. By examining their opportunities to pursue bilingualism in four different international settings, the authors found a perennial lack of provision for bilinguals with developmental conditions, when compared to their neurotypical bilingual peers. The authors warned that this lack of opportunity could result in children losing the ability to communicate in their home language. They recommend greater collaboration between teachers and speech and language therapists, and better access to second language programmes for children with developmental conditions. Such advice chimes with Peña, Gillam, Bedore, and Bohman's findings that priority is almost always given to the majority language, most commonly English, by dint of a 'lack of available bilingual personnel, time pressures, and lack of training' (2011, p.311). A disconnect therefore comes to the fore between evidence-based recommendations and the realities of professional practice. Similarly, in their study into the availability of bilingual services for atypically-developing children, Marinova-Todd et al. (2016) found that the provision of language classes was deemed inadequate, especially when compared to access for typically-developing children.

Strategies for the inclusion of bilingual autistic children in educational settings are few and far between (Medina & Salamon, 2012). A lack of bilingual staff and bilingual special education services mean that even if schools wanted to provide interventions in the home language, they would be hard-pressed to do so (Peña et al., 2011; Yu & Hsia, 2018). Consequently, Paradis et al. (2018) argue that it is not an autistic child's capacity for bilingualism that may prevent them from maintaining their home language, but a lack of opportunities to develop their home language proficiency. Beauchamp and MacLeod (2017) therefore return to the importance of increasing the child's exposure to their first language in the home setting, if they are exposed only to the dominant societal language in school. They recommend that, where possible, parents enrol their children in home language programmes outside of school to further broaden their exposure to the home language (Beauchamp & MacLeod, 2017). However, it is important to note that these programmes often incur a cost, which may make them less accessible to children from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

1.5.6. Limitations and gaps in the literature

Despite nuances in their research questions and methodological approaches, the studies reviewed in this section concur that professionals working with bilingual autistic children should be cognisant of, and adaptive to, the diversity of their linguistic profiles and clinical presentations. Extant literature has begun to examine the linguistic and cognitive impact of bilingualism in autistic children, the perspectives of families when making language decisions, and, to a lesser extent, issues of policy and practice. However, there are both limitations and gaps in the current body of research. Limitations include restricted sample sizes (e.g. 3 families in Jegatheesan (2011); 3 families in Yu & Hsia (2018); and 1 family in Seung et al. (2006)), and data collection tools that were not in participants' home languages (e.g. Bird, Lamond, & Holden, 2012; Fahim & Nedwick, 2014; Zhou et al., 2019). Bird et al. (2012), for example, acknowledged that the limited responses in their study may have been a result of an 'English only' questionnaire. Insufficient methodological clarity was also a common limitation within the extant literature. Baker (2013), for instance, neither included explicit methods nor an analytical framework for her study, which may raise questions about the rigour applied to the research and the reliability of its findings. In a similar vein, Fahim and Nedwick (2014) did not provide information about methods for participant selection nor ethnographic techniques for observing the family interactions discussed. As previously noted, terminological differences can also render the findings of certain studies invisible to other disciplines and researchers, and crucially, to stakeholders themselves.

Lim et al. (2018) argue that there is a lack of research into improving diagnostic assessments for children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The authors note that the tendency for autism research to take place in Western countries with Caucasian participants leads to significant gaps in our knowledge of linguistically and culturally diverse children on the autism spectrum (Lim et al., 2018). Wang et al. (2018) add that studies assessing linguistic outcomes of bilingual autistic children should test both of their languages and give more emphasis to the effects of bilingualism on their pragmatic language skills. Existing literature lacks evidence about the linguistic opportunities available to autistic individuals (Bird et al., 2016a) and inclusion strategies that encourage bilingual language acquisition (de Valenzuela et al., 2016). Within autism research more broadly, calls have been made to recognise the linguistic diversity of individuals on the autism spectrum and integrate bilingualism into study designs and interventions (Özerk & Özerk, 2017).

Studies investigating educational provision for this group are also conspicuously absent from the current body of research. In particular, further comparative work is needed that accounts for different educational systems (e.g. monolingual v bilingual) and for different clinical presentations of autism. There is also a lack of empirical knowledge about pedagogical strategies for supporting the learning of bilingual autistic children (Medina & Salamon, 2012). Research is therefore needed that addresses the role of practitioners who support bilingual pupils on the autism spectrum (Marinova-Todd et al., 2016). Additionally, understanding the attitudes and perspectives of the teachers and teaching assistants who educate bilingual children on the autism spectrum is also an unexplored area. However, three studies to-date have focused on service provision and professionals' practices and views in supporting bilingual children with a developmental condition (de Valenzuela et al., 2016; Marinova-Todd et al., 2016; Pesco et al., 2016). This type of research helps to highlight issues that may be applicable in different settings or systems, and permits researchers and practitioners to share best practice.

More pressing still is the need to understand the views and experiences from a first-person perspective. Too often studies have been conducted via the lens of professionals, parents and advocates rather than listening to the voices of autistic people themselves. It is important too that studies seeking to gain a first-person understanding are responsive to individuals' specific needs in their research design, and account for the heterogeneity within the autistic population (Medina & Salamon, 201). Despite a shift towards participatory methods in autism

research (Pellicano et al., 2018), no studies to-date seek to elicit the perspectives of bilingual autistic children, perhaps due to perceived communicative challenges. By encouraging young people to share their perspectives, we may empower them to reflect more on their identities as multilinguals and, in-so-doing, provide researchers and practitioners with a much-needed window into their lived experiences.

1.6. Thesis rationale and research questions

Drawing the various threads discussed in this chapter together, the rationale for the thesis is threefold. First, it addresses the aforementioned gaps in the literature by providing first-person experiences of bilingualism in autism and by focusing on the previously under-examined views of educational practitioners. In what follows, the comparisons drawn between different educational settings (i.e. bilingual schools in Wales and monolingual schools in England) build on the multi-site review of educational policies conducted by Pesco et al. (2016). Second, as the first study to elicit the perspectives of bilingual autistic children, this thesis pursues methodological innovation through the use of computer-assisted interviewing and interpretative phenomenological analysis. Last but by no means least, the driving force behind this study is an ambition to move the conversation from theory to practice, when it comes to considerations of bilingualism in autism. This will be best achieved by expounding evidence-based recommendations for educational policy and practice.

By shedding a light on the difficulties particular to children who are both bilingual and autistic, this thesis aspires to inform policy changes on a local and national level in order to ensure that this group of children enjoy similar opportunities to flourish as their monolingual neurotypical counterparts. Bird, Trudeau, and Sutton (2016b) call for further investigation into bilingualism for children with developmental disabilities that considers 'the family, the local community, the educational context, and the larger society and relevant policies' (p.75). With this in mind, four main research questions guide the trajectory of the thesis, each of which are foregrounded by the cross-contextual comparison between England and Wales discussed earlier in the chapter.

Research Question (RQ) 1: What are the lived experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum?

Despite a growing number of autistic and bilingual children in mainstream classrooms in the UK, as noted earlier, the first-person perspectives and experiences of this group of learners is

conspicuously absent from extant research (Anderson et al., 2016; DePape & Lindsay, 2016). Yet it is only through adopting a child-centric view that researchers can successfully capture the realities of their lived experience and develop meaningful recommendations to improve their well-being (Greene & Hogan, 2005; Saggers, 2015). The first research question, addressed in chapter 3, seeks to remedy this situation by analysing the experiences of bilingual autistic children, with a particular focus on their identity formation and school environments.

RQ 2: What are educational practitioners' perspectives and experiences of supporting a bilingual autistic child?

This research question, considered in detail in chapter 4, responds to the pressing need for research into practitioner experiences of supporting autistic children from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Lim et al., 2018). Marinova-Todd et al. (2016) highlight the need to better understand practitioner perspectives on the intersectionality between bilingualism and developmental conditions. More specifically, chapter 4 considers questions such as: do educators perceive bilingualism to be feasible for autistic children?; how are attitudes towards bilingualism operationalised in linguistically different educational contexts?; and, how can whole-school approaches and person-centred strategies create a more inclusive learning environment for this group of pupils? The purpose of this research question is to uncover educators' beliefs about the impact of bilingualism on autism, and to shed light on their experiences of supporting autistic learners from multilingual backgrounds.

RQ 3: What are parents' experiences of raising an autistic child in a multilingual family?

This question is considered primarily in relation to parental language choices and builds on existing research in this area, such as the studies discussed in section 1.5.4. (e.g. Hampton et al., 2017; Yu, 2013, 2016, etc.). Although parents are often the first group to be consulted in autism research, the voices of parents from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds often remain unheard. This research question therefore aims to illuminate what Baker describes as the 'texture and nuance that exists in the lives of all multilingual families of children with autism' (2013, p.527). This entails understanding not only parental perceptions about bilingualism, but also the factors affecting their real-life language decisions and the consequences of these decisions for the child concerned and the wider family unit. Answers to this third research question will be explored in chapter 5.

RQ 4: To what extent do the perspectives and experiences of children, educators and parents converge and diverge when bilingualism meets autism?

Comparing various stakeholders' perspectives, which provides the central focus of chapter 6, serves to address possible power imbalances between them and offers a richer understanding of the children's interaction with their familial and educational contexts (Harden, Backett-Milburn, Hill, & MacLean, 2010). A multi-informant approach is adopted not necessarily for the purposes of triangulation, that is, to prove the validity of participants' claims, but rather to enable the researcher to paint a more nuanced picture of the experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum. It is acknowledged that the experiences of participants both within and across groups may differ (Greene & Hogan, 2005); however, such a multi-perspectival design will arguably result in a more convincing and substantive analysis (Larkin, Shaw, & Flowers, 2019).

1.7.   Chapter summary and conclusions

This chapter has sought to elucidate current debates and trends in the fields of bilingualism and autism, before outlining the emergent body of research that explores their interaction. By reviewing literature on the familial and educational experiences of autistic and bilingual children respectively, it became clear that the challenges facing both groups are often remarkably similar. As distinct groups, bilingual and autistic learners face barriers to inclusion in the mainstream school environment and often report feelings of 'otherness'. It remains to be seen, however, whether children who are 'doubly different' from their monolingual typically-developing peers face additional challenges and further exclusion. Debates around the terminology used in the respective fields of autism and bilingualism were critically considered and attempts have been made to ensure that language does not further marginalise the individuals under discussion in this thesis.

As we have seen, the growing body of research investigating bilingualism in autism consists of two, somewhat contradictory, themes. First, research suggests that children on the autism spectrum generally have the capacity to learn and maintain more than one language. Second, despite this finding, multilingual families are frequently advised by professionals to adopt a monolingual approach to raising their autistic child due to concerns that bilingualism may exacerbate their difficulties. As discussed, researchers question this advice, instead recommending that clinicians present families with up-to-date research on the feasibility of

bilingualism in autism, whilst taking into account the needs of the individual child and those of their family. Indeed, current research suggests that using the home language with an autistic child may afford social, cultural and cognitive benefits. This chapter has also identified major gaps in the current literature, namely the lack of research exploring educational settings and the first-person perspectives of bilingual autistic children. As a result, this thesis sets out to make a fresh contribution to existing knowledge by providing an innovative, multi-informant account of perspectives and experiences when bilingualism meets autism.

2. Methodology and Research Design

This chapter traces the methodological dilemmas, decisions and details of the thesis. First, it considers some possible qualitative approaches to answering the research questions posed in chapter 1, followed by a more detailed examination of the chosen methodological framework, phenomenology and, more specifically, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Next, the study's context, sampling strategy, and participants are detailed. Following the consideration of the ethical questions raised by this research, the study's procedures are outlined, with a particular focus on the selection of semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Finally, the process of data analysis and questions of research rigour will be discussed.

2.1. Qualitative approaches

Qualitative research enables us to not only capture the nuanced and complex realities of individual experience, but to better understand them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Schutz, 1970). Unlike more quantitative approaches, rooted in a positivist epistemology, qualitative study is often grounded in interpretivist perspectives in order to provide further insight into 'the subjective world of human experience' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p.17). In many instances, the success of qualitative research is contingent upon the researcher interpreting the experiences of the researched within the social realm (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ling & Ling, 2016). Given the inherently social nature of experiences in familial and educational settings, and the sociolinguistic implications of bilingualism in autism, the interpretivist paradigm is most apposite to the aims and research questions of this thesis.

A range of methodological approaches are available to the qualitative researcher and have been adopted in previous research investigating bilingualism in autism. These approaches required consideration as possible methodological frameworks for the thesis. First, several studies adopted a case study approach, drawing on the particular cases of "Oscar" (Yu, 2016), "Lena, Toda and Jose" (Fahim & Nedwick, 2014), "Adam" (Kim & Roberti, 2014), "J" (Seung et al., 2006), and "Anna, Biyu and Karel" (Bird et al., 2016b). However, none of these articles give an in-depth description or interpretation of the case study as an overarching methodological approach, which leads to ambiguity over what the term really means. Simons describes a case study as 'an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity

and uniqueness of a particular project, policy institution or system in a "real-life" context' (2009, p.21). It becomes clear then that the task of a case study researcher is to move from the particularities of an individual's circumstances to the ways in which those circumstances may or may not reflect wider realities. Given that the focus tends to be on a non-human entity (e.g. a project, an institution etc.), case study research relies on a variety of data sources and/or multiple methods (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Although less common than the case study in scholarship on bilingualism in autism, ethnographic approaches have also been employed by qualitative research in this field (e.g. Jegatheesan, 2011; Kremer-Sadlik, 2005; Y'Garcia et al., 2012). Ethnography is concerned with shared patterns of behaviour and beliefs among a culture-sharing group (Harris, 1968) and tends to be carried out through participant observation. Jegatheesan (2011) posits that the hallmark of ethnographic research is that procedures are tailored to the varying cultural and linguistic practices of the individuals involved. For example, in her study into multilingual socialisation in autistic children, she focused on individuals from a shared culture (parents from South Asian Muslim backgrounds), and adapted ethnographic techniques (interviews, observations, on-site fieldwork) to the needs of the participating families, e.g. adopting a more conversational style in interviews to accommodate parents' caring duties and local communicative norms.

Moving the focus from individuals who share a particular culture (as in ethnography) to those who participate in a particular process, grounded theory aims to verify or generate a 'unified theoretical explanation' (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p.107). It consists of category identification, refinement and integration (Willig, 2013) followed by the generation of a theory that is grounded in the data (Creswell, 2013). While traditional approaches to grounded theory caution against the researcher's personal beliefs or biases impeding the analysis, more contemporary interpretations, such as constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), incorporate the researcher's own positionality and take a more reflexive stance. In this sense, parallels can be drawn between constructivist grounded theory and phenomenology, which seeks to provide 'a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals' (Creswell, 2013, p.82). Given its focus on experience rather than processes (as in grounded theory), cultures (as in ethnography) or systems (as in case study research), it became apparent that a phenomenological approach was more apposite than the frameworks considered above to the research questions posed in chapter 1. The sections that follow will describe the

characteristics of phenomenology, and its more recent counterpart, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and provide justification for their central role within the thesis.

2.2. Phenomenology

Derived from the Greek word *phaino*, meaning 'to bring to light', phenomenology is 'the study of human experience and of the way things present themselves to us in and through such experience' (Sokolowski, 2000, p.2). Its philosophical roots can be traced back to the work of Husserl (1931), who posited that by utilising only the data available to an individual's consciousness we can discover the essence of their lived experience. This process involves eschewing the *natural attitude*, that is, our prior knowledge, experience and convictions, and adopting a *phenomenological attitude*, which involves 'bracketing out', or suspending, our pre-conceived ideas about the phenomenon. Without the constraints of our own interpretative lens, we are better placed to discern the lived experience of others with neutrality and sound judgement (Conklin, 2014; Nazir, 2016). Such a process, according to Husserl, is an imperative precursor to further empirical investigation. This is known as transcendental – or descriptive – phenomenology, and its later proponents include Merleau-Ponty (1962), Giorgi (1985) and Moustakas (1994).

Unconvinced by the plausibility of 'bracketing' or the possibility of arriving at a unified, objective description of a phenomenon, Heidegger (1962) proposed a more interpretative approach in which the individual is inextricably bound to their *lifeworld*. As a result, their experiences are derived from the context that surrounds them. A student of Husserl, Heidegger suggested that it is not only impossible, but injudicious, for the researcher to ignore their own knowledge and experience of a phenomenon as they seek to elucidate it. Moving from the descriptive to the interpretative, hermeneutic phenomenology is 'the study of *experience* together with its *meanings*' (Friesen, Henriksson, & Saevi, 2012, p.1). This approach discounts the argument inherent to transcendental phenomenology that meaning can be ascribed without recourse to personal biases and contextual factors. Instead, it requires sensitivity and openness to experiential data rather than theoretical concepts. Hermeneutic phenomenologists interpret the narrative accounts, or "texts" of life (van Manen, 1990), of individuals who have experience of, and insight into, the phenomenon in question (Danaher & Briod, 2005; Robson & McCartan, 2016). Although transcendental phenomenology is primarily descriptive compared to the interpretative, hermeneutic orientation, it would be ill-

advised to pit the two against each other as dichotomous systems. Instead they should be viewed as two complementary approaches positioned along a methodological continuum (Finlay, 2012).

In recent years, phenomenology has been viewed not only as a philosophical theory but as a methodological approach to qualitative research, including studies in the field of bilingualism and autism (Ijalba, 2016; Yu, 2013). Hermeneutic phenomenology is arguably more easily applied to qualitative research than its transcendental counterpart because the data analysis is, to a certain extent, framed within the context of the phenomenon (Langdridge, 2007). When analysing interview transcripts, the hermeneutic phenomenologist oscillates between the text as a whole, reflecting the experience in its entirety, and its individual parts, which describes its minute, and often overlooked, details. This analytical movement between the whole and its parts is known as Heidegger's hermeneutic circle (1962). More recently, Smith and colleagues (1996, 2009, 2015) have drawn on ideas from hermeneutic phenomenology to develop 'interpretative phenomenological analysis', first in the field of health psychology, and more recently in wider qualitative psychology. As the methodological framework for this thesis, consideration will now be given to the guiding principles of IPA and justifications for its selection based on the research questions.

2.3. Interpretative phenomenological analysis

2.3.1. Guiding principles

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is a qualitative research approach developed by Smith and colleagues (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). The aim of IPA is to describe and interpret individuals' lived experience. Still in its embryonic stages, IPA has been associated with the field of health psychology but is starting to gain traction across several other disciplines. Most crucially to the purposes of the current thesis, it is viewed as a particularly useful approach within autism research (Howard et al., 2019; MacLeod, 2019), because of its focus on understanding participants' lived experience through their own words. The efficacy of IPA in autism research will be further explored in section 2.3.4.

Returning to the guiding principles of IPA, Smith (2004) characterises the approach as idiographic, inductive, and interrogative. It is idiographic in that the researcher moves from the close, micro-analysis of a single case to a search for patterns and themes across informants

(Smith, Spiers, Simpson, & Nicholls, 2017). It is an inductive analytical approach because it is data-driven rather than theory-driven (Shaw, 2010a), allowing participants' responses rather than pre-conceived hypotheses to determine themes. Finally, it is interrogative in its reference to, and interaction with, extant literature related to the phenomenon under discussion. Intrinsic to IPA is a 'double hermeneutic', whereby the researcher aims to interpret the experience of participants who are themselves actively engaged in a process of sense-making (Smith & Osborn, 2015). To this end, IPA strikes a balance between the 'emic' position (the researcher is an 'insider' when hearing the account of the participant) and the 'etic' position (the researcher assumes an 'outsider' role through interpreting – and then re-articulating – the participants' lived experience) (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). IPA is therefore 'a joint product of researcher and researched' (Smith et al., 2009, p.110). A strength of IPA is its commitment to researcher reflexivity; the approach requires researchers to reflect on their own positionality and experiences of the phenomenon and in so doing, acknowledge potential discrepancies between the participant's words and the researcher's interpretation of those words.

One critique of IPA, proposed by van Manen (2017), is that the provision of a 'step-by-step' guide by no means assures phenomenological insights. Further, Giorgi (2010) challenges the oxymoronic nature of a 'non-prescriptive method', arguing that such methodological flexibility cannot be scientifically robust. In his rebuttal, Smith (2018) argues that it is unhelpful to apply a positivistic criterion for validity onto IPA, which neither claims generalisability nor replicability. Instead, Smith suggests that IPA's methodological flexibility enables the individual researcher to apply its guidelines creatively. Moreover, he argues that by accumulating a body of IPA studies, 'core constructs' of certain phenomena may come to the fore (2004, p.51).

Further doubts are raised regarding the legitimacy of IPA as a phenomenological approach by its critics maintaining that it is not sufficiently rooted in a philosophical understanding of phenomenology (Giorgi, 2010; van Manen, 2017; Zahavi, 2019). Zahavi (2019), for example, suggests that qualitative researchers in pursuit of sense-making of a particular phenomenon should draw on alternative disciplines and traditions if they are not willing to engage fully with the tenets of philosophical phenomenology as outlined by Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. In a similar vein, van Manen argues that IPA should be described as 'interpretative *psychological* analysis', suggesting that the approach's reliance on

psychological analysis and engagement with affective processes have the potential to result in 'superficial and shallow' themes. Smith (2018) counters, however, that psychological and phenomenological approaches are not mutually exclusive, and that drawing on both enables a more in-depth analysis. He further argues for a more pluralistic view of philosophical phenomenology, arguing that 'a single, definitive form of phenomenology' does not exist (2018, p.1956), and that 'philosophy does not own phenomenology' (Smith et al., 2009, p.32).

This research seeks to find some consensus between critics and proponents of IPA, drawing on MacLeod's useful distinction (1947) between psychological and philosophical phenomenology. MacLeod proposes that the former is a methodological approach derived from the latter, which is, by nature, theoretical (1947, p.193). While IPA is employed as the methodological framework for the present research, it is nonetheless acknowledged that 'an account of ultimate reality in terms of its essences' (MacLeod, 1947, p.193) is only possible through philosophical phenomenology, and its psychological counterpart can 'never be more than an approach to scientific enquiry' (p.207). Accordingly, Smith's IPA undoubtedly builds on the foundations of psychological phenomenology, which MacLeod defines as a 'systematic attempt to observe and describe in all its essential characteristics the world of phenomena as it is presented to us' (1947, p.194). It is within this school of thought that the current thesis sits. Having outlined the guiding principles of IPA, it is now important to justify its use within this research.

2.3.2. Justification of IPA

IPA is a useful method for investigating phenomena or populations about which little is known (Reid et al., 2005), as is the case for the experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum. However, some further consideration needs to be given to why IPA was deemed more consonant with the aims and research questions of this study than other qualitative approaches. While certain studies into autism and bilingualism employ phenomenological interviews (Ijalba, 2016; Yu, 2013), others opt for an ethnographic framework. The rationale for choosing IPA over ethnography is three-fold. First, ethnography is concerned with interpreting groups that share a culture, rather than those sharing a similar experience or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018), such as 'bilingualism in autism'. Participants in this study came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, which may have rendered an ethnographic approach less effective. Second, ethnography tends to employ methods of observation, whereas semi-structured interviews were considered a more effective method in order to appreciate and

understand participants' perspectives and experiences. Third, and more broadly, ethnography is rooted in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, whereas the current study, in line with phenomenology, seeks to investigate experiences of bilingualism in autism, and is therefore more aligned with the fields of education, psychology, and applied linguistics.

As discussed in section 2.1., grounded theory and case study research were also considered as methodological approaches to the current study. Like ethnography, grounded theory arguably relies on the researcher's observations and interpretations 'from the outside' (Charmaz, 2006, p.25), which was unsuitable given the thesis' aim of understanding experiences 'from the inside'. IPA is thus more akin to Pellicano et al.'s call for an 'equality of participation' (2018) in autism research and to the research questions presented in chapter 1. Giving a voice to participants was a central concern in the current study's research design, whereas one could argue that preference is given to the theoretical claim(s) rather than the individual voice in a grounded theory paradigm. IPA shares many characteristics with grounded theory, such as adopting descriptive and inductive approaches to data analysis. However, the frameworks differ in two key areas: IPA arguably offers the researcher greater flexibility and creativity in the choice of methods, and broadly speaking, seeks to answer psychological rather than sociological questions (Willig, 2013).

Finally, case studies have been widely used in the literature (Baker, 2013; Seung et al., 2006; Yu, 2016) and share an idiographic focus with phenomenology; both are concerned with 'particularization, not generalization' (Stake, 1995, p.8) in their analysis of highly specific circumstances. However, case studies differ from IPA in that they tend to focus on systems, processes or events (Creswell & Poth, 2018), while IPA enables the researcher to elucidate the experience of individuals. Further, an effective case study draws on multiple sources of data (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016), such as interviews, questionnaires, documentary analysis and observation, whereas IPA tends to uncover the voices of participants solely through interviewing. Given the aim of promoting autistic voices, drawing on other data collection techniques in this study – particularly observation – may have undermined the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, and detracted from the richness of data. Moreover, the context of the data may have been neglected at the expense of triangulation (Silverman, 1993).

2.3.3. Multi-perspectival IPA

Moustakas argues that the phenomenon in question could be examined from various perspectives until a 'unified vision' emerges (1994, p.58). A multi-informant design was therefore selected in the current research, leading to a more nuanced picture of the experiences of bilingual autistic children. While IPA has traditionally opted for more homogenous samples, a recent trend has emerged towards multi-perspectival approaches, which enable researchers to consider 'the relational, intersubjective, and microsocial dimensions of a given phenomenon' (Larkin et al., 2019, p.183). Multi-informant IPA studies may also give rise to 'a more detailed and multifaceted account of that phenomenon' (Reid et al., 2005, p.22) and offer a type of triangulation (Smith et al., 2009). It could be argued then that the 'double hermeneutic' central to IPA becomes a 'triple hermeneutic' when multi-perspectival designs are employed; the researcher and participant are not only interpreting the participant's own experiences, but are seeking to understand the sense-making of others too. In this thesis, for example, educators and parents were making sense of their own experiences of bilingualism in autism, but also seeking to understand the experiences of the children under their care from the child's perspective. Accordingly, the synthesis of viewpoints – not only within but across participant groups – may bring about a more convincing and cogent analysis than a single-group design (Larkin et al., 2019).

However, drawing on the experiences of different stakeholders may risk prioritising the voices of one group over another. With variation more likely across different groups, there is a very real temptation to generate a consensus that does not exist (Larkin et al., 2019). Inevitably, when accounts differ across groups, the question arises: whose perspective is more legitimate? This required particularly careful consideration in the current research; it was essential that the voices of children were not overshadowed by those of their parents or educators, especially as the children themselves are the primary experts of their own experiences. Another issue with multi-perspectival designs in IPA is that a larger sample may restrict the opportunity for detailed description and interpretation, which could undermine the framework's idiographic nature.

2.3.4. IPA in autism research

The dawn of a 'new era in autism research' (Pellicano et al., 2018), rooted in participatory methods, has led to a growing number of studies into autistic experiences that employ interpretative phenomenological analysis as their methodological framework. Certain features

of IPA, including its commitment to an equality of voice and researcher reflexivity, may help to illuminate the experiences of autistic individuals (Howard et al., 2019). Accurately reflecting the perspectives of autistic individuals is particularly important in light of the 'double empathy problem' (Milton, 2012), whereby possible mutual misunderstanding between non-autistic and autistic people threatens to undermine the authenticity of autism research. Given IPA's reflexive engagement, its treatment of participants as experts, and its attempt to equalise the balance of power between autistic informants and non-autistic researchers, the presence of a 'double hermeneutic' not only makes IPA an effective qualitative approach in autism studies, but may also go some way towards alleviating the 'double empathy problem' (Milton, 2012) that can so often discredit autism research. For autistic participants, the sense-making process inherent to IPA 'may require accommodating (or rejecting) an externally-imposed identity' (MacLeod, 2019, p.50).

An IPA framework gives a much-needed voice to autistic individuals (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008) and facilitates rapport-building between the researcher and participant (Cridland et al., 2014). Particular adaptations can be made for autistic children and adolescents in IPA research, including: using concrete examples to help young people to make comparisons during interviews (Tierney et al., 2016), identifying an appropriate adult in advance in case of distress during the interview (Huws & Jones, 2015), and providing them with a stop card (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). These different techniques demonstrate a move away from conventional IPA guidelines in recognition of the fact that the autistic community may require or prefer different mediums through which to articulate their lived experience. Credibility (or member) checks are also a hallmark of existing IPA studies into autistic experience, and serve to verify that researcher interpretations are as close to the original meaning as possible (Howard et al., 2019; MacLeod, 2019). By placing the informant at the nexus of the research and enabling them to participate meaningfully in the sense-making process, IPA necessitates a respect for the participant and their perspective, providing a crucial first step in bridging the 'double empathy' gap (Howard et al., 2019).

While IPA offers great insight into the lived experience of autistic participants, its focus on language as the medium of expression poses a challenge to its use. This may be particularly true for research conducted with the autistic community (MacLeod, 2019). Dewinter, van Parys, Vermeiren, and van Nieuwenhuizen (2017), for example, highlight that limited expressive language and overly formal language of some participants restricted the richness of

the data. Similarly, Griffith, Totsika, Nash, and Hastings (2012) report that some autistic informants preferred 'closed' questions, as opposed to the typically 'open-ended' interview style advocated by IPA. If IPA is so intrinsically bound to the elicitation of voice, questions may well be raised as to whether it can be a legitimately useful tool for autistic individuals with language or social communication difficulties. In this vein, it is acknowledged that while traditional forms of IPA may represent a useful methodological framework for some autistic participants, it will not be appropriate for all in the autistic community, particularly as autistic people should be treated as individuals rather than one homogenous group (Milton & Moon, 2012). As MacLeod rightly asks, 'whose voice is represented here?' (2019, p.59). IPA's over-reliance on linguistic interpretation means that only those who can articulate their experiences are represented. To mitigate against the potential for an 'elite bias' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.41), other methods of data collection such as participant diaries and drawings, as well as photo elicitation (King et al., 2017; Stephenson & Adams, 2016), are starting to emerge to redefine IPA within autism research.

2.4. Context

Having outlined and justified the methodological framework underpinning this thesis, it is time to turn our attention to the practical details of the study, beginning with its context. The present research took place in two linguistically different educational settings: England and Wales. This allowed for a contextual comparison between the experiences of bilingual autistic learners in linguistically different environments. As discussed in chapter 1, children with English as an additional language (EAL) represent around one in five pupils in primary schools in England (DfE, 2018). However, there is a stark disconnect between the increasing presence of multilingualism in the classroom and the decreasing value of language learning in the curriculum. This is most reflected by a significant decline in the uptake of modern foreign languages at GCSE and A-Level (Ayres-Bennett & Carruthers, 2019).

In Wales, by contrast, bilingual education is growing in popularity with a quarter of the school-aged population attending Welsh-medium schools. However, English is typically viewed by many as 'the language of inclusion' in Wales (Thomas & Roberts, 2011, p.105). As a result, the *Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Transformation Programme,* statutory guidance put forward by the Welsh Government, highlights the need for a bilingual system in which 'services must consider whether a child or young person needs additional learning provision in Welsh' (WG, 2017, p.4). If the child does require service provision through the medium of

Welsh, 'all reasonable steps' (p.4) should be taken to ensure that this is carried out. Nevertheless, there is currently little evidence of how services should fulfil this requirement and no direct information about autism is available. This research therefore sought to illuminate the lived experiences of children, parents and educators in England and Wales in order to understand how individuals within linguistically different educational settings perceive bilingualism in the context of autism.

2.5. Researcher positionality

For transcendental phenomenologists like Giorgi (1985) and Moustakas (1994), it is essential for researchers to 'bracket out' their individual biases and experiences when adopting a phenomenological approach. By contrast, IPA requires researchers to consider the impact (both positive and negative) of these biases and experiences on research design and procedures, given that the analyst's interpretation of data plays a central role in IPA studies (Shaw, 2010b). Accordingly, the aim of this section is to reflect on my own position within the research, and establish potential factors influencing the subsequent analyses.

First, as part of a wider research project entitled "Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies", my work takes an intrinsically pro-multilingualism stance, which may inadvertently affect the analysis presented. It is also important to note that I was myself raised in a monolingual household, therefore do not share the same circumstances as the children being studies here. Instead, I consider myself a 'language learner', having studied languages and lived abroad, which also contributes to my belief that languages are beneficial. Second, my professional experiences as a secondary school teacher may also have influenced the analyses presented in this thesis. Having taught EAL pupils and autistic pupils (and a small number of bilingual autistic pupils), I came to my research questions with some prior knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under question. As such, it was likely that my own professional experiences would help me to relate to the educational practitioners involved in the study, and understand some of the challenges faced by the pupils. However, I entered the research with less experience and knowledge of primary-aged children. Third, for several years I have volunteered at a youth group for young people on the autism spectrum, which has not only increased my knowledge of autism, but, more crucially, has increased my desire to advocate and support autistic individuals. In this sense, my approach towards analyses was rooted in a social – rather than medical – model of autism (Oliver, 1983). All of these

factors are important to keep in mind as they may have significantly influenced the analytical process.

2.6. Participants

2.6.1. Sampling and recruitment strategy

With the aim of better understanding the experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum, this research sought the perspectives of three key groups of stakeholders: bilingual autistic children, parents, and educational practitioners (including teachers, teaching assistants, Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinators (SENDCos), and speech and language therapists). Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which relies on the researcher's judgement to choose participants who are representative of the population under investigation. This technique is widely used in studies seeking to uncover the experiences of bilingualism for children with developmental conditions (de Valenzuela et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2017) and led to a sample who were selected on the basis of characteristics that best reflect a broad array of perspectives. Although the use of purposive sampling inevitably limits the researcher's ability to draw inferences about the general population beyond the sample, it ensures that informants not only exemplify the experience but have the requisite expertise to discuss their perspectives. Indeed, Smith et al. argue that in IPA studies the focus should be on 'quality not quantity' (2009, p.51), challenging the traditional linear relationship between 'number of participants' and 'value of research'. To retain the idiographic commitment intrinsic to IPA research, the current project was viewed as three separate IPA studies (chapters 3 to 5), before the findings relating to each participant group were drawn together and analysed in unison (chapter 6).

Consonant with research conducted by Pellicano and colleagues (2013, 2015, 2016, 2017) into the experiences of autistic children and reports investigating the experiences of EAL learners (Arnot et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2016), this study employed a multi-informant approach. As discussed in section 2.3.2., such a *modus operandi* enables researchers to draw on the varying perspectives of key stakeholders who are clearly distinguishable from one another (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Prevalent within current autism literature (e.g. Hebron, Humphrey, & Oldfield, 2015; Jepsen, Gray, & Taffe, 2012), the multi-informant approach permits polyvocality and gives crucial context to the child's experience (Harden et al., 2010). By taking into account different stakeholders' views, alongside, and in the light of, children's accounts, it was hoped that a multi-informant approach may mitigate against potential

acquiescence biases (Breakwell, 2006). Nevertheless, difficulties may arise when different groups give conflicting advice or opinions (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2018). Within the current sample, it has therefore been particularly important to reflect the diversity of views expressed both within and between groups and avoid homogenising a single 'autistic experience'.

The type of school selected also plays a significant role in children's experiences and the perspectives shared by parents and practitioners. To reflect the diverse linguistic make-up of the UK and understand how different linguistic settings may impact upon experience of bilingualism in autism, a balance of schools with more multilingual populations (e.g. a high percentage of EAL pupils in England, or a bilingual curriculum in Wales) and schools with more monolingual populations (e.g. a low percentage of EAL pupils or English-medium schools in Wales) was sought. Of the schools in England involved in the study, three had a percentage of EAL pupils below the national average and four had a percentage of EAL pupils above the national average. In Wales, three children attended Welsh-medium schools (in which the language of instruction was Welsh) but came from English-dominant homes while three children attended English-medium schools but spoke more Welsh at home.

Mainstream schools were given preference over specialist autism schools for three primary reasons: (1) the majority (around 70%) of students on the autism spectrum are now educated in mainstream schools in England (DfE, 2019); (2) special schools have more targeted policies and training for autism therefore there may be a greater need for better inclusive practices in mainstream settings; and (3) children educated in special schools are likely to face greater communicative challenges that may impede their participation in an interview. It should thus be acknowledged that the focus of this study has been narrowed to a particular type of schooling, and does not reflect the educational experiences of all bilingual autistic children. However, one child (Gareth) attended an English-medium specialist autism school at the time of interview, having previously attended a Welsh-medium mainstream primary school at the time of recruitment. He spoke both English and Welsh at home. Four children (Zehra, Jack, Glyn and Marco) attended specialist autism units within a mainstream school, and took part in some mainstream lessons.

Participants from the three groups were recruited through direct contact with mainstream schools, email bulletins sent by autism organisations, communication with parental support groups, personal contacts of the researcher, and social media posts. Once contact was

established, participants were provided with an information sheet about the study and were given the opportunity to ask questions and/or withdraw from participation. The current study aimed to recruit triads of participants (i.e. a child, a parent and a practitioner with experience of the child). However, in many cases access to all three was not possible (see Table 1). For example, some parents felt that their child would not be able to meaningfully participate in an verbal interview but still wished to take part themselves, while some schools declined the invitation for staff members to be involved due to time constraints. Consonant with previous literature, there were more females than males in the teacher and parent participant groups (Fox et al., 2017; Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson, & Scott, 2013; McNerney, Hill, & Pellicano, 2015), and more males in the pupil group (Calder, Hill, & Pellicano, 2013; Hampton et al., 2017). Demographic information about participants is found in Table 1 and all names have been changed to protect participants' anonymity. Two sets of siblings (Jack & Glyn [line 11]; James & Zoe [line 16]) feature in the table as all had a diagnosis of autism, however, none of them took part in the research themselves.

Table 1: Participant information

	Child (gender)	Age	Interview length (location)	Language(s) other than English	Parent (gender)	Interview length (location)	Interpreter	Practitioner (role)	Interview length (location)	School type	Country
1	Dyfan (M)	6	-	Welsh	Molly (F)	30:50 (school)	No	Bethan (teacher)	20:51 (school)	Mainstream Primary (WM1)	Wales
2	Nish (M)	7	20:44 (home)	Bengali Hindi	Hira (F) Davesh (M)	35:17 (home)	No	-	-	Mainstream Primary	England
3	Zehra (F)	7	-	Turkish	Roshan	18:53 (home)	No	-	-	Autism unit in Mainstream Primary	England
4	Thomas (M)	8	17:23 (home)	Welsh	Katherine (F)	22:23 (home)	No	-	-	Mainstream Primary (WM)	Wales
5	William (M)	8	23:14 (home)	Spanish	Magdalena (F)	27:43 (home)	No	Dawn (SENDCo)	19:44 (school)	Mainstream Primary	England
6	Suvrat (M)	9	14:14 (school)	Hindi	Chandra (F)	28:10 (school)	No	Emma (teacher)	15:17 (school)	Mainstream Primary	England

1 WM = Welsh-medium

7	Amira (F)	9	9:10 (school)	Urdu Punjabi	Baheela (F)	12:58 (school)	Yes	Cath (TA)	18:01 (school)	Mainstream Primary	England
8	Luke (M)	9	12:47 (school)	Italian	Eleanora (F)	26:59 (school)	No	Robert (teacher)	17:04 (school)	Mainstream Primary	England
9	Daniel (M)	9	7:55 (school)	Polish	Lena (F)	16:21 (home)	Yes	Paula (teacher)	18:11 (school)	Mainstream Primary	England
10	Ryan (M)	9	13:08 (school)	Welsh	Anna (F) Mary (F)	35:32 (school)	No	Anwen (SENDCo)	9:13 (school)	Mainstream Primary (WM)	Wales
11	Jack (M) Glyn (M)	9 11	-	Welsh	-	-	-	Suzanne (teacher) Gill (Speech and Language Therapist) Lucy (TA) Rachel (TA)	38:34 (school)	Autism unit in EM[2] Mainstream Primary	Wales
12	Rahul (M)	10	16:03 (school)	Hindi Gujarati	Nabani (F)	42:37 (school)	No	Natalia (TA)	13:08 (school)	Mainstream Primary	England
13	Gareth (M)	11	21:47 (home)	Welsh	Julie (F)	26:28 (home)	No	-	-	Specialist autism primary school (EM)	Wales

[2] EM = English-medium

14	Marco (M)	12	18:05 (home)	Italian	Roberta (F)	46:04 (home)	No	-	-	Mainstream Secondary	England
15	Jokubus (M)	14	19:57 (school)	Lithuanian	-	-	-	Debbie (SENDCo)	39:40 (school)	Mainstream Secondary	England
16	James (M) Zoe (F)	18+ 18+		French Arabic	Dasia (F)	23:13 (public space)	No	-	-	Specialist autism school Mainstream secondary	England

2.6.2. Characteristics of children

The following inclusion criteria guided the selection of children for the study: (1) children had received a diagnosis of autism in the UK; (2) they were exposed to more than one language on a daily basis; (3) they were aged 7 or over; and (4) their parents or guardians believed they would be able to participate in a verbal interview. As such, 12 out of the 18 children featured in Table 1 took part in interviews. Parents and practitioners were consulted about each child's suitability to participate in an interview, including their willingness and capacity to communicate. As it is very common for children on the autism spectrum to have a co-occurring condition (Matson, 2015), it was deemed methodologically unfeasible, as well as unrepresentative, to exclude such individuals. The period of time spent in the UK may have impacted upon both the children's capacity to express their perspectives and the extent to which their bilingualism interacts with their autism, but this was not defined as a selection criterion as it may have further constrained recruitment. Participants were heterogeneous in terms of language proficiency and ethnicity. Out of the eighteen children discussed in this research, only three were female (one of whom was interviewed). Given that autistic females are routinely under-represented in autism research (Carpenter et al., 2019), this represents a significant limitation of the sample.

Although age was not prescribed as an inclusion criteria, late-primary aged children were deemed to be the most appropriate group for the following reasons. First, the attitudes of bilingual children towards their bilingualism are conspicuously absent from research (Little, 2017; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015). Second, it was considered that the effects of a child's bilingualism are likely to become less significant to their school experience by secondary age, especially if they were born in the UK. Third, as this study seeks to uncover educators' perspectives, those in primary settings may be in a better position to discuss the child given that primary educators spend considerably more time with a smaller number of pupils than those in secondary schools. In the secondary environment, pupils see a greater range of staff and so finding staff with detailed knowledge of the individual child may have proved problematic. Fourthly, 'late' primary (e.g. aged 7-11) was deemed most appropriate because children may be better placed to articulate their views and experiences by this stage. As such, children under 7 in the sample were not interviewed (i.e. Dyfan), although two of the children interviewed were of early secondary age (i.e. Marco and Jokubus) and so offered slightly different insights into their

school experiences. One bilingual mother (Dasia) had a son and a daughter on the autism spectrum (James and Zoe [line 16 of Table 1]) and spoke about her experiences parenting both children, who are now adults. With the exception of these two adults, who did not participate in the study, the age range of children interviewed was between 7 and 14 years old.

2.6.3. Characteristics of adults

Once suitable children were identified, parents and practitioners were asked whether they would also be willing to participate in the study and share both their experiences of the child and their perspectives of bilingualism in autism. Educational practitioners were included in the current study if they: (1) teach or support a bilingual pupil on the autism spectrum in a mainstream school; and (2) have worked in the school for at least two years. Criterion 1 was chosen so that participants could draw on relevant and recent experiences of supporting a bilingual autistic child, and mainstream schools were selected as this reflects the educational setting of the majority of autistic pupils (DfE, 2019). Criterion 2 was included so that practitioners would bring more in-depth experience to the interview, and because it would be unreasonable to ask newly-qualified or newly-established staff to participate. This criterion dovetails with existing studies into the perspectives of teachers of bilingual (Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2017) and autistic learners (Soto-Chodiman, Pooley, Cohen, & Taylor, 2012). Thirteen practitioners participated, including teachers (n=5), teaching assistants (n=4), special educational needs and disability co-ordinators (SENDCOs) (n=3), and a speech and language therapist (n=1) (see Table 1).

Within the qualitative literature exploring the interaction between autism and bilingualism, parents are the most frequently consulted group (Hampton et al., 2017, Ijalba, 2016; Yu, 2013). In this study, parents were included if their child: (1) had been diagnosed with autism in the UK; and (2) was exposed to more than one language on a daily basis. The majority of participants were mothers of a bilingual child on the autism spectrum. One bilingual father (Davesh) and one monolingual grandmother (Mary) were also interviewed together with the child's mother (Hira and Anna, respectively). In total, sixteen family members took part. A wide range of languages were spoken by participants and/or their families; five parents were native English speakers whose partner spoke a different language (in all cases, this was Welsh), while thirteen were either first- or second-generation migrants whose first language was not English.

2.7. Ethical considerations

The consideration of ethical issues is of utmost importance to the researcher throughout the research process. As Iphofen astutely notes, 'a responsible researcher is one who understands and examines the ways in which the moral and the methodological principles of their work are interwoven' (2011, p.4). In this sense, consideration should be given not just to the procedural design of research, as specified by research ethics committees, but to the ethical principles that underpin the whole project (Macfarlane, 2010). Accordingly, the current research was informed by the ethical principles outlined by Carpenter (2018), which include: maximising benefit, respecting rights, ensuring inclusivity, and researching with integrity (pp. 39-40). These four guiding principles will be discussed in turn, with reference to their application in the current study.

First, the notion of 'maximising benefit' questions whether the proposed research will be more beneficial than costly to participants and wider society (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). From the outset, the rationale for this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of bilingual autistic children, and in so doing, improve educational practice and policy for this group of learners and enhance the support and advice their families receive. On these grounds, ethical approval was sought and granted from the School of the Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Cambridge (Case No: 17/136) before the study began.

Second, in accordance with the guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (2018), respecting participants' rights to privacy, fair treatment, and self-determination was essential in the current study. Children were informed that the interview would consider different areas of their life, but were not told that the study was specifically investigating autistic pupils. This decision was taken because it emerged from discussions with parents and educators that many pupils had not been told about their diagnosis and others had little knowledge of it. Nevertheless, some children did bring up autism in their interviews and were not discouraged to do so. All participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time (BERA, 2018); accessing this offer was facilitated by providing a 'stop card' that children could use during interviews. Attempts were also made to minimise the disruption to the school day for all those participating, including children's learning time and teachers' work schedules (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008).

The third principle, 'ensuring inclusivity', was particularly pertinent in view of the linguistic, cultural, developmental and ethnic diversity of participants in this study. Several strategies were employed to facilitate children's participation, and alleviate the possible stress induced by an interview (see 2.8.6.). The phrasing of questions was also carefully considered to encourage inclusivity (van den Hoonaard, 2018). However, a major ethical challenge to this research was ensuring not just an equality of presence and participation, but an equality of voice for the children taking part in the study, given that 'the reality experienced by children and young people in educational settings cannot be comprehended by inference and assumption' (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000, p.61). Even within a multi-informant research design, there is a tendency to give adults' viewpoints more credence than children's (Greene & Hogan, 2005). This is espcially true when the views presented by the adult diverge from those of the child. As such, when conducting analyses it was important to be aware of potential biases towards favouring adults' perspectives, and to promote children's agency within the research; this involved reflecting on what the child was actually saying rather than merely on what was expected (Komulainen, 2007).

Fourth, the principle of 'researching with integrity' is concerned with the manner in which research is conducted and disseminated. For example, the researcher was prepared for the possibility of sensitive issues and strong emotions coming to the fore, given the nature of semi-structured interviews, the exploration of 'experience' and the sometimes difficult circumstances participants faced. A process of member checking took place with child participants in order to verify the accuracy and veracity of interpretations (see 2.8.7.). Audio recordings were also safely stored in a password-protected file and participants were given pseudonyms to safeguard their right to anonymity (Brady & Graham, 2018).

2.8. Procedures

2.8.1. Choosing appropriate methods

As 'vehicles through which a research problem is made researchable' (Blaikie, 2007, p.2), the research questions outlined in chapter 1 (and again in the Table 2 below) require suitable methods to reach appropriate answers. Understanding participants' perspectives and experiences was integral to research questions 1 to 3. Semi-structured interviews were therefore selected as the most suitable method for eliciting the voices of each participant group and computer-assisted interviewing was employed to facilitate children's participation. These decisions will be justified in subsequent sections (2.8.2. and 2.8.6.). Answering research

question 4 involved finding parallels and disparities across participant groups and employing a multi-perspectival IPA design (Larkin et al., 2019). Table 2 provides an outline of the procedures in relation to each research question.

Table 2: Research questions and procedures

	Research Question	Procedure
1	What are the lived experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum?	Computer-assisted, semi-structured interviews
2	What are educational practitioners' perspectives and experiences of supporting a bilingual autistic child?	Semi-structured interviews
3	What are parents' experiences of raising an autistic child in a multilingual family?	Semi-structured interviews
4	To what extent do the perspectives and experiences of children, educators and parents converge and diverge when bilingualism meets autism?	Synthesis of participants' accounts

2.8.2. Semi-structured interviews

Interview data helps to capture the distinctive qualities, or 'essence', of a shared social phenomenon through the lens of those who experience it, enabling informants' words to speak for themselves (Lewis & Staehler, 2010). Described by Gubruim, Holstein, and Marvasti as 'a virtual window on experience' (2012, p.30), semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate research method for answering research questions 1 to 3 because they provide descriptions of participants' daily lives, and generate detailed information about their interpretations and perceptions of such experiences (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). The semi-structured interview consists of a series of concise, (generally) open-ended questions, which may be adapted during the interview according to the participants' responses, and is considered the method *par excellence* in IPA research (Smith et al., 2009). This approach grants flexibility in the wording, order and follow-up of questions (McAteer, 2013), gives greater credence to participants' expertise (Leech, 2002), and affords more autonomy of expression.

However, semi-structured interviews can present challenges to the researcher and participant alike. For example, it is important that the researcher picks up certain threads if the conversation digresses and refrains from leading the participant to a particular answer (Smith et al., 2009). Most crucially, the interviewer must show great sensitivity, especially when

potentially emotional topics or experiences are discussed, and must keep in mind that interviews can be intimidating experiences for participants.

2.8.3. Interview schedules

Creating a coherent interview schedule is central to conducting successful semi-structured interviews. This process ensures that the researcher is asking clear and pertinent questions that are consonant with the research's overarching research questions (van Manen, 2017). Cultural sensitivity in the wording of questions – particularly those related to autism and multilingualism – was sought throughout (Willig, 2013). The researcher also drew on professional experience as a teacher to ensure that questions for child participants were age-appropriate. In this study, three interview schedules for each participant group were drafted in a four-step process.

First, the researcher considered the various facets of experience relevant to each group, the research questions and the phenomenon under investigation. Taking inspiration from Danker et al.'s categorisation (2016) of eight domains of school well-being for autistic pupils, the researcher developed five domains central to the experiences of bilingual autistic children in the home and school setting. These domains are: (1) language use; (2) socialisation; (3) accomplishment; (4) motivation; and (5) environment. The conceptualisation and rationale behind these five domains is delineated in Table 3, along with their concomitant sub-themes.

Table 3: Five domains of experience

Domain	Rationale	Sub-theme
Language Use	Language development and use is an integral facet of children's daily lives, and is particularly important for the purposes of this thesis. Understanding how and why bilingual autistic children use language(s) also sheds light on the other domains of their experience at home and in school. This domain asks questions such as: how frequently do they use their home language (both at home and in school)?; what are their perceptions of the language of instruction (English or Welsh)?; and,	• Multilingual identity (Haukås, 2016; Martínez, Durán, & Hikida, 2017) • Home language maintenance (Latham Keh & Stoessel, 2017; Molyneux et al., 2016) • Linguistic motivation (Gardner, 2010) • Bilingual education (Bialystok, 2018; García, 2009)

	do they believe that there are advantages to multilingualism.	
Socialisation	Children's interactions with peers, staff, and family members are central to their daily lives. Given potential communicative challenges for autistic children and those for whom English is an additional language, understanding the social advantages and challenges faced by this population is important in addressing the aims of this study.	• Relationships with peers (Liu & Evans, 2016; Rowley et al., 2012) • Relationships with staff (Blacher, Howell, Lauderdale-Littin, Reed, & Laugeson, 2014; Caplan, Feldman, Eisenhower, & Blacher, 2016) • Social communication (Stephenson & Adams, 2016; Sutton, Webster, & Westerveld, 2019)
Accomplishment	The academic performance of children on the autism spectrum and those with EAL is heterogeneous. However, issues of students' perceptions of achievement, their inclination towards certain subjects and away from others, and their reactions to rewards are central to their experiences. It is equally important to consider the learning styles of this group to determine ways of encouraging best practice in schools.	• Accessing the curriculum (Leung, 2007; Olson, Roberts, & Leko, 2015) • Attainment among autistic (Keen, Webster, & Ridley, 2016) and bilingual (Strand & Murphy, 2015) children • Learning styles (Gunn & Delafield-Butt, 2016) • Pedagogy (Anderson et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2017; Tan et al., 2017) • Literacy (Bialystok, 2014; Murphy, 2018)
Motivation	Children's engagement with their learning and participation in lessons is key to their academic achievement. This domain seeks to answer questions such as: does the child enjoy school?; what motivates them?; and, how does their motivation fluctuate between tasks (both at home and in school)?.	• Academic engagement (Steinbrenner & Watson, 2015) • Emotional regulation (Ashburner, Ziviani, & Rodger, 2010; Jepsen et al., 2012)
Environment	The role of the classroom environment, the provision of resources, and wider educational context and policy have major implications for children's experiences of school. This domain refers to children's access to suitable resources, a safe and positive learning environment, and educational practitioners. This domain is more	• Family-school partnerships (Anderson et al., 2016; Azad et al., 2016; Schneider & Arnot, 2018) • School inclusion policies (Pesco et al., 2016; Roberts & Simpson, 2016)

Children	Practitioners	Parents
	concerned with experiences in school than the familial setting, however, it does draw on the partnerships forged between families and schools.	• Classroom environments (Segall & Campbell, 2012)

Second, introductory questions were drafted for each participant group, with the purpose of gathering demographic data and putting the participants at ease. These introductory questions are below in Table 4 (underlined questions have been adapted from the literature on the school experiences of autistic children and bilingual/EAL children).

Table 4: Introductory questions

Children	Practitioners	Parents
1. Can you tell me your name and age? **2.** What do you like to do when you're not at school? **Prompt**: Can you tell me a little bit more about that? OR Ask follow-up question about hobby/interest	**1.** Can you tell me about your role at Y[3]? **2.** How long have you been in your role at Y? **3.** Can you tell me about X[4]? **4.** [Only in schools in England] How many children speak EAL in the school? **5.** [Only in schools in Wales] Is this a WM or EM school[5]? **6.** [Only in EM schools in Wales] Do many of the children in the school speak Welsh or have much access to Welsh? **7.** Can you tell me more about how X is getting on at school? **8.** [For TAs/SENDCOs only] How often do you work with X? **9.** Apart from X, can you recall working with other	**1.** Can you tell me about X? (verify age) **2.** Where was X born? (If outside UK, when did he/she move to UK?) **3.** <u>Which</u> language(s) does X speak other than English?[6] **4.** <u>How</u> does X use language to express him/herself?[7] **5.** What language or languages do you mostly use when talking to him/her? And other children/family members? **6.** What language does he/she use with you? And with other family members? **7.** What age was your child when he/she was diagnosed with autism? **8.** If you are happy to disclose this information, please could you tell me if X has been formerly diagnosed

[3] Y = name of school

[4] X = name of child

[5] WM = Welsh-medium, EM = English-medium

[6] Adapted from Fahim & Nedwick (2014)

[7] *Ibid.*

	children who are both autistic and bilingual/EAL?	with any other conditions aside from autism.
		9. <u>Can</u> you tell me about how things might have changed since X was diagnosed with autism?[8]
		10. And how has your family, and particularly X, adapted to these changes?

Third, the interview schedules of qualitative studies investigating autistic children's school experiences (e.g. Lindsay et al., 2013), bilingual or EAL children's school experiences (e.g. Anderson et al., 2016) and parental experiences of bilingualism in autism (e.g. Yu, 2013) were searched for relevant examples. This was challenging as most of the studies did not provide interview schedules. When studies did provide schedules, questions were either drawn directly or adapted according to the purposes of the thesis, and were added to the relevant domain of experience. These questions are underlined in Tables 4 and 5.

Fourth, questions were then drafted in each domain of experience with one main question for each domain and concomitant prompt questions; the latter were to be employed according to participants' responses. The three interview schedules are presented below in Table 5. For the parent group, questions primarily focused on the familial settings, while for educators the school environment was more prominent. Certain questions had some variation according to whether participants were living and working in England or Wales (e.g. questions 3 and 4 for practitioners in the 'language use' domain). Particular steps were also taken when designing the interview schedule for children. Additional prompts were provided with certain questions, to give further support and examples if children were unsure about the original question. Five images related to the five domains of experience were selected for the computer-assisted interviews with children, which are described in Table 5. Underlined questions in the table are those that have been adapted from existing literature investigating the school experiences of autistic children or bilingual/EAL children. Further information about the process of computer-assisted interviewing will be provided in section 2.8.6.

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[8] Adapted from Yu (2013)

Table 5: Interview schedules related to domains of experience

Domain	Image description	Interview questions for children	Interview questions for practitioners	Interview questions for parents
Language Use	The image shows children speaking to one another with four speech bubbles, each with a different language saying "hello". The languages were English, French, and Spanish (as languages that children may recognise from school) and the child's home language. If the child was exposed to two other languages other than English at home, both were included.	**MQ**[9]: What does the picture show us? **PQs**[10]: **1.** I have heard that you speak more than one language – can you tell me about that? **2.** Is it a good thing to speak more than one language? Why/Why not? **3.** Do you learn other languages at school? **4.** Do you ever use Z[11] at school?[12]	**MQ**: How does being bilingual affect X[13]'s autism? **PQs**: **1.** What are your views of pupils using their first language in the classroom?[14] **2.** Have language choices been discussed with parents?[15] **3.** [For schools in England] Does X ever speak his/her first language at school? If so, is this encouraged? **4.** [For schools in Wales] How much Welsh does X use in school and at home?	**MQ**: What languages does X use, and in which contexts?[20] **PQs**: **1.** What have teachers or other professionals told you about your child's learning of English or Z?[21] **2.** What languages are used most frequently in your household? And in different situations?[22] **3.** What do you feel are the benefits of speaking Z with X?[23] **4.** Are there challenges to X being bilingual?

[9] MQ: Main question
[10] PQs: Prompt questions
[11] Z = Home language(s)
[12] Adapted from Anderson et al. (2016)
[13] X = Child's name
[14] Anderson et al. (2016)
[15] *Ibid.*
[20] Adapted from Fahim & Nedwick (2014)
[21] Adapted from Yu, 2013
[22] Adapted from Baker (2013)
[23] Adapted from Yu (2013) and Baker (2013)

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			5. What are the challenges and advantages of supporting EAL pupils?[16]	
			6. Do you believe bilingualism is possible (and helpful) for children on the autism spectrum?[17]	
			7. [For schools in Wales] Which language(s) are bilingual autistic children assessed in? And what are the challenges with this?[18]	
			8. How can bilingual parents (or parents of EAL pupils) be involved in their child's education?[19]	
Socialisation	This image shows five children in a huddle, with their hands in the middle, to represent teamwork. Children in the picture are of different ethnicities to ensure that the image promotes diversity. This image was chosen to prompt children to think about their peers and	**MQ**: What do you think that this picture shows? **PQs**: **1.** What do you like to do at breaktime and lunchtime? **2.** Do you like to spend time with other children from your class?	**MQ**: What are X's relationships like with peers and staff? **PQs**: **1.** Has X's ability to socialise with others developed or changed since you have worked with him/her? **2.** Does he/she communicate with peers in English or Z[24]? **3.** How does X's social interaction compare to that of	**MQ**: How social is X in school and at home? **PQs**: **1.** What are X's relationships like with teachers?[25] **2.** And with peers? **3.** And with family members?

[16] Adapted from Anderson et al. (2016)
[17] Adapted from Marinova-Todd et al. (2016)
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] Adapted from Baker (2013)
[24] Z = Home language
[25] Rubenstein et al. (2015)

	their social interaction in school.	**3.** Do you like to use Z with others at school? **Prompt**: with teachers, TA, peers.	other EAL pupils? And other autistic pupils?	
Accomplishment	Representing accomplishment, the third image is a colourful rosette with the words 'Star of the Day'. This image was intended as a springboard for discussing the rewards system children have at school, followed by a conversation about the curriculum, including subject preferences, strengths and difficulties.	**MQ**: What might this picture represent? **PQs**: **1.** What do you think it means to be successful at school? **Prompt**: who, what, how – academic success v social success etc. **2.** Can you give me an example of a time when you did something really well at school? **Prompt**: Lesson, subject, assembly, with peers etc. **3.** What is your favourite subject? **Prompt**: Why? And your least favourite? **4.** What makes it hard for you to learn in school? **Prompt**: classroom environment, noise,	**MQ**: What is X's attainment like compared to their peers? **PQs**: **1.** What is your approach to teaching children on the autism spectrum?[26] **2.** And those with EAL? **3.** What are the main barriers preventing X from achieving his/her potential? **4.** What are the main challenges of teaching pupil X? **5.** Are there particular subjects that child X enjoys/excels in?	**MQ**: How do you think X learns best? **PQs**: **1.** What advice do you have for your child's teachers for how to work with your child to improve their experience at school? **2.** Do you think your child's experiences of school will be different at secondary school than primary school?[27] **3.** Can you tell me about the subjects X most enjoys?

26 Lindsey et al. (2013)
27 Dillon & Underwood (2012)

		instructions, others in the class etc.		
Motivation	This image is a school blackboard with two words: the word 'can't' has been crossed out and has been replaced with the word 'can'. This image was included to begin a discussion about the challenges that students might face in school, and the ways in which they might overcome those challenges.	**MQ**: What do you see in this picture? **PQs**: **1.** Why do you think the word 'can't' is crossed out? **2.** When do you feel most motivated to learn? **3.** Do you feel motivated to keep learning Z? **4.** What do you find hardest about school? **Prompt**: certain times of day, subjects, type of learning, interacting etc.	**MQ**: How engaged is X in their learning? **PQs**: **1.** In what circumstances is X more/less motivated to learn? **2.** Is X motivated in learning other languages in school? **3.** What rewards systems are in place at your school, and how does X respond to it?	**MQ**: Does X enjoy school? **PQs**: **1.** When is X most motivated? **2.** What does he/she like doing at home? **3.** How does X respond to rewards?
Environment	This is an image of a primary school classroom. The classroom has no children in it. Instead, there are five tables, surrounded by chairs, a whiteboard and various displays (including a display of the solar	**MQ**: What can we see in this picture? **PQs**: **1.** How does this picture compare to your own classroom? **2.** What do you like about your classroom?	**MQ**: In your experience, what are the best ways to support bilingual autistic children?[28] **PQs**: **1.** What advice/training have you received (if any) about working with children on the autistic spectrum?	**MQ**: What support does the school provide for X? [31] **PQs**: **1.** What suggestions would you offer to other parents in multilingual homes whose child has been diagnosed with autism?[32]

[28] Adapted from: de Valenzuela et al. (2016)
[31] Adapted from Rubenstein, Schelling, Wilczynski, & Hooks (2015)
[32] Adapted from Yu (2013)

system and eco-systems). The purpose of this image was for children to discuss their own classroom environment, first by comparing it with the image, and then by giving their opinions on how their classroom and the resources available to them (including staff) help their learning.	**3.** Who helps you to learn in school? **Prompt**: how do they help? **4.** And what helps you to learn? **Prompt**: resources, people, environment etc. **5.** What would you change about your school environment to help you to learn even more?	**2.** And working with bilingual pupils? **3.** What resources/ support does child X receive from school? **4.** What advice do you have about improving inclusion practices for autistic and EAL pupils?[29] **5.** What do you think would be the best way for your school to encourage bilingualism for children on the autism spectrum?[30] And with special needs more broadly?	**2.** Would you recommend they continue with different languages or stick to one?

[29] Adapted from Lindsey et al. (2013)

[30] *Ibid.*

2.8.4. Pre-interview procedures

Once the three interview schedules were drafted, a process of vetting, rehearsing and piloting took place, as commended by Ravitch and Mittenfelner (2016). Pilot interviews were conducted with 2 children on the autism spectrum, 2 parents of autistic children, and 3 primary school teachers (including 2 headteachers) to check the suitability of the proposed interview schedules. As a result of this piloting process, questions were revised or removed to ensure that they were linguistically and developmentally appropriate (Greene & Hogan, 2005). For example, questions containing words such as 'advantages' and 'benefits' were simplified and two images were changed to convey the school domain in a more child-friendly and accessible way. Most importantly, teachers recommended expanding the participant groupings of the current study to include other practitioners who support bilingual autistic pupils such as teaching assistants and SENDCos, to provide more varied viewpoints. This represented a significant change to the research design, as originally teachers were to be the sole educational practitioners included. This adaptation has yielded greater insight and more varied professional perspectives of the school experiences of the given population. After piloting with teachers, the interview schedules were then verified with two teaching assistants, who offered further feedback on the design and structure of the children's interviews, including suggestions for making some questions more autism-friendly. Piloting the interview schedule also enabled the researcher to develop interview skills (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015); most notably, a tendency to ask too many double questions during the interviews was noted. As a result, the researcher was able to modify this ineffective interview style (Smith et al., 2009) during the main interviews.

Following recruitment for the main study, participants received an outline of the topics to be covered in the interview and the parents of participating children were encouraged to talk to them about the interview in order to build their confidence and afford them ample time to reflect on their experiences (Preece & Jordan, 2010). The aims and procedures of the research were clearly explained to all participants prior to interviews both verbally and in writing and informed written consent was obtained from adult participants included in the study (see appendices 1 & 2). Parents gave written consent for their child to be involved. Pre-interview meetings took place with child participants, which served to build a rapport with the children (Fontana & Frey, 2005) and safeguard against unfamiliarity that could lead to reluctant participation (Daniel & Billingsley, 2010). During this pre-interview meeting, a concise explanation of the study's purpose and procedures was shared with the children and an example

question was posed, along with an example image of a library, to further familiarise them with the procedures. The pre-interview meetings provided a useful opportunity to reassure children that there are no right or wrong answers (Daniel & Billingsley, 2010), and to show them the 'move on/stop' card and 'emoji' palette available to them during the interview, both of which are considered potentially useful tools in participatory research with children (MacDougall & Darbyshire, 2018; Stephenson & Adams, 2016). Children gave verbal assent to participate during these pre-interview meetings and again at the beginning of the main interview.

2.8.5. Interview procedures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve children, thirteen educational practitioners and sixteen parents. This section will outline the methodological principles and linguistic considerations pertinent to these interviews, along with practical concerns such as interview recording, location and length. First, the researcher sought to adhere to key principles for effective interviewing, such as: establishing a rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee (Fontana & Frey, 2005); starting the interview with a less serious question to put the participant at ease (Giogi, 1985); posing clear, non-threatening questions (Robson & McCartan, 2016); avoiding interrupting participants (Wescott & Littleton, 2005); and completing the interview in the allocated time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A 'funnelling' interview technique (Smith & Osborn, 2015) enabled the researcher and interviewee to move from the general to the specific, and follow-up questions were often utilised depending on the flow of the conversation. Each interview was concluded by asking participants if they would like to ask any questions themselves (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

Interviews were as attentive as possible to potential linguistic barriers faced by participants who speak English as an additional language. Although the use of interpreters can impact the rapport between the interviewer and interviewee, and questions may arise about the accuracy of translated responses (Arnot et al., 2014; van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010), parent informants were given a choice regarding interpretation. The rationale for this decision was to ensure that their responses were not limited by their English language proficiency, although it was acknowledged that the transfer of meaning between languages may result in a less reliable interpretation of participants' accounts (van Nes et al., 2010). Most participants were willing to be interviewed in English, however two participants opted to have an interpreter (Baheela in Urdu and Lena in Polish) as they felt more comfortable expressing their views in their home language. Interpreters were made aware of the research aims and questions prior to

interviews for contextualisation purposes (Liamputtong, 2010). It was acknowledged, however, that the phenomenological quality of these two accounts may have been compromised, as an interpretation may not fully convey participants' meaning (Squires, 2009).

With one exception, all interviews were audio-recorded, which provided an accurate record of interviewees' perspectives and meant that the interviewer could fully participate, without having to take notes (Willig, 2013). One child (Marco) wanted to participate in the interview but did not wish for the interview to be recorded. In this case, notes were taken during the interview, and a more comprehensive transcript was produced immediately after the interview. Participants were interviewed individually, but children and parents were given the choice to be accompanied by a family member, in keeping with the studies undertaken by Yu (2013) and Poon et al. (2014). Four children were accompanied by an adult during the interview (parent, teacher or teaching assistant). The majority of parents were interviewed individually, however one father and one grandmother were also interviewed together with the respective child's mother (see Table 1). For convenience, four practitioners (Suzanne, Gill, Lucy, Rachel) from the same school were interviewed together and were questioned about their experiences with two autistic pupils (Jack and Glyn) who were bilingual in Welsh and English (see Table 1). It is acknowledged that a 'focus group' approach was not anticipated in the study design due to concerns that the phenomenological aspect of drawing out individual lived experience may be compromised (Smith et al., 2009). However, it was deemed an appropriate method in this instance because practitioners worked closely with one another, had in-depth knowledge of the two children being discussed, and the focus group generated 'diversity and difference' in perspectives (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996, p.96), which, in turn, enriched the data.

The location of interviews can significantly impact the construction and deconstruction of meaning (Herzog, 2012). Parents were consulted as to the most suitable location for their child. Although it is generally considered unconventional to grant participants a choice of location for the interview (Herzog, 2012), this procedure is common within the autism literature (Brewin, Renwick, & Fudge Schormans, 2008; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Fox et al., 2017) and may have resulted in participants feeling more at ease, leading to more honest responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviewing children at school was considered more advantageous by the researcher because it is a context in which unfamiliar adults are normative (Beresford, Tozer, Rabiee, & Soper, 2004), however five children were interviewed at home. With regard to interviews with parents, seven took place in participants' homes, six at their

child's school, and one in a public space, on the request of the participant. All practitioners were interviewed in school, not only for logistic reasons but also because, despite possible distractions of their daily surroundings (Gillham, 2000), respondents were likely to speak more readily in the context being explored.

As for interview length, previous studies in the autism and EAL literatures vary widely; interviews with children range from 8-19 minutes (Makin, Hill, & Pellicano, 2017) to 45-75 minutes (Poon et al., 2014), while interviews with parents vary from 17–46 minutes (McNerney et al., 2015) to up to 2 hours (Brewin et al., 2008). The reasons for such a fluctuation include possible developmental challenges faced by children on the autism spectrum and potential linguistic barriers for both children and parents with EAL. Interview lengths with school staff in existing literature are more consistent, lasting between 30 and 40 minutes on average (Anderson et al., 2016; Lindsay et al., 2013; Liu & Evans, 2016; Makin et al., 2017). In the current research, interviews with children lasted between 7 minutes 55 seconds and 23 minutes 14 seconds (average = 16 minutes 20 seconds). Interviews with adult participants were longer as they tended to give more detailed responses than child participants. Interviews with practitioners lasted between 9 minutes 13 seconds and 39 minutes 40 seconds (average = 25 minutes 3 seconds), while interviews with parents lasted between 12 minutes 58 seconds and 46 minutes 4 seconds (average = 29 minutes 2 seconds).

2.8.6. Interviews with children

As previously argued, encouraging children and young people to participate in research is of vital importance if we are to better understand their experiences. Phenomenological interviews with children were particularly crucial to the current research because they elucidate experiences that are somewhat foreign to the adult world (Danaher & Briod, 2005). However, interviewing bilingual children on the autism spectrum requires a high degree of sensitivity to the individual's social, linguistic and developmental needs, and an acknowledgement that autistic children may be less willing to engage in consultation (Preece, 2002). Accordingly, particular accommodations were made for the children in this study to facilitate their participation. More closed-questions were asked (as opposed to the more open questions used with adults) as these have been found to be more effective in interviews with autistic children and young people (Kirby, Dickie, & Baranek, 2015; Preece, 2002). Children were also given a card with 'stop' on one side and 'move on' on the other, if they wished to end the interview or

move onto the next question, along with an 'emoji' palette as a visual prompt they could point to when faced with difficulty expressing themselves verbally.

There is a strong advocacy within the literature for using photographs as an interview technique with children on the autism spectrum (Beresford et al., 2004; Preece & Jordan, 2010; Stephenson & Adams, 2016) as it enables 'more to be said with fewer words' (Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007, p.855). Interviews with children therefore employed computer-assisted interviewing (CAI) to elicit their lived experiences. In this study, CAI involved showing children five images on a computer screen related to the five domains of experience (see Table 3). These visual stimuli functioned as a springboard for the conversation and were followed by questions about their experiences of each specific domain (see Table 5). This visual support is more congruent with the preference of many autistic individuals to process information visually rather than linguistically (Newman, Cashin, & Waters, 2010) and serves to facilitate the flow of conversation (Beresford et al., 2004). A particular strength of CAI is the engagement of the interviewee and interviewer in a shared external focus, the reduction of stress for the participant, and the opportunity for the child to control the pace of the interview (Calam, Cox, Glasgow, Jimmieson, & Larsen, 2000; Cousins & Simmonds, 2011; Fängström et al., 2016). However, the researcher had to be attentive to the potential challenges of CAI, namely that attention has to be divided between the interviewee and the computer, and there is less flexibility in changing the order of questions (Couper & Hansen, 2001).

2.8.7. Post-interview procedures

After each interview, children received a book mark as a 'thank you' token and adults were sent a follow-up email to thank them for their participation. Detailed notes were taken by the researcher directly after the interaction outlining first impressions, contextual factors, reflections on methods and key themes (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Transcription took place within 24 hours of the interview (and in most cases within 3 hours) to ensure that the memory of the interaction was fresh. Each interview was transcibed verbatim for the purposes of thorough and accurate data analysis. Given the focus on content over communication (MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004), a denaturalised approach to transcription was adopted whereby the meanings of speech took precedence over form (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). Transcription thus followed the method propounded by Mercer and Sams (2006); punctuation was applied based on the researcher's interpretation of the speech, words spoken with particular emphasis were underlined, and significant non-verbal cues and behaviour –

relevant to the analysis – were described in italics. Unlike the transcription conventions used by conversation analysts (Jefferson, 1996; ten Have, 2007), additional information such as involuntary noises, volume, prosody, and the length of pauses was not deemed pertinent to the data analysis and therefore was not included in the transcription process. All identifying material, such as names and locations, was removed from transcripts prior to analysis. Following transcription, the researcher simultaneously listened to and read each transcript to verify the accuracy of the transcription. This process both re-familiarised the researcher with each interview and served as a crucial first step in the analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

When all the interview data from a participant group had been transcribed, the process of data analysis began, which will be discussed in detail in section 2.8. Following the initial coding of the data and the compilation of a list of master themes, discussions with the researcher's supervisors took place to verify the initial findings. A researcher who was both independent (i.e. outside the immediate research team) and qualified (i.e. with experience of analysing qualitative data) then carried out validity checks to verify that the themes were consistent with the data (Smith, 1996). When the themes were well-established, the researcher then contacted participating educators and parents with a summary of the main findings within their respective participant group (see appendices 3 & 4). Giorgi (2010) is sceptical about this process of 'member-checking' because 'the meaning of an experience, once it has been expressed, is as accessible to the other (researcher) as it is to oneself' (p.13). In this vein, the purpose of contacting adult participants was more to inform them of the findings, than to validate them. However, they were nonetheless given the opportunity to clarify any ambiguities or misrepresentations of their experiences.

In view of the 'double empathy' problem in autism research (Milton, 2012) – that is, the non-autistic researcher's potential biases and misunderstandings of autistic experience – and the possible vulnerability of children participating in research, a process of member-checking was undertaken for child participants. As in Humphrey and Lewis (2008), individualised child-friendly summaries of the children's interviews were shared with parents (see appendix 5 for one example), who were asked to read the summary with their child and to share any additional information or amendments that the child wished to make. This process was also particularly important for the child whose interview was not audio-recorded, as it was more likely that the researcher may divert from the original meaning. His mother replied to say

that he was content with the summary and did not wish to add further comments. In two instances, where contact had not been established with parents apart from their written consent, the researcher returned to the school to read through the summary with the child and give them an opportunity to suggest alterations.

2.9. Strategy for data analysis

2.9.1. Analysis in IPA

Interpretative phenomenological analysis was both the overarching methodological framework in this study, and the specific method employed for data analysis. Before outlining the process by which data was analysed in this study, it is important to consider the distinctive features of the analytic process involved in IPA. IPA should be idiographic, balancing the distinctiveness of an individual's lived experience with the commonalities shared by the wider group (Reid et al., 2005). This requires an iterative process of movement within the hermeneutic circle. Within this multi-perspectival design, it was important to compare experiences first within and then across participant groups. In like manner, the analysis sought to draw together the phenomenological (that is, the lived reality of the participant through their own voice) with the hermeneutic (that is, the researcher's interpretation of this reality) (Willig, 2013). Smith et al. (2009) caution that novice IPA researchers tend to describe participants' experiences successfully – often using transcript excerpts to exemplify description – but fail to provide sufficient interpretation. Particular attention was therefore afforded to ensuring that interpretations were as reliable and rich as possible.

Given that IPA is an inductive approach, it was important to avoid imposing pre-determined themes, such as the five domains of experience (see Table 3), onto the data. Instead, following the initial analysis, the researcher had to consider the master list of themes within the body of existing research both on experiences of autism and experiences of bilingualism. Considering the ways and extent to which participants' experiences and emergent themes fit within the wider literature was of paramount importance during these analyses. Finally, despite the researcher's best efforts to ensure that analyses aligned as closely as possible to participants' original meaning, there is an acknowledgment that truth claims are tentative and subjective in IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

2.9.2. Analytical process

While Smith et al. (2009) are keen to highlight that IPA is flexible and non-prescriptive, the stages they outline for data analysis were broadly adopted in the current study and are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Stages of analysis based on Smith et al. (2009)

	Analytical stage	**Explanation**
1	Read and re-read first transcript line by line	Multiple, close readings of the first transcript without making notes familiarises the researcher with the text and provides active engagement with the data.
2	Note descriptive comments in the left-hand margin	This involves providing a detailed descriptive, linguistic and conceptual commentary of the participants' account to identify the ways in which they approach different topics. Conceptual coding at this stage may lead the researcher to ask pertinent questions about the participant's views on aspects of the phenomenon.
3	Note emergent themes in the right-hand margin	The iterative movement between discreet chunks of text and the narrative as a whole comes into play. This step provides a bridge between the participant's description and the researcher's interpretation and involves condensing these interpretations into concise statements that represent emergent themes.
4	Search for connections across themes	In order to view the narrative as a whole, rather than merely its constituent parts, the researcher should seek to establish the occurrence and import of particular themes throughout the text. Evaluating the importance of each theme is crucial to this stage, and may result in discarding certain emergent themes and foregrounding others.
5	Repeat the same process for all transcripts	The process in stages 1-4 are repeated with each transcript. Although the researcher will have more awareness of potential themes after analysing the first transcript, it is essential to undergo an equally rigorous analysis for each transcript and search for the uniqueness of each participant's experience.
6	Identify superordinate themes across accounts	Once the researcher is confident that all themes have been identified and can be

		accounted for with excerpts from the text, superordinate themes are identified across transcripts. This takes place through processes of abstraction (classifying similar themes), subsumption (bringing together themes under a superordinate theme) and numeration (establishing the frequency of themes).
7	Cluster themes into a master list	This final stage of the analysis involves finding synergies between superordinate themes and creating a master list, which tends to be the focus of the discussion section of an IPA study. This master list may be presented as a table of themes, a hierarchy or a model.

Following the steps outlined above, the first interview transcript of each participant group (starting with the children's accounts) were read and re-read line-by-line in search of descriptive, linguistic and conceptual significance. Descriptive comments were annotated in the left-hand margin, which primarily consisted of noting and summarising significant aspects of the text. The transcript was then read again and emergent themes marked in the right-hand margin. The process of reading and identifying themes continued until the researcher was satisfied that all possible themes had been considered. Each transcript in the participant group was then analysed in the same fashion.

One of Giorgi's major criticisms against IPA is that the analyst does not have to account for all the data, but rather selects what they deem to be most relevant, leading to a possible selectivity bias (2010). In view of this criticism, once an initial list of emergent themes had been established for each participant group, verbatim quotations were grouped with their corresponding theme. This provided consistent evidence of a theme's selection and enabled the researcher to ground thematic selection in the data (Willig, 2013). Following the compilation of all emergent themes in each participant group, a process of refining and de-duplicating these themes took place (see Table 7). At this stage, insignificant and overlapping themes were discarded to create a master list of superordinate themes through abstraction, subsumption and numeration techniques (Smith et al., 2009). When a master list of themes had been established, an independent researcher reviewed three transcripts from each participant group along with their concomitant master themes to verify that themes were congruent with the data.

Consonant with Larkin et al.'s suggestion (2019) for IPA studies with a multi-perspectival design, in this research participant groups were initially treated as three separate micro-systems (chapters 3 to 5 in this thesis) followed by a cross-group analysis (chapter 6). In the data from interviews with children, 82 initial emergent themes were identified. This was then whittled down to 45 subthemes following a process of refinement and de-duplication, which culminated in 2 superordinate themes and 5 subthemes after a process of subsumption, abstraction and numeration (see Table 9 in chapter 3). The data from practitioner and parental interviews yielded a significantly longer list of emergent themes (219 and 327 respectively), perhaps due to the length and depth of the interviews. While the balance of speech between the interviewer and the interviewee was, on average, equal in the interviews with children, adult participants spoke with far greater detail than children, which may explain the imbalance in emergent themes. Accordingly, there was far more data than could be discussed within the parameters of the thesis, therefore priority was given to presenting data that directly related to the research questions in chapter 1. For practitioners' interview data, 3 superordinate themes and 8 subthemes were selected from an initial 219 emergent themes (presented in Table 12 in chapter 4). For the parental interviews, 327 emergent themes became 246 sub-themes following de-duplication, which underwent another round of reduction to 49 subthemes. These 49 subthemes then became 4 superordinate and 12 sub-themes (presented in Table 15 in chapter 5). Further details of the thematic reduction undertaken for each participation group are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Theme reduction

Participant group	N. of emergent themes	N. of sub-themes after de-duplication	N. of sub-themes after reduction	N. of superordinate themes	Superordinate themes
Children	82	45	5	2	1. Identity formation 2. School experience
Practitioners	219	56	8	3	1. Perspectives on bilingualism in autism 2. Comparisons across two linguistically different settings

					3. Creating inclusive learning environments
Parents	327	246	58	4	1. Perceptions about the value of bilingualism 2. Factors influencing language decisions 3. Consequences of language choices 4. Shifting expectations

2.10. Research rigour

It is widely acknowledged that evaluating the 'validity' of qualitative research with sole recourse to the well-established criteria used to assess quantitative work may well be counterproductive (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Willig, 2013; Yardley, 2000). There are nonetheless many commonalities between quality measures for qualitative and quantitative research. Elliott et al. (1999), for example, list the following criteria: explicit scientific context and purpose; appropriate methods; respect for participants; specification of methods; appropriate discussion, clarity of presentation; and, contribution to knowledge (p.220). As such, pitting quantitative against qualitative research with regards to validity arguably leads to a false dichotomy. In this thesis, several strategies were employed to increase methodological rigour, both as part of the growing corpus of studies using interpretative phenomenological analysis and as a piece of qualitative research more broadly. Given the creativity involved in IPA research, Smith et al. (2009) caution that 'criteria for validity will need to be flexibly applied' (p.184). Accordingly, the four principles of good qualitative research proposed by Yardley (2000) were applied to the present research. These include: (1) sensitivity to context; (2) commitment and rigour; (3) transparency and coherence; and (4) impact and importance.

This thesis sought 'sensitivity to context' by grounding the research in the existing literature on the interaction between bilingualism and autism. Each of the three distinct IPA studies in the thesis (presented in chapters 3 to 5) discuss findings with reference to previous analyses of the experiences of bilingual children and autistic children respectively, along with existing knowledge about the perspectives of families and practitioners. With regard to terminological sensitivity, the author considered the possible terms related to autism and

bilingualism, opting for the term 'autistic' and 'on the autism spectrum' rather than 'person with autism', given the preferences expressed among the autistic community (Kenny et al., 2016). Moreover, in the presentation of excerpts, participants' own words are used throughout, even though they do not always use standardised English, to ensure that their authentic voices are heard. On a procedural level, 'sensitivity to context' was enhanced by providing children with personalised visual aids during the interviews and ensuring that interpretation was available for participants who preferred to speak in a language other than English. Details about the linguistic and policy landscapes of England and Wales and descriptive data about the sample (e.g. age, language profile, educational setting) were included in the study (see 2.4. and 2.6. respectively) to give contextual relevance to analyses (Elliott et al., 1999; Yardley, 2000).

The second of Yardley's criteria, 'commitment and rigour', involves the researcher's engagement with the phenomenon, consideration of participants' needs, and well-argued defence of each methodological decision. The quality, consistency and depth of the interviewing was crucial to understanding participants' experiences (Kvale, 1995) and required a personal commitment on the part of the researcher to due care and diligence. Consonant with extant IPA research, data were transcribed directly after each interview for the sake of accuracy, and detailed field notes were taken to ensure thorough coverage of the participants' experiences.[33] Smith et al. (2009) also consider systematic analysis with appropriate idiographic engagement to be a central tenet of Yardley's principle of 'commitment and rigour'. The researcher's supervisors were consulted regarding the interpretation of interview data and the list of superordinate themes with and the master list of themes was reviewed by an independent researcher to increase the confirmability of the findings. Ensuring that other possible avenues of explanation were explored, checking for disconfirming evidence and exceptions to patterns, and keeping the findings within the context from which they emerged were of paramount importance to the credibility of the analyses (Patton, 2005). Equally, caution was taken to prevent divergence between analytic claims and evidence in the data, and too much overlap in themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Yardley's third principle of 'transparency and coherence' (2000) relates to clearly delineated procedures, clarity of argumentation, and researcher reflexivity. Much has been

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[33] Although the names used in the field notes were pseudonyms, information included within them may contain identifiable information and therefore it was not appropriate to include them in an appendix.

written about the efficacy of 'member checking' or 'credibility checks' to increase transparency in qualitative research (Elliott et al, 1999; Willig, 2013). Morse (2015) expresses reservations about allowing participants to change their minds, Riessman (1994) has concerns that the analyst's interpretations may be somewhat undermined, and Smith (2018) underscores that engaging the informant in the interpretative process again is not an integral feature of IPA. However, member checking is an increasingly common approach for ensuring that informants' views are accurately presented and has been employed in the nascent field of autism and bilingualism (Ijalba, 2016; Jegatheesan, 2011; Yu, 2013). It was thus deemed an effective strategy for increasing the credibility of themes within the children's accounts. In pursuit of reflexivity, the researcher has attempted to heed Elliott et al.'s call (1999) in 'owning one's perspective', by disclosing their positionality and the potential biases, assumptions, and external factors that may have shaped the research (Willig, 2013; Yardley, 2000) (see 2.5.). Coherence in this thesis involved the pursuit of a delicate balance between presenting the prevalence and convergence of themes within and across participant groups, whilst upholding the thesis' idiographic commitment by illuminating the nuances of individual experience (Elliott et al., 1999). Attempts have been made to present analyses that offer both the breadth and depth of each theme, combining the phenomenological and hermeneutic with pertinent examples from participants' own words (Smith, 2011).

Finally, Yardley's fourth criteria (2000), 'impact and importance', questions the extent to which the research resonates with the reader. In the context of IPA, this thesis aims not merely to describe the experiences of bilingual autistic children and their parents and educators, but to interpret their lived reality, and in so doing, bring their stories to life. In practical terms, the research aims to bring to the fore implications for policy and practice, which are discussed in chapter 7. These conclusions can only be drawn out when the analysis of participants' individual experiences is clear, coherent and concise.

2.11. Chapter summary and conclusions

Interpretative phenomenological analysis was considered a useful methodological framework for this thesis because of its commitment to illuminating participants' lived experience and giving a voice to those whose experiences may have been misconstrued in, or precluded from, mainstream narratives (Smith et al., 2009). With this in mind, the use of IPA may somewhat blur the lines between research and advocacy, as the researcher highlights 'processes of marginalisation or […] contexts in which people are misunderstood' (Larkin et al., 2019,

p.183). While largely absent from research into the experiences of bilingualism, IPA is gaining ground as a useful *modus operandi* in qualitative autism research (Howard et al., 2019; MacLeod, 2019).

This chapter has sought to describe the guiding principles underpinning IPA, its roots in phenomenology and its pertinence to the research questions posed in chapter 1. It argues that semi-structured interviews were the most useful method for answering the research questions posed, and describes the procedures undertaken to find answers to those questions; from recruitment and sampling through to data analysis and member checking. Crucially, this chapter seeks to balance justification of the practical realities of the research with theoretical considerations of rigour and ethics. Having laid the theoretical and methodological foundations for this thesis in chapters 1 and 2, it is now time to turn our attention to the findings of each of the three IPA studies, which are presented, in turn, in the following three chapters.

3. The Lived Experiences of Bilingual Children on the Autism Spectrum

3.1. Chapter aims and questions

The number of children diagnosed with autism who speak more than one language is inevitably on the rise in England by dint of increases in both autistic and bilingual school-aged populations (DfE, 2018; DfE, 2019). However, first-person accounts are conspicuously absent from both the autism (Fayette & Bond, 2018) and the EAL (Anderson et al., 2016) literatures. In part, this is due to the potential methodological, communicative and linguistic challenges associated with interviewing this population. In autism research, legitimate concerns have been raised regarding the paucity of studies that facilitate the participation of autistic individuals (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2018; Pellicano et al., 2014).

With a commitment to an equality of voice, interpretative phenomenological analysis is increasingly viewed as a useful approach in understanding how individuals experience autism (Howard et al., 2019; MacLeod, 2019). Using IPA as its methodological framework, this chapter examines the lived experiences of twelve bilingual children on the autism spectrum with a particular focus on their experiences of school. After outlining the research aims and questions, I will discuss the importance and challenges of eliciting children's experiences. Following the introduction of participants and procedures specific to this study, the two superordinate themes, 'identity formation' and 'school experience', will be explored using excerpts from the children's interviews.

The aims of this chapter are threefold: (1) to illuminate the lived experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum, particularly in relation to school; (2) to understand how various factors such as schools' linguistic profiles and parental decisions about language maintenance affect children's conceptualisation of their multilingual identities; and (3) to reflect on the efficacy of particular adaptations, such as computer-assisted interviewing, in eliciting the perspectives of bilingual autistic children. The educational provision for this group of learners is an under-researched area within existing literature on bilingualism in autism (Bird et al., 2016b), which focuses primarily on experiences within the familial setting. Previous research investigating the school experiences of autistic learners tends to emphasise one or two of the discreet domains of experience (see Table 3), with particular attention given to children's

social development (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Rotheram-Fuller, Kasari, Chamberlain, & Locke, 2010; Stephenson & Adams, 2016). Instead, this chapter seeks to move away from discrete domains and instead capture children's holistic experience, especially within the school setting.

As posed in chapter 1 (see 1.6.), the overarching question considered by this chapter is research question 1:

What are the lived experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum?

No research to date has explored the lived experiences of bilingual autistic children themselves, despite a growing body of research on family decisions regarding language use (Hampton et al., 2017, Yu, 2016 etc.). This chapter therefore seeks to make a unique contribution to current knowledge and understanding of bilingual autistic children's linguistic and social identities. Drawing on the conceptualisation of experience outlined in Table 3, the following sub-questions shaped the current study:

1. To what extent do children perceive themselves to be bilingual?
2. What are children's social and learning experiences in school?
3. How do learning environments contribute to children's school experiences?
4. What role do emotion and autism awareness play in their school experiences?
5. How do contextual factors (such as the school's linguistic profile and parental language choices) affect children's experiences and perceptions of bilingualism?

3.2. Participants

3.2.1. Pupil voice

Pupils' voices should be at the forefront of research that informs educational practice and policy, yet are frequently an under-utilised resource (Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). This is particularly true for learners who are identified as different to their peers. Indeed, the first-person perspectives of children with developmental conditions and those who are bilingual – or identified as EAL – have been largely absent from literature on school experience (Anderson et al., 2016; Fayette & Bond, 2018). Not only is listening to pupils' first-hand experiences essential in ensuring that their education is more inclusive (Poon et al., 2014; Saggers, 2015),

but their active participation in educational decisions that will affect their lives is also a fundamental human right (United Nations, 1989).

However, facilitating the participation of children who are both bilingual and autistic engender particular challenges. Fayette and Bond's systematic review (2018) of research eliciting the views of young people on the autism spectrum found just twelve relevant studies, with only three deemed to be of a high methodological quality based on Gough's research quality framework (2007). Similarly, Fletcher-Watson et al. (2018) contend that, while autism research is rightly moving towards a more participatory model, the inclusion of children's voices, as well as the perspectives of individuals with intellectual disabilities or who are non-verbal, is lacking. This highlights significant scope for improvement in capturing the lived experiences of autistic individuals, especially children. For some, difficulties with social interaction, processing language and identifying and evaluating emotion can make an interview scenario problematic (Preece & Jordan, 2010).

Where an interview is possible, considering the impact of physical spaces (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2018), modifying questions and questioning style (Stephenson & Adams, 2016), and providing visual prompts (Loyd, 2015) are all possible strategies for enhancing autistic pupils' participation. Harrington, Foster, Rodger, and Ashburner (2014) recommend creative and flexible approaches to research methods with autistic pupils, and a focus on what works for the individual child. Harnessing the experience, skills and expertise of practitioners who work with the children being interviewed in order to understand their specific interests, strengths and difficulties may help researchers to better adapt their procedures to the needs of the individual child (Beresford et al., 2004; Stephenson & Adams, 2016).

Less attention has been afforded to the efficacy of research methods with bilingual or EAL pupils, which indicates there is not yet a large enough body of research investigating the experiences of bilingual pupils. An obvious potential barrier for EAL pupils partaking in interviews is that their expression may be constrained by their proficiency in English (Arnot et al., 2014). Evans and Liu (2018) suggest using interpreters for newly-arrived children to ensure participation, although it is important to consider the impact of an additional unknown adult in the room on children's responses (Arnot et al., 2014). Moving away from interviews, Conteh, Gregory, Kearney, and Mor-Somerfield (2005) and Safford and Drury (2013) recommend ethnographic research methods to understand young bilingual children's experiences,

particularly in situations where 'bilingual children's voices are silent and their home lives are invisible' (Safford & Drury, 2013, p. 78).

Whether through verbal or non-verbal approaches, there is no doubt that eliciting the perspectives of neurologically and linguistically diverse children will offer a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and has the potential to both inform and instigate evidence-based policy recommendations. The challenge for researchers in the field of bilingualism and autism is to find suitable, ethical and engaging ways to do this. The current study sought to facilitate the participation of bilingual autistic children through computer-assisted interviewing, the provision of an 'emoji' palette and a 'move on/stop' card, as well as a pre-interview meeting with each child to build a rapport and explain the procedures. Reflections on the suitability of these techniques will be presented in section 3.6.3. The application of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was also employed as an increasingly prominent approach in autism research, given its commitment to uncovering and interpreting the authentic voices of participants (Howard et al., 2019).

3.2.2. Demographic information

A sample of twelve children aged between 7 and 14 were purposively selected to take part in this study. Table 8 presents demographic information about the children, using the same numbering system used throughout the thesis (i.e. based on Table 1). Children who were discussed by parents and/or practitioners but did not themselves take part in interviews are still included in the table below, i.e. Dyfan, Zehra, Jack, Glyn, James and Zoe. These individuals did not participate in interviews due to their age or because their parents did not deem an interview to be suitable for them.

The children interviewed had exposure to the following languages: Hindi (n=3), Welsh (n=3), Italian (n=2), Bengali (n=1), Gujarati (n=1) Lithuanian (n=1), Polish (n=1), Punjabi (n=1), Spanish (n=1), and Urdu (n=1). Not all the children in this study were classified as having EAL, partly because some were exposed to English along with an additional language or languages at home and can thus be described as simultaneous bilinguals (De Houwer, 1995), and partly because some acquired Welsh as an additional language at school. Three of the children interviewed were born outside the UK (Daniel, Jokubus and William). Nine out of the twelve schools attended by the children interviewed had a school population that could be described as multilingual (that is, the school either had a percentage of EAL pupils above the

national average (21.2% [DfE, 2018]) or was a Welsh-medium school). Two of the children interviewed attended Welsh-medium schools, in which the language of instruction was Welsh, but came from English-dominant homes.

Table 8: Demographics of children

	Participant (gender)	Age	Took part in interview	Language other than English	Born in UK	Interview Location (Time – mins:secs)	School Type	School's language profile
1	Dyfan	6	No	Welsh	Yes	-	Ma/Pr[34]	WM
2	Nish (M)	7	Yes	Bengali Hindi	Yes	Home (20:44)	Ma/Pr	Above average EAL %
3	Zehra (F)	7	No	Turkish	Yes	-	Unit in Ma/Pr	Above average EAL %
4	Thomas (M)	8	Yes	Welsh	Yes	Home (17:23)	Ma/Pr	Welsh-medium
5	William (M)	8	Yes	Spanish	No	Home (23:14)	Ma/Pr	Above average EAL %
6	Suvrat (M)	9	Yes	Hindi	Yes	School (14:14)	Ma/Pr	Above average EAL %
7	Amira (F)	9	Yes	Urdu Punjabi	Yes	School (9:10)	Ma/Pr	Below average EAL %
8	Luke (M)	9	Yes	Italian	Yes	School (12:47)	Ma/Pr	Above average EAL %
9	Daniel (M)	9	Yes	Polish	No	School (7:55)	Ma/Pr	Below average EAL %
10	Ryan (M)	9	Yes	Welsh	Yes	School (13:08)	Ma/Pr	WM
11	Jack (M) Glyn (M)	9 11	No No	Welsh	Yes	-	Unit in Ma/Pr	EM

[34] Ma/Pr = Mainstream Primary

12	Rahul (M)	10	Yes	Hindi Gujarati	Yes	School (16:03)	Ma/Pr	Below average EAL %
13	Gareth (M)	11	Yes	Welsh	Yes	Home (21:47)	Sp[35]	English-medium
14	Marco (M)	12	Yes	Italian	Yes	Home (18:05)	Ma/Se[36]	Above average EAL %
15	Jokubus (M)	14	Yes	Lithuanian	No	School (19:57)	Ma/Se	Above average EAL %
16	James (M) Zoe (F)	18+ 18+	No No	French Arabic	No	-	Sp Ma/Se	Below average EAL %

3.3. Results overview

Two superordinate and five subordinate themes were extracted from the children's interview data (see Table 9). The first superordinate theme, 'identity formation', illustrates children's reflections on being bilingual, on their learning and on their social interaction. Children expressed both positive and negative views about their multilingual identities, with those educated in a more multilingual environment tending to hold more positive attitudes towards the value of bilingualism. Irrespective of their attitudes, a strong tendency emerged in which children minimised both the importance of bilingualism in their own lives and their linguistic proficiency in the language(s) other than English. Regarding their identities as learners, children's levels of motivation in school varied significantly, however, common preferences for art and maths, and an aversion to literacy-based subjects were consistent across accounts. In line with previous autism research, many children reported having limited – and sometimes challenging – social interaction with peers.

The second superordinate theme, 'school experience', relates to children's perceptions of their learning environments and their sense of well-being at school. Children discussed the support they receive and gave recommendations for improving their learning environments; more time to process information emerged as a key suggestion. Many of the children also considered the important role played by technology in their learning environments. With

[35] Sp = Specialist autism school
[36] Ma/Se = Mainstream secondary

regards to well-being, children's school experiences were often marked by challenges in regulating emotions and some children described a lack of enjoyment at school. Only three children demonstrated an awareness of their autism, with two reflecting on its impact on their school experience.

Table 9: Superordinate and subordinate themes (children's accounts)

1. IDENTITY FORMATION

A. Being bilingual	⇒ Compartmentalising language ⇒ Minimising the importance of bilingualism ⇒ Recognising the benefits
B. Developing as learners	⇒ Overcoming challenges ⇒ Curriculum
C. Social identity	⇒ Limited social circles ⇒ Social development

2. SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

A. Learning environments	⇒ Classrooms ⇒ Support ⇒ Technology
B. Well-being	⇒ Emotional regulation ⇒ Attitudes towards school ⇒ Autism awareness

Each subtheme is delineated below with excerpts from the children's own words to capture the nuances of their school experiences. As outlined in chapter 2, children's responses were facilitated through interview questions and images (see Table 5), as well as special

adaptations to the interviews, the efficacy of which will be discussed in section 3.6.3. of this chapter.

3.4. Theme 1: Identity formation

3.4.1. Results

A) Being bilingual

Children's bilingual identities emerged as central to their accounts and featured a process of compartmentalising language use, minimising their own language proficiency and, for some, recognising the benefits of bilingualism. First, many children compartmentalised their language use, with English or Welsh as the 'language for school', and their parents' native language as the 'language for home'. Suvrat demonstrates this notion of compartmentalising language use; when asked 'when do you speak Hindi?', he replied 'when I am in India'. This differs from his mother's account (Chandra), as she says that Hindi is the primary language used at home. When asked about the contexts in which he speaks Welsh, Gareth answered, 'to talk with parents and on Wednesdays'. Having started in a Welsh-medium school, Gareth had recently moved to an English-medium school and explained that Wednesdays are 'the only time of the week where there's a Welsh teacher. So we speak Welsh then'. He was the only child in Wales who spoke Welsh at home and predominantly English at school, but like others in Wales, made a strong distinction between linguistic spaces. Only two children mentioned drawing on their multilingual repertoires in the school environment. Daniel stated that he uses Polish with other pupils in school, and Jokubus remarked that his classmates describe him as 'the King of Lithuania' and that he speaks Lithuanian with the school librarian.

Some children were less cognisant of their bilingual language use and exposure; Rahul described his parents' language as 'Indian' rather than specifying which language was spoken, while Amira was unable to identify which language she used at home. Instead, she said, 'my dad speaks in a different language, so does my mum'. Interestingly, she did not mention her own linguistic repertoire. This sense of distance between being bilingual and her own identity continued as she spoke about the benefits of bilingualism. She suggested that being bilingual 'makes them special'; her use of 'them' rather than 'us' or 'me' indicates that she may not consider herself bilingual despite speaking Punjabi and Urdu at home.

Consistent with previous research into children's perceptions about their home language (Liu & Evans, 2016), many children minimised the importance of their multilingual identities:

> *I only know two languages – English and Polish. (Daniel)*

> *I don't speak it that much, only when I'm in Italy or when I'm speaking to my grandad on the telephone – which is like every night. (Marco)*

> *I don't really know Hindi… so mostly… so I use Bengali most … I don't even know everything in Bengali. (Nish)*

> *I just know English and a tiny bit of Spanish […] I can only say 'hello' in Spanish, and 'bye bye', and two more words, but I can't like say a conversation or something. (William)*

> *I don't speak different languages. (Rahul)*

The recurrence of 'only' and 'just' in many of the examples above illustrates children's reluctance in identifying as multilingual. One interpretation is therefore that in downplaying their competence, the children are disassociating themselves from their home language. This tendency to minimise home language competence and use often stood in contrast to the accounts of their parents, who reported that the children were much more proficient than the children themselves indicated. Marco's report that 'I don't speak it that much' is somewhat incongruous with his following comment that he uses Italian 'like every night'. Most strikingly, Rahul was keen not to associate himself with multilingualism, stating 'I don't speak different languages', despite the fact that he hears other languages at home and with wider family members, according to his mother. Instead, he is keen to emphasise the importance of English. In reference to his favourite Belgian football player, he insists, 'He doesn't speak that language [French], he speaks English'.

Rahul was one of three children educated in a more monolingual setting (i.e. schools with a lower percentage of EAL students), all of whom stated a preference for English and felt uncomfortable identifying as bilinguals. Rahul described bilingualism as a 'bad thing' because 'no-one will understand you', while Luke noted, 'I prefer to speak English over Italian.... I just feel more comfortable with it'. William, who also attended a school with a low proportion of EAL pupils, perceived his 'tiny' knowledge of Spanish differently to his mother, who reported that he is 'constantly hearing Spanish in the house'. These examples perhaps suggest that receptive language competence is less valued by the children than expressive language; that

the mark of being bilingual is in one's ability to speak rather than to understand. William viewed multilingualism as a skill for later in life, rather than an immediate priority, suggesting that 'when you're older you can speak to people that are in those languages'. This example dovetails with the perceptions of parents, who discussed their children's future multilingual use and identity, viewing multilingualism as an ever-changing state rather than a fixed construct.

Children who were educated in more multilingual environments tended to hold their dual language use in higher regard and recognised some advantages of bilingualism. Gareth, for example, noted how 'I understand what people are saying', 'you can impress people that don't speak the language' and can even 'make them feel jealous and want to learn the language'. All participants, except Thomas and Ryan who both attended Welsh-medium schools but speak English at home, cited communication with family members as the primary reason for speaking more than one language. For example, Luke stated: 'I can communicate with my grandma who is currently here. And I can… with my other grandparents…I also speak Italian'. Children also described bilingualism as a useful skill that increased opportunities for communication.

> If you can chat to them in a different language, they may understand and then talk to you back. (Nish)

> It's helpful. It's good to know more than one language… you can meet people in other countries. (Ryan)

> You can help people in other languages. (Thomas)

In all the above statements, children use 'you' rather than a first-person narrative to discuss the potential benefits of bilingualism. Like Amira's earlier account, there is a sense in which children do not identify with bilingualism themselves, or at the very least, are uncertain about how multilingual advantages may apply to their own context. Continuing this trend of describing the general rather than the specific, Suvrat was the only child to highlight a religious facet of multilingual proficiency, stating that 'it's good to speak Hindi because it's good to pray to God'. Being able to use his home language, he felt, gave him access to his religion in a way that monolingualism may not have.

As Suvrat's statement suggests, even when children viewed multilingualism in a positive light, the sense of distance between bilingualism and their own linguistic identities

prevailed. Marco, for example, argues that a benefit of bilingualism is that 'foreign people can understand you', while Ryan says, 'if you're in France and you know French you can stop and talk French instead of English'. It is interesting that neither child refers explicitly to their own languages (Italian and Welsh, respectively). Instead, Marco's use of 'foreign people' infers a sense of 'otherness', whereas Ryan equates bilingualism with French, the most common foreign language taught in schools in the UK, rather than Welsh. This may suggest that even children who value bilingualism in general may not perceive their own bilingualism as inherently valuable.

This finding is consistent with the aforementioned notion of children minimising their language proficiencies. Daniel was the only child who stated that he was more proficient in his home language than English – 'I understand Polish more than English' – and the only one to draw on code-switching practices: 'sometimes I say a couple of words in Polish and then some in English, yeah, cos I don't know very well how to say it in English'. He also mentions home language literacy, but still plays down his bilingual ability; 'I know the Polish language but I can't write Polish' is then followed by 'sometimes I can read it, sometimes I can, like, write a little bit of letters'. The repetition of 'sometimes' once again highlights that Daniel may underestimate his linguistic proficiency.

B) Developing as learners

Along with their attitudes towards bilingualism, the children interviewed also commented on their identities as learners. Many expressed a fascination with learning and a frustration about gaps in their knowledge. Gareth expressed a desire to 'feel like I'm smarter. Not the closed kind of looking smart, but actually being smart'. This suggests an awareness of social pressures to look intelligent and a desire to move beyond the superficial. Similarly, Jokubus commented, 'I be sad when I want to know, like, everything. I want to know everything', before giving the example of Simon from *Alvin and the Chipmunks*: 'I want to become like Simon. Simon knows everything'. This intellectual curiosity and aspiration were mirrored across many of the children's accounts. However, in line with the finding that socially-prescribed perfectionistic beliefs are more prevalent among autistic children (Greenaway & Howlin, 2010), participants often identified making mistakes at school as a distressing experience. When asked what he would change at school, Nish responded, 'I wouldn't make any mistakes because sometimes I make mistakes'. Nevertheless, he subsequently explained the benefits of making mistakes:

> **Nish**: *So, first the brain is like that [draws small circle on page with dots], like I think 1cm… so whenever you make mistakes like, la…la… la [draws crosses in circle], and then there's something that's wrong, you cross it out and then your brain goes even bigger [draws bigger circle next to smaller one].*
> **Interviewer**: *So is making mistakes a good thing?*
> **Nish**: *Yeah! The more mistakes you get…*
> **Nish's father**: *[corrects Nish] The more mistakes you make…*
> **Nish**: *Ah 'you make', I mean − thank you dad − the bigger the brain gets.*

This powerful insight into the notion of 'growth mindset' (Dweck, 2006) is echoed in other participants' accounts about overcoming challenges in school. Ryan, for instance, describes the process of improving his handwriting through consistent practice, while Rahul emphasises the importance of perseverance by stating: 'if you can't do it you don't give up. If you can do it, you never give up. You can still do it'. He then recounted his experience as a learner using the oft-cited metaphor of a light:

> *Think in your brain. Keep thinking, keep thinking, and then, have a question. Then there's a light. So thinking, then a light. There's a light here [gestures with hand] and it means 'I got it'.*

With regard to the national curriculum, two school subjects emerged as clear favourites among participants: maths and art. The seemingly opposing demands of these subjects highlight the variability of autistic children's preferences and skills in the classroom. While ability in maths is stereotypically associated with autism (Baron-Cohen, 2015), less is known about the association between autism and creative tasks. Opportunities to develop and use their imagination were welcomed by many of the children. Marco, for instance, stated, 'I've just started writing a book', while Luke notes, 'I like to play off-screen minecraft zombie invasion'. In her own interview, Luke's mother describes some of the social advantages of his imagination, commenting that other children 'started to gravitate towards him because he used to make up the games'. William noted that he learnt best 'by pictures', which tallies with visual supports and schedules being widely regarded as a useful resource in the teaching of children on the autism spectrum (Knight, Sartini, & Spriggs, 2015).

Most of the students learnt a foreign language at school, but only Luke remarked that being bilingual may be advantageous when learning an additional language: 'French can sound a bit like Italian and… and sometimes English'. Despite this advantage, Luke prefaced his statement by saying, 'I'm not really good at speaking French'. Others described languages as hard and unenjoyable, which is consistent with the finding that the children's least favourite

subjects featured an element of literacy. Accordingly, literacy-based tasks were presented as the most challenging part of school life:

> *If we're writing letters I usually find it hard, because I don't really know what to write. (Luke)*

> *When I have to write like a lot, it's like super hard. (Daniel)*

C) Social identity

After discussing the image of children playing on a playground (see Table 5), most children reported having limited friendship circles and that they found social interaction – both inside and outside the classroom – a challenge. The fragility of their relationships with peers is epitomised by Jokubus' affirmation that 'sometimes I have friends. Sometimes I don't'. Equally, William's statement that 'I don't really play with anyone' and Amira's report that 'I made just a little bit of friends' resonated across many accounts. Nish felt unable to talk about his social interactions with peers, saying, 'I don't really have much… but I just don't know, I just can't talk to you'. This reluctance to speak about his socialisation in school – when compared with his excitement in talking about the academic aspect of school life – showcases the challenges some autistic children face in discussing issues related to social interaction. In turn, this suggests a need for different research methods in eliciting their perspectives on this domain of their experiences.

Children arguably demonstrated more self-awareness about their social identities than their linguistic and academic experiences. Jokubus, for example, stated, 'sometimes I speak too much' and, when asked whether she works well with peers, Amira replied, 'not really. I'm a bit annoying'. This self-deprecation reveals Amira's social vulnerability and could represent an internalisation of previous negative comments made by peers rather than a view she initiated herself (Hebron & Humphrey, 2014; Williams et al., 2017). In a similar vein, when asked whether he enjoyed working with others, Nish replied, 'yeah, but sometimes they be rude to me'. William's response to the same question was, 'it depends if he [a classmate] wants to talk to me or not', which suggests that rather than being a reciprocal relationship, for William the onus is on the willingness of the other individual to initiate conversation. Social imbalance in the classroom was also evident in Marco's account: 'unfortunately, I don't really have many friends but I am always surrounded by two bullies who don't really like me'. Others expressed frustration at not being listened to by peers: 'he never listens to me when I have a great idea

and he's just messing around' (Daniel), and 'I was doing handball and I told catch with two hands but he didn't listen' (Jokubus).

These examples are consonant with the social interaction difficulties commonly experienced by autistic children in the school setting (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). However, some participants described more positive interaction with peers. Rahul described close friendships at his new school, and Gareth explained how he formed friendships through a shared interest in videogames, showing signs of being socially confident in his new school environment. All participants reported positive relationships with members of staff, with the exception of Thomas, who said he got along with 'some' teachers at his school, implying perhaps not all.

3.4.2. Analysis

In the light of growing sociolinguistic diversification in UK schools, understanding pupils' attitudes towards their multilingual identities is increasingly important (Blackledge & Creese, 2014; Evans et al., 2016; Evans & Liu, 2018). In the current study, the type of school the children attended seemed to have an important influence on their multilingual identity. Children educated in schools with a higher percentage of EAL pupils or schools in which the medium of instruction was Welsh tended to hold more positive views about bilingualism than those in more monolingual educational settings, who, like the students in Liu and Evans (2016) and Mills (2001), stated a preference for, and often a deference to, English. Even those who were positive about bilingualism described generic benefits rather than specific advantages experienced in their own lives. As such, more emphasis should be placed on creating opportunities for bilingual pupils to express, explore and cultivate their linguistic identities at school, especially in schools with low numbers of EAL pupils. Such encouragement may be particularly significant for children on the autism spectrum, who are more likely to be at risk of 'linguistic mainstreaming' (Bracken et al., 2017), in light of the professional advice given to some parents to adopt a monolingual approach (Hampton et al., 2017). Children whose parents reported adopting a more monolingual approach inevitably expressed a preference for using English over their home language, and some – especially Rahul – questioned the relevance of multilingualism.

Like the EAL students in Hall's study (2019), children compartmentalised their languages, and distinct linguistic spaces emerged that they were keen not to conflate. Very few

children referred to using their home language in school. Children were hesitant in talking about their home language or bilingual status (Liu & Evans, 2016) and the notion of children minimising the importance of their bilingual proficiency came to the fore. This tallies with the experience of 'linguistic inadequacy' described by Evans and Liu (2018), although for the children in this study the sense of inadequacy did not relate to their use of English, but rather their home language. Students' reluctance to use, or even acknowledge, their home language may have been an attempt to assimilate linguistically to their school environment, or to avoid bullying, but lies in contrast to the pedagogical imperative to draw on their existing linguistic resources (Bracken et al., 2017; García, 2009; Molyneux et al., 2016). This growing reliance on English is also common among neurotypical children who speak EAL, and often leads to language attrition (Little, 2017). Conversely, students educated in environments where multilingualism was the norm recognised certain benefits of bilingualism, most notably the ways in which it facilitates communication with others, particularly family members.

Children also articulated their identities as learners, including their curriculum preferences and strategies for overcoming academic challenges. One of the more surprising findings of this study was students' preference for art and creative tasks. Future research should therefore investigate the benefits of creativity in the curriculum – both in art lessons and more broadly – for learners on the autism spectrum. These may include the encouragement of imaginative thinking and self-expression, along with findings that art therapy enables autistic children to feel more flexible and relaxed (Schweizer, Spreen, & Knorth, 2017). By contrast, some students discussed difficulties with literacy-based subjects, highlighting the need for more rigorous interventions and strategies to support this group's literacy development. Such interventions should take into account each of the child's languages (Bird et al., 2016a), and the fact that both autistic children and EAL pupils tend to have difficulties with reading comprehension (Brown, Oram-Cardy, & Johnson, 2013; Murphy, 2018). Despite difficulties with literacy, many children in this study showcased a desire to succeed academically and a perseverance to overcome challenges in the classroom. Such enthusiasm could serve as a catalyst for improving educational outcomes. Without disregarding the learning challenges faced by the children interviewed, their pursuit of knowledge and identities as curious learners are differences worth celebrating.

Within existing literature, autistic adolescents often report feelings different to their neurotypical peers (Cage et al., 2016). Given that 'feelings of exclusion' (Evans & Liu, 2018, p.163) and a 'sense of being different' (Hall, 2019, p.28) are also common in the experiences of children with EAL, it is possible that being bilingual may compound – not alleviate – the social difficulties associated with autism by adding another layer of difference. However, unlike the findings of many studies concerned with the school experiences of autistic children, as outlined in Williams et al.'s meta-synthesis (2017), none of the children interviewed in this study, except Jokubus, described themselves as 'different', despite the potential 'double difference' to their peers of being bilingual and autistic. This may well be due to the characteristics of this study's participants; most of the children had limited awareness of their autism diagnosis because of their age, some were not fully cognisant of their multiple language use, and many attended schools where multilingualism was the norm. By minimising the value and significance of their linguistic identities, some of the children in this sample were perhaps trying to lessen their 'double difference'. In this sense, helping bilingual autistic children to discover, understand and celebrate their differences may reduce the potential stress of 'camouflaging' or seeking to assimilate to the profile of a monolingual neurotypical child.

In keeping with previous research into the experiences of autistic children (Calder et al., 2013; Rotheram-Fuller et al., 2010; Symes & Humphrey, 2010), difficulties with social interaction were a hallmark of the school experiences of the pupils interviewed. Children reported having limited social circles (Poon et al., 2014), spending time alone (DePape & Lindsay, 2016), and some highlighted frustrations about not being listened to (Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, Solomon, & Sirota, 2001). However, unlike previous research (Rowley et al., 2012; Symes & Humphrey, 2010), very few students explicitly mentioned bullying as part of their school experience, despite some referring to social tension in the classroom. However, this could be the result of the children feeling uncomfortable sharing personal accounts of bullying, as may have been the case with Nish, who was reluctant to mention his social experiences.

3.5. Theme 2: School experience

3.5.1. Results
A) Learning environments

In the image of the 'environment' domain (see Table 5), the children observed a classroom, which functioned as a springboard for reflection on their own learning environments. With regard to the physical layout of the classroom, Suvrat noted, 'I like it when things are hanging like aeroplanes and balloons' and 'if everyone's classroom looked the same it would be boring'. Similarly, William noted that he would like 'more like displays on the walls and more like stuff to help us'. As most of the children attended primary school, they would stay in the same classroom throughout the day, however in a secondary school environment Jokubus mentioned 'getting to lessons' as a particularly difficult part of his school experience, as it involves moving through crowded corridors. In keeping with the findings of existing literature, excessive noise was deemed to be a barrier to learning for some of the children interviewed (McAllister & Sloan, 2016). For example, when discussing sitting next to a classmate Gareth commented, 'I like that he doesn't make any noise', while Jokubus stated that it 'makes it hard when I…. when people keep talking … make my head hurt, sometimes'. Similarly, Marco adds that 'I prefer it when we're doing quiet time'.

Despite the recurrence of social tension in the classroom for some children, many stated a preference for collaborative work. Similarly, most claimed that peer and teacher support were essential to their academic progression, although Gareth said he preferred to solve problems by himself. Unlike the other children, Gareth attended a specialist autism school and therefore probably had much more individualised support and interaction with teaching staff than children in mainstream environments, many of whom did not have one-to-one support in the classroom. Accordingly, Gareth may have sought more independence while other children in the study felt that they needed greater support. For example, when asked what he would improve about his learning environment, William commented, 'if we had like more things to help us or more teaching assistants'.

The children offered a range of recommendations for improving their learning experience, most of which centred on having more time to reflect and complete tasks. Daniel reflected that 'more time to think' was the major change he would make to his school experience, reasoning that 'you can't think of anything in time' and 'sometimes you don't know something and you have to think but then… but then the lesson ends and it's too late'. This sense of running out of time is echoed by Gareth who remarked, 'sometimes I can't do the full page in the amount of time'. Both Thomas and Ryan would like to see more time for play, because 'fresh air helps, doesn't it?' (Ryan), while other children suggested changes to

the timings of the school day. Gareth, for instance, suggested a shorter working week and Luke opted for shorter lessons so that concentration could be maintained in shorter bursts.

The majority of children referred to technology during the interviews, either as an interest or as a learning resource in school. While Suvrat stated that videos helped him to learn, Marco articulated, 'they can't make me learn but it makes me calm down a lot'. Gareth spoke most frequently about the use of technology to enhance learning, suggesting that 'we can do the apps on computers', 'you can research things on the computer', and 'I can help the staff because they're not very good [with technology]'. Although Gareth was convinced that more access to computers would improve his school experience, arguing that the use of strategy in his games is educational, both he and Jokubus described frustration that their screen time is limited at school.

B) Well-being

Experiences of school are inextricably bound to children's sense of well-being. Although not present in every account, anxiety, anger and apathy were common features of some children's school experiences. While Nish expressed anxiety about coping in the later years of primary school, Luke described periods of lessons in which 'my mind goes in panic mode'. Marco used equally emotive language to depict his difficulty maintaining composure in the classroom:

> *I find it hardest staying calm and then being able to stop my detonation like an exploding kitten. Very often I'll start blowing up and then I start creating trouble for everyone and then destroying it for the whole class.*

Marco demonstrates an acute awareness of the impact of his emotional outbursts on the learning of others in his class when he mentions 'creating trouble for everyone and destroying it for the whole class'. This frustration is compounded when he remarks, 'getting punished makes me angry'. In her interview, Marco's mother, Roberta, also comments on his difficulty in managing anger, saying, 'there were times when he'd have a meltdown and become aggressive […] he would go for the head teacher'. Although no children besides Marco reflected on their own emotion regulation, other parents commented on their children's tendency towards anger and aggression at school:

> *If he can't cope he'll become violent and aggressive. (Katherine – Thomas' mother)*

> *He has... massive anger management issues. He has a tendency to re-decorate the classroom with tables and chairs. His class have an evacuation plan for when Luke goes nuclear. (Eleanora – Luke's mother)*

He'd walk up to me and he'd nip me really, really hard and then kick the back of my chair all the way home in the car. And really angry, really angry. (Magdalena – William's mother)

Magdalena's reference to William's anger after school is consistent with the notion of 'camouflaging' behaviour, in which children on the autism spectrum mask their traits during the school day culminating in emotional outbursts at home (Carrington, Templeton, & Papinczak, 2003; Moyse & Porter, 2015).

Instead of anger, Gareth demonstrated a very different type of dissatisfaction with his school experience, characterised by indifference. When asked about the most difficult aspect of school life, he answered, 'having to go there five times a week', and when questioned about his favourite subject he replied, 'going home, if that counts as a subject'. Other comments such as 'I just don't like going to school' and 'school is just a way to make money' underline his seeming apathy towards school. However, such comments should be evaluated in the context of Gareth's special interest in computer games; Gareth referred to school getting in the way of his gaming and frequently mentioned that his school experience would be enhanced through greater access to technology. Others also expressed a lack of enjoyment: William commented 'it's boring and I don't like working', and when asked what he would change about school, Thomas answered, 'no work, only playing'. Equally, Luke remarked, 'lots of people don't like school', which may have been a way of diplomatically expressing his own experience.

As previously noted, given the age of the participants and the fact that some did not know about their diagnoses, autism was not mentioned explicitly by the researcher in the interviews for ethical reasons. However, three children independently reflected on their experiences of autism. Gareth affirmed that, 'everyone at my new school has autism'. As the oldest child in the study, Jokubus showed more autism awareness, describing it as when 'you think different to other people', adding that 'at lunch time I eat food, I drink tablet for… to stop me getting hyper because I have autism'. He then justified the school placing a limit on his computer time, saying, 'I have to be like a bit older, cos I have autism'. In Thomas' school, autism training was given to all pupils, staff and parents. Here, he reflects on his experience of talking to his class about autism.

> **Thomas**: *I told them what was easy for me, and what wasn't easy for me… I told them like about what it feels like being autistic… they were learning about autism…*
> **Interviewer**: *What does it feel like?*

Thomas: *[long pause] Mmm. It kind of feels scary.*

Thomas' description of autism as 'scary' tallies with his mother's remark that 'his anxiety is a big concern for us'. However, Thomas continued by describing an advantage of autism, that 'you know more stuff about what you like than most people'. This notion of children's 'special interests' was present in many of the children's accounts and is important to both their identity formation and experiences of school.

3.5.2. Analysis

As expected, children in this study had varied experiences of school (Poon et al., 2014). Despite this heterogeneity in experience, certain patterns emerged that warrant further discussion. Children highlighted the importance of teacher and peer support in their learning, which is widely regarded as a key factor in the inclusion of children on the autism spectrum (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Saggers et al., 2011) and EAL pupils (Anderson et al., 2016; Wardman, 2013). However, William's comment about requiring more resources and teaching assistance may reflect the consequences of decreasing funds designated to EAL pupils (Bracken et al., 2017; Costley, 2014) and children with special educational needs (Hodkinson, 2019).

Consonant with the findings of Dillon, Underwood, and Freemantle (2016), some children also stated a preference for group work, despite the possible challenges in social interaction and maintaining friendships faced by autistic children. Collaborative learning tasks may therefore serve as much-needed opportunities to improve this group's social and communicative skills, increase newly-arrived children's exposure to English, and facilitate social integration within the school and wider community. Although collaborative tasks engaged some pupils in this study, others expressed concerns about noise in the classroom, echoing the findings of previous research (McAllister & Sloan, 2016; Moore, 2007). As such, teachers should be aware of the potential heightened sensitivity to noise among this population, keeping in mind that frenetic, noisy classroom environments can be inimical to their sensory processing and concentration levels (Preece & Jordan, 2010). The use of technology in the classroom also had a significant role to play in engaging children in this study, but training may be required to ensure it is effectively integrated into teaching and learning and does not become an unhelpful distraction (Hedges, Odom, Hume, & Sam, 2018). In viewing the classroom and its resources as a 'silent curriculum' (Taylor, 2009), schools should consider the

effects of the sensory environment on pupils' outcomes through close consultation with students and their parents.

Understanding and improving well-being leads to better educational outcomes (Gutman & Vorhaus, 2012; Noble & McGrath, 2014), which may be particularly pertinent for bilingual autistic children given attainment gaps between EAL and non-EAL pupils in the early years of primary school (Strand et al., 2015) and discrepancies between some autistic children's cognitive abilities and their academic achievement (Estes, Rivera, Bryan, Cali, & Dawson, 2011; Jones et al., 2009). In this study, some children expressed apathy towards learning, however others expressed a strong desire to learn and to succeed academically. Engaging students in learning through reference to their special interests can be an effective approach to enhancing their enjoyment of school and improving their social interaction in the classroom (Daniel & Billingsley, 2010; Stephenson & Adams, 2016).

The process of regulating emotions was challenging for some of the children in this study, which raises important questions about well-being among linguistically diverse children with neurodevelopmental conditions. Anger and anxiety either in school or at home were often experienced by the children, which is consistent with research into emotion regulation in children on the autism spectrum (Hebron & Humphrey, 2014; Samson et al., 2015). To a lesser extent, anxiety has also been shown to be present in the experiences of EAL pupils, particularly newly-arrived children (Evans et al., 2016; Hall, 2019). Evidence is beginning to emerge that in typically-developing populations children's knowledge of both languages (the home language and the dominant societal language) improves parent-child relationships (Boutakidis, Chao, & Rodríguez, 2011; Oh & Fuligni, 2010), decreases depressive symptoms (Choi, Tan, Yasui, & Pekelnicky, 2014) and in turn positively affects well-being (Müller et al., under review).

Despite these positive associations between bilingual language exposure and well-being in neurotypical populations, the role of bilingualism in the well-being of autistic children emerges as something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, if it is the case that fairly equal exposure in both languages leads to what De Houwer calls 'harmonious bilingual development' (2015), and it is also true that autistic children have greater difficulties in emotion regulation than non-autistic children (Mazefsky, Borue, Day, & Minshew, 2014), then it is possible that providing autistic children from multilingual families opportunities to develop

proficiency in both languages could, to some extent, mitigate the challenges they experience in emotion regulation. On the other hand, it is clear that a child's linguistic context constitutes just one of many factors affecting emotion regulation, and well-being more broadly. It is far too simplistic then to state that creating a more balanced linguistic environment for bilingual autistic children will improve their well-being, given that unrealistic expectations about multilingualism can cause increased stress and anxiety for children and parents alike (Little, 2017). In this vein, increasing multilingual exposure may in fact exacerbate existing emotional challenges in autistic children, as will be discussed in chapter 5.

Another key issue in deciphering the effects of bilingualism on autistic children's well-being is finding adequate tools to measure both constructs. In this study, for example, more parents reported their children's emotional experiences than the children themselves. This could be because children may not feel comfortable discussing their emotions to a new adult or because they may have difficulty expressing them. Nish's mother, for example, noted, 'he is, like, understanding those simple emotions at the moment. Complex ones are quite difficult', which may account for Nish's enthusiasm for talking about certain topics (i.e. academic experiences) and his unwillingness to discuss others (i.e. social and emotional experiences). To this end, research methods that facilitate bilingual autistic children's elicitation of their experiences, emotions and well-being are much-needed in order to gain more comprehensive insights into how a bilingual upbringing affects children on the autism spectrum.

Few of the children in this study were aware of their autism diagnoses, perhaps, in part, owing to their age, along with common delays between parents receiving their child's diagnosis and disclosing it to the child (Smith, Edelstein, Cox, & White, 2018) and parental concerns about the possible detrimental effect of a disclosure (Crane, Jones, Prosser, Taghrizi, & Pellicano, 2019). However, despite Thomas' admission that having autism was 'scary', his recognition that 'you know more stuff about what you like than most people' is consistent with parents' and practitioners' views about the importance of celebrating differences (Crane et al., 2019; Lindsay et al., 2014). It is essential to note that the so-called impairments linked to autism can – and should – be framed in a positive light in the school setting. Raising awareness of autism leads to greater acceptance, which in turn enhances autistic pupils' well-being in school. Parallels can be drawn with the bilingual school population; raising students' awareness of the benefits of their multilingual identities may encourage them to maintain their home language,

leading to a 'balanced bilingualism' and its concomitant benefits for well-being (De Houwer, 2015; Müller et al., under review).

3.6. Discussion

3.6.1. Bringing together identity and experience

The first aim of this chapter was to illuminate the lived experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum, particularly in relation to their experiences of school. The superordinate themes delineated above, 'identity formation' and 'school experiences', are undeniably interrelated; identity influences experience just as experience shapes identity. For the children in this study, being autistic and being bilingual are only two facets of their identity, both of which were unfamiliar to some children, and nascent to others. As such, attempts to understand the identity formation of primary-aged children may be at best ambitious, at worst, premature. For some, their identities as autistic and/or bilingual individuals are yet to develop, and may be abandoned or rejected − whether consciously or not − as they grow older. In seeking to uncover the lived experiences of bilingual autistic children, this research has shed light on a striking parallel between the 'othering' experience that both bilingual and autistic individuals face (García et al., 2017; Milton & Sims, 2016), albeit to different extents and in different ways. Described by Johnson et al. as 'a process that identifies those who are thought to be different from oneself or the mainstream' (2004, p.255), experiences of 'othering' may well be exacerbated for bilingual autistic children who are 'doubly different' to their typically-developing monolingual peers.

In this study, multilingualism was viewed as advantageous in a general sense, but few children acknowledged the benefits specific to their own context. Interestingly, in their descriptions of multilingualism, some children 'othered' those who were more multilingual than themselves. The tendency to downplay their own multilingual proficiency is consistent with the findings of Liu and Evans (2016), who found that EAL students tended to give more status to English than their home language. Considering the changes in language profiles over childhood leads us to consider how not only autism, but also bilingualism, may be viewed as a 'multidimensional spectrum' (Cornips, 2018, p.25). Given the children's varying ages, linguistic backgrounds and developmental profiles, the children were at different points along both continua, which would have affected both their identity formation and lived experience.

The findings of this chapter highlight the importance of giving autistic children from multilingual families opportunities to explore and understand oft-neglected aspects of their identities, such as the role of autism and bilingualism in their lives. Without ignoring the possible challenges this group of children face, schools may play a pivotal role in creating an environment in which linguistically and neurologically diverse children can celebrate their differences, rather than minimise them.

3.6.2. Contextual trends

The second aim of this chapter was to understand how various factors affected children's attitudes towards multilingualism. While the small samples in IPA studies are not intended to draw out generalisations about populations, certain patterns emerged that merit further discussion. These trends relate to: (1) the linguistic profile of the child's school; (2) parental language choices.

(1) The linguistic profile of the child's school

The linguistic profile and location of the school that children attended seemed to influence their linguistic identities to a certain extent. Children who were educated in more multilingual environments were more positive about their identity as bilinguals, compared to those in more monolingual environments. In the latter setting, children may feel that their linguistic diversity exacerbates the existing differences they may experience to their peers because of their autism. Drawing parallels between the EAL literature and autism research, the pupils' desire to assimilate to the linguistic norm is synonymous with the notion of 'camouflaging' or 'masquerading' in autism, in which individuals may try to mask their autistic traits (Carrington & Graham, 2001; Hull et al., 2017; Lai et al., 2017). Schools have the difficult task of helping bilingual pupils on the autism spectrum to accept and celebrate their differences, whilst acknowledging their possible inclination to assimilate.

Another linguistic distinction in this study should be made between schools in England and Wales. Children educated in bilingual schools in Wales were far more positive about the merits of bilingualism, which chimes with previous research into children's attitudes towards Welsh (Thomas & Roberts, 2011). In this study, children educated in Wales also tended to be more socially active within their school communities, perhaps because they were not experiencing the 'double difference' of being both linguistically and neurologically diverse; it was autism – rather than bilingualism – that distinguished them from their peers. Even Gareth,

who had moved from a Welsh-medium to an English-medium school, held very positive attitudes towards the value of Welsh. He was the only child to be in a school setting with other bilingual children on the autism spectrum, which may be a significant factor in his social confidence in school when compared to other children in this study. As the educational system in England is almost exclusively monolingual, there was perhaps more scepticism about the value of bilingualism among children educated in England. Inevitably, pupils educated in schools in England with a high percentage of EAL pupils considered multilingualism to be more normative than those in more monolingual settings, which seemed to impact children's perceptions of languages and their own linguistic identities.

(2) Parental language choices

Many of the children interviewed lacked confidence in their home language. This was particularly the case for children whose parents had adopted a more monolingual approach (i.e. the parents of Rahul, Nish and William), as will be discussed in chapter 5. Unsurprisingly, those exposed to more English at home expressed a preference for English. Rahul's vehemence that 'I don't speak other languages' highlights a possible desire to be like his monolingual peers and eschew a multilingual identity, despite his mother's comment that Punjabi, Gujarati and, to a lesser extent, Hindi, were all spoken at home. By contrast, the children whose parents had adopted a more multilingual approach were more cognisant of the benefits of bilingualism, citing communication with family members as the chief advantage.

3.6.3. Reflections on methods

Thorough reflection on the usefulness of different research methods with children on the autism spectrum is currently insufficient (Fayette & Bond, 2018). This makes replicability difficult and stalls the efficacy of future research with diverse populations. Sharing methodological issues and setbacks leads to a more constructive dialogue and a platform on which future research methods with neurologically and linguistically diverse groups can be developed (Beresford et al., 2004; Preece & Jordan, 2010). Reflecting on the usefulness of particular methods and creating unique ways to elicit participants' lived experience are also key tenets of an IPA approach (Smith et al., 2009). The third aim of this chapter was to reflect on the efficacy of particular adaptations made in this study to encourage the participation of bilingual autistic children. Field notes were taken directly after each interview, detailing first impressions, contextual factors, reflections on methods and key themes. What follows will consider the

various adaptations used, and discuss whether they enhanced or detracted from children's participation.

First, the pre-interview meetings served as a crucial time to build a rapport and explain the procedures to children. Given the use of computer-assisted interviewing, an example question was displayed for the children so that they could visualise the nature of the interview. This technique proved useful in ensuring that the children had understood the procedures and all participants responded well to it. The pre-interview meetings also enabled me as the interviewer to see if any specific adjustments could be useful for the child. For example, during the pre-interview meeting with Amira I noticed that she was easily distracted and that shorter chunks of information suited her better. I was then able to build this into her main interview. Equally, I used the pre-interview meetings to get to know the child's specific interests so that these could be the starting point for our discussion during the main interviews. Using prior knowledge about the child at the beginning of the interview enabled me to build a strong rapport with them and helped them to relax.

Second, choice was given to parents and children over the location of the interviews. A key reflection was that children interviewed at home were much more relaxed than those in school, which had both advantages and disadvantages. Children perhaps felt more in control with their parents in the same room or close by, which on the one hand would have put them at ease and encouraged their participation, but on the other hand, may have had an impact on the answers they gave. Occasionally, parents interrupted the interviews with their own comments, which gave useful context, but may undermine the child's agency as interviewee (Preece & Jordan, 2010). However, another advantage was that children had easier access to their own materials, which increased the rapport between the interviewer and interviewee; Gareth presented his videogame collection, William was able to show his artwork, and Nish used the resources around him to draw his experiences. These moments were significant in demonstrating that the spoken interview does not have to be the only method used for eliciting children's experiences and that there is a need for flexibility and creativity in its administration.

Third, the emoji palette with five different emojis related to different emotions aimed to give the child some processing time; while they were considering their verbal answers they could point to the emotion that best described the domain under discussion. All the children, except one, were able to identify the meaning of the emojis during the pre-interview meeting

but only five children used them during the interview. For those children, the palette was particularly useful in giving them additional processing time and children tended to point to the confused emoji, either to express confusion about the question – which meant I could re-phrase or clarify – or to express their feelings about a particular aspect of school. Accordingly, the emoji palette may be a useful strategy for interviews with children on the autism spectrum and those for whom English is not their first language. However, the emoji palette was a distraction for some children, so more consideration of how to integrate this visual cue into the interview design is needed.

Fourth, the 'move on/stop' card was used by half of the children interviewed. Only one child (Amira) stopped the interview entirely, although she used the card as the interview was drawing to a natural close and once most domains had been discussed. The 'move on' side of the card was much more popular and was used when children were less inclined to answer a question; quite often it was used to move on from questions about their social interaction. Amira, in particular, benefitted from the 'move on/stop' card as it gave her a sense of autonomy over the pace and direction of the interview. One drawback of the card was that less data could be collected about certain domains when children opted to 'move on', however, this is outweighed by the importance of ensuring children's comfort during the interview and respecting their agency in the interaction.

Finally, the use of computer-assisted interviewing (CAI) was arguably the most successful technique adopted to encourage children's participation in the interviews. Not only did it give them a shared, visual focus and remove the potential anxiety induced by a face-to-face interview, but it allowed them to direct their answers specifically to the domain under discussion. Moreover, the use of the five images sustained children's attention and interest during the interview as they were all curious to see what was next. Nish, for instance, turned the action of pressing the button for the next image into a game, closing his eyes each time. By asking children to press the button to continue, they each took an active role in the interview and derived enjoyment from interacting with the technological aspect of the interview, in line with the group's stated preference for using technology. In this sense, CAI may have engaged this group in a way that a purely verbal interview may not have done, and may contribute to redressing the power imbalance intrinsic to the conventional interview scenario.

The most useful image was the first, which consisted of four children speaking four different languages, as this was modified to the languages known to the child. Although many were not literate in their home language, they recognised the word for 'hello' in this language. By contrast, the least successful image was image 4, as it required an element of verbal reasoning that some children found difficult. The choices researchers make about images during the process of research design thus have significant implications for the answers participants give, and require careful attention and piloting. Preece and Jordan (2010) caution that while visual stimuli may facilitate communication, participants' answers may be restricted by the researcher's choice of images. As such, the importance of the individual's voice and agency over the discussion, which is central to IPA, may to some extent be diminished. Adopting Stephenson and Adam's strategy (2016) of allowing the children to take their own photographs prior to the interview to be used as visual prompts may help to reclaim children's sense of autonomy over the research process.

3.7.   Chapter summary and conclusions

The lived experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum vary significantly and are shaped by multiple factors, including parental language choices, birthplace, and the linguistic profile of their schools. However, some commonalities emerged between the accounts of the twelve children from England and Wales who took part in this study. This chapter has reported the findings of the first interpretative phenomenological analysis in this thesis, with a keen emphasis on children's identity formation and experiences of school. As the first study of its kind to present the perspectives of bilingual children on the autism spectrum, the research presented in this chapter makes an original contribution to current understandings of this population of children and builds on the nascent body of work seeking to find better ways of including diverse groups of learners both in their school settings and in research. The use of visual prompts, most notably, computer-assisted interviewing, enabled children to engage more readily in interviews and should be considered an effective tool in eliciting children's perspectives.

In keeping with extant literature on the school experiences of EAL pupils, many of the children displayed a tendency to minimise the importance of their home language and multilingual identities, particularly those educated in more monolingual environments. Among children who attended either bilingual schools in Wales or schools in England with a high percentage of EAL pupils, attitudes towards multilingualism were more favourable: children

identified communication with family as an important reason for pursuing bilingualism. Taken together, the findings of this chapter suggest that giving autistic children from multilingual families opportunities to construct their linguistic identities in the classroom may be crucial to them becoming 'balanced bilinguals', which is emerging as an important indicator of well-being in children from multilingual backgrounds. Although parental language choices inevitably affected children's attitudes to their own linguistic identities, some differences emerged between parents' and children's accounts, which will be further discussed in chapter 6. Educational environments and professionals also played a key role in the identity formation and school experiences of the group being studied. With this in mind, our focus now shifts to another key stakeholder previously neglected in the field of research into bilingualism and autism: the educational practitioners who work alongside this group of learners.

4. Autism and Bilingualism in the School Setting

4.1. Chapter aims and questions

With greater linguistic diversity in educational settings across the UK, and a rise in autism diagnoses, educators are more frequently supporting children who are both linguistically and neurologically diverse to their peers. This chapter examines the perspectives and experiences of thirteen educational practitioners (a combination of teachers, teaching assistants, SENDCos and one speech and language therapist) who support bilingual autistic pupils. By drawing on a variety of expertise and roles within schools rather than exclusively focusing on the class teacher, it is hoped that a clearer picture of the different support available to children will emerge. After outlining the research questions and procedures for this part of the thesis, the chapter expounds three key themes relating to practitioners' perspectives of bilingualism in autism, comparisons between England and Wales, and strategies for creating inclusive educational environments for bilingual pupils on the autism spectrum. This chapter makes a unique contribution to the field of bilingualism and autism in its exploration of the interaction within the school setting, from the perspective of educational practitioners.

The aim of the present chapter is to uncover the perspectives and experiences of educational practitioners who support bilingual autistic learners in England and Wales. In existing literature, a disconnect is beginning to emerge between beliefs about bilingualism and actual linguistic practices. This has been established among family members (Yu, 2016; Yu & Hsia, 2018) and professionals working with children with neurodevelopmental conditions (de Valenzuela et al., 2016; Marinova-Todd et al., 2016) but has yet to be found among practitioners working specifically with autistic children from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Like the previous chapter on the perspectives and experiences of the children themselves, this chapter contributes unique insights into autism and bilingualism in the school setting. It seeks to address this issue by exploring attitudes and practices of educators when supporting bilingual autistic children, and by evaluating the extent to which their school environments and the specific children they teach shape their perspectives. Building on chapter 3, the differences between Wales and England as two linguistically different educational settings were more salient in the practitioners' accounts and will therefore be analysed in greater detail. Finally, the discussion aims to delineate implications for educational practice when supporting bilingual autistic children.

In light of these aims, this chapter is informed by research question 2, as posed in chapter 1:

What are educational practitioners' perspectives and experiences of supporting a bilingual autistic child?

As most studies in the field of autism and bilingualism examine the experiences of parents, the voices of educators are missing from current research. Three key studies that focus on educational practice and policy (de Valenzuela et al., 2016; Marinova-Todd et al., 2016; Pesco et al., 2016) resemble the current thesis in their cross-setting approach. However, they differ in that their focus is on children with developmental disorders more generally, while this chapter focuses on practitioners' views and experiences of bilingualism specifically in autism. Building on this valuable work and in search of answers to RQ2, this chapter was guided by the following sub-questions:

1) What are educational practitioners' perspectives about the impact of bilingualism on autistic pupils?
2) How do attitudes differ between practitioners who support children in a predominantly monolingual education system (England) and those who work in an educational system that promotes bilingualism (Wales)?
3) What are practitioners' classroom experiences of supporting bilingual pupils on the autism spectrum?

4.2. Participants

Participants were recruited through direct communication with mainstream schools in England and Wales, or through families who had already been recruited for the wider study. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview a practitioner from the schools of all participating children and families. As outlined in chapter 2, educators were included in the current study if: a) they teach or support a bilingual pupil on the autism spectrum in a mainstream school; and b) have worked in the school for at least two years. As outlined in section 2.6.3., the sample of 13 practitioners consisted of teachers (n=5), teaching assistants (n=4), SENDCos (n=3) and a speech and language therapist (n=1). While most of the practitioners from Wales were bilingual in Welsh and English, in England the practitioners

who discussed their own language use considered themselves to be monolingual. Demographic information about participants is found in Table 10.

Table 10: Practitioners' demographic information

	Participant (gender)	Role	Child (age)	Interview length (mins:secs)	School type	Country
1	Bethan (F)	Teacher	Dyfan (6)	20:51	Mainstream Primary (WM)	Wales
2	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	Dawn (F)	SENDCo	William (8)	19:44	Mainstream Primary	England
6	Emma (F)	Teacher	Suvrat (9)	15:17	Mainstream Primary	England
7	Cath (F)	Teaching assistant	Amira (9)	18:01	Mainstream Primary	England
8	Robert (M)	Teacher	Luke (9)	17:04	Mainstream Primary	England
9	Paula (F)	Teacher	Daniel (9)	18:11	Mainstream Primary	England
10	Anwen (F)	SENDCo	Ryan (9)	9:13	Mainstream Primary (WM)	Wales
11	Suzanne (F) Gill (F) Lucy (F) Rachel (F)	Teacher Speech and Language Therapist Teaching assistant Teaching assistant	Jack (9) Glyn (11)	38:34	Autism unit in EM Mainstream Primary	Wales
12		Teaching assistant	Rahul (10)	13:08	Mainstream Primary	England
13	-	-	-	-	-	-

14	-	-	-	-	-	-
15	Debbie (F)	SENDCo	Jokubus (14)	39:40	Mainstream Secondary	England
16	-	-	-	-	-	-

4.3. Data analysis

As outlined in chapter 2, interview data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. At the first stage of analysis 219 emergent themes were identified relating to practitioners' perspectives and experiences of working with a bilingual autistic child in the school setting. During the de-duplication and refinement stage of the analysis (stage 6 in Table 6), the emergent themes became 56 subordinate themes based on the thesis aims' and research questions. Finally, following a further process of reduction (stage 7 in Table 6), these themes became 3 superordinate themes and 8 subordinate themes. This process of reduction is presented in Table 11.[37]

Table 11: Reduction of themes process (practitioners)

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes	Previous subordinate themes
Theme 1: Perspectives on bilingualism in autism	A) Bilingualism for typically-developing children vs. bilingualism for autistic children	1. Advantages of bilingualism (general) 2. Advantages of bilingualism (specific to autism)
	B) Concerns about feasibility	1. Disadvantages of bilingualism for autistic pupils 2. Bilingualism makes life more challenging at the moment 3. Capacity for bilingualism depends on the child 4. Heterogeneity of language skills in autism 5. Concerns about speech, language and communication 6. Children communicating basic needs is more important than bilingualism

[37] The subthemes identified in the process of de-duplication and reduction are available on request.

		7. Is slow processing the result of autism or bilingualism?
		8. How natural is bilingualism to the child?
		9. Time needed for bilingual development
	C) Consequences for the classroom	1. Challenge of identifying SEND among newly-arrived children
		2. Home language maintenance and loss
		3. Bilingualism is a barrier to English literacy development
		4. Child's language input at home
		5. Language interventions
		6. Difficulty understanding instructions is a combination of autism and bilingualism
Theme 2: Comparisons across two linguistically different settings	A) Differences between England and Wales	1. Reflections on own linguistic identity
		2. Language in Wales
		3. English-medium v Welsh-medium
		4. Compartmentalising language
		5. Home language in school
	B) Commonalities between England and Wales	1. Supporting home language
		2. Assessment
		3. Recognition of EAL pupils' linguistic repertoires
		4. Children value English (perhaps above home/other languages)
Theme 3: Creating inclusive learning environments	A) Identifying barriers to learning	1. Literacy is the main area for development
		2. Negative social experiences
		3. Behaviour
		4. Physical behaviour or violence
		5. Difficulties with motivation to work
		6. Transition periods are difficult
		7. Full-time TA is necessary
		8. Insufficiency of labels
		9. Public perceptions of autism
	B) Best practice in the classroom	1. Person-centred approaches
		2. Pedagogical strategies
		3. Child would benefit from extra time (to process information)

		4. Curriculum preferences
		5. Creativity
		6. Learning environment
		7. Supporting social interaction
		8. Reinforcement of instructions is needed
		9. Visual prompts
		10. Structure and routine important
		11. Importance of cultivating independence
	C) Whole-school approaches	1. Mainstreaming
		2. Need for autism awareness
		3. Importance of celebrating strengths and successes
		4. Strengths
		5. Curious learner
		6. Home-school communication
		7. Educational culture
		8. Emotion and well-being
		9. Professional experiences
		10. Professional development
TOTAL	8	56

4.4. Results overview

Three superordinate themes were extracted from the data collected during interviews with practitioners: (1) Perspectives on bilingualism in autism; (2) Comparisons across two linguistically different settings; and (3) Creating inclusive learning environments. While the first two relate to practitioners' perspectives and attitudes about bilingualism in autism, the third theme considers the possible barriers students and educators face when bilingualism meets autism. It also outlines individual and whole-school approaches to supporting bilingual autistic children in school.

Table 12: Superordinate and subordinate themes (practitioners' accounts)

Superordinate themes	**Subordinate themes**
1. Perspectives on bilingualism in autism	A) Bilingualism for typically-developing children vs. bilingualism for autistic children B) Concerns about feasibility

	C) Consequences for the classroom
2. Comparisons across two linguistically different settings	A) Differences between England and Wales B) Commonalities between England and Wales
3. Creating inclusive learning environments	A) Identifying barriers to learning B) Best practice in the Classroom C) Whole-school approaches

The results indicate that practitioners' views about bilingualism for typically-developing children differ from their views about the value and feasibility of bilingualism for autistic pupils. Indeed, many practitioners expressed concerns that bilingualism was not possible for the autistic children who they supported, and some suggested that bilingualism may be having a detrimental impact on the child's academic and social development. Others highlighted the challenges of identifying autism – and special educational needs more broadly – in bilingual children. Practitioners in Wales, who tended to be bilingual, were more positive about the merits of bilingualism than practitioners in England, many of whom considered themselves monolingual. Staff in Wales also tended to be more confident in supporting bilingual children than educators in England. However, in both settings participants noted how children tended to give higher value and status to English than their home language or Welsh.

Educators identified various barriers to the learning of bilingual autistic children, including difficulties with literacy, social interaction and moments of transition (whether between curriculum content, physical spaces in the school, or year groups). A lack of awareness about autism and bilingualism, and a lack of support available in the classroom, were also highlighted as challenges to the successful inclusion of this group. Nevertheless, practitioners were keen to stress individual and whole-school approaches to creating more inclusive educational environments for bilingual autistic children, namely giving children more time to process information, improving collaboration and communication with families, and celebrating children's strengths and diversity. What follows will delineate the three superordinate themes identified in the data using excerpts from the interviews as evidence within the analyses.

4.5. Theme 1: Perspectives on bilingualism in autism

4.5.1. Results

A) Bilingualism for typically-developing children vs. bilingualism for autistic children

Practitioners' perspectives about the value of bilingualism for pupils on the autism spectrum varied widely, with little agreement about whether bilingualism helped or hindered students' development. Educators highlighted some key advantages of bilingualism, although they tended to mention these benefits only in relation to typically-developing pupils, rather than to the specific autistic pupil being discussed. These include cognitive, cultural, vocational, communicative and linguistic benefits. First, Emma mentioned the cognitive benefits of bilingualism for children in her class who do not have speech, language or learning difficulties:

> *I can see the benefits already when I'm teaching them in French and Spanish. Some of them have learnt at home how our grammar works so they have a good understanding of it. And having English as an additional language has cognitive benefits.*

Second, when discussing the benefits of bilingualism for all bilingual learners, Natalia reports intercultural understanding as a major advantage:

> *They have a broader view of the world. They know that there's not just one culture that you have to follow, but there are other ways of seeing the world.*

Third, two teachers in Wales also mentioned the vocational benefit of being bilingual. Bethan argued, 'I think it's very important in Wales because obviously everything is bilingual and it does help on your CV', while Anwen highlighted that, 'even if he [Ryan] doesn't choose to use it in his working career, he's always got it there'.

Although the perceived benefits of bilingualism were generally discussed with reference to all bilingual pupils, Cath and Anwen described communicative and linguistic benefits specific to the autistic child they supported, but not specific to the child's autism. Instead, the benefits they note are applicable to all children, including, but not limited to, autistic children. Cath perceived bilingualism to be an asset for Amira because it facilitated her communication with family members: 'she has relatives who do not speak English and she has recently been to Pakistan on holiday so obviously her own language is what they'd speak at home'. Meanwhile, Anwen described a linguistic advantage of developing Welsh literacy before English, referring first to Ryan, then collectively to all the children in her school:

> *Because his [Ryan's] spelling was phonetic and it's easier to spell in Welsh than it is in English, because he hasn't had the English patterns since nursery, it's only been*

the phonetical spelling, so the Welsh is definitely a bonus for children because they hear it and then spell it in the same way.

From these examples, it can be noted that while many practitioners cited many benefits to bilingualism, no practitioner offered a benefit of bilingualism that was specifically applicable to autistic children.

B) Concerns about feasibility

As outlined in the first sub-theme, some of the benefits of bilingualism that were true for typically-developing bilingual children were also pertinent for autistic children. However, rather than highlighting advantages of bilingualism in autism, practitioners often noted that it is not always feasible for the autistic children from multilingual backgrounds that they supported to maintain their home language. In this vein, according to the practitioners interviewed, the challenges of bilingualism for children on the autism spectrum may outweigh the benefits in certain cases. The capacity for bilingualism in autism is thus considered by educators to be dependent on the language profile of the individual child, given the wide heterogeneity of language development in autism (Gernsbacher, Morson, & Grace, 2016). This implies that different advice may be appropriate for different autistic children and their families when it comes to bilingualism.

In Wales, two practitioners noted that they had taught autistic children for whom bilingualism was possible, but suggested that it may be unrealistic for the specific children under discussion. For example, Gill affirmed, 'we've got another autistic pupil whose parents speak Welsh at home, and he can speak English and Welsh here, but his understanding is far more advanced [than Jack and Glyn's]'. Similarly, Bethan commented that 'there are autistic children that I've taught who have picked up the language straight away', but suggested bilingualism was not appropriate for Dyfan, describing Welsh as a 'constant barrier' to his progress. As his use of English was affecting his academic performance, Bethan believed that Dyfan should move from a Welsh-medium school to an English-medium one, which he was set to do the following academic year. It is important to frame Bethan's advice for monolingualism in the light of her highly positive views about Welsh: 'The Welsh language is really important to someone like me who speaks Welsh often and we don't want it to be washed away'. Her views on the value of bilingualism in general differ to her views about the value of bilingualism for Dyfan, given the specific challenges associated with autism.

Working as a teacher in an autism unit within a mainstream school, Suzanne also commented that the severity of a child's symptoms plays a role in the feasibility of bilingualism in autism:

> *The pupils who have more high-functioning autism, they can choose themselves if they want to speak the English or the Welsh, whereas here, they go with the flow. Whatever is spoken to them, they repeat it back.*

Suzanne's assertion suggests that the environment (i.e. a mainstream classroom or a specialist unit) may, to a certain extent, determine the child's exposure to bilingualism. It also infers that the child's agency to communicate in a certain language may be conditional upon their autistic traits. Suzanne justifies the more monolingual approach adopted in the autism unit by suggesting that 'primarily the language spoken is English because for pupils it's too confusing to do different ones'. She continues by suggesting that the children's ability to communicate their basic needs may be more important than bilingualism: 'they can get their needs and wants over to people who know them, but if they were left out in the street, I worry that they would get confused'. The notion of bilingualism being confusing for autistic pupils is also echoed by Natalia, who states: 'if they have rules in a certain language, and then at school they have rules in a different language that might confuse them'. Along with others, she therefore reasons that 'bilingualism could be a disadvantage for them'. Similarly, Dawn raises concerns that 'having English as an additional language impacts on William's processing, therefore it would be a negative for him'. Like Natalia, she concludes that 'bilingualism is not helpful to him, it's more difficult for him'.

Contrary to concerns that bilingualism is too confusing, there was a sense in some practitioners' accounts that while bilingual development may take longer for autistic children, it is nonetheless possible. For example, Anwen notes how Ryan was initially finding two languages difficult but, in time, has found bilingualism more natural: 'last year I would have said he was struggling with the two languages but this year now it's just clicked'. Emma also intimates that although the benefits of bilingualism may not be evident at this stage of Suvrat's development, in time they will emerge: 'at the moment it makes it more challenging, but from my understanding, I think when he's older it's beneficial'. These examples may indicate that advising monolingualism too early on in a child's development may not give the child the time or the opportunity to develop as a bilingual. In the context of a Welsh-medium primary school, Bethan posed a series of questions to consider when weighing up the value of a bilingual

education for autistic children: 'can they take the language on board? Does it come naturally to them? If it doesn't come naturally, is it going to be holding them back?'. These questions provide an effective starting point for considering the feasibility of bilingualism for a child on the autism spectrum.

C) Consequences for the classroom

As we have seen, educators viewed bilingualism as beneficial in principle, but these benefits did not necessarily translate to their autistic pupils. In keeping with their concerns about the feasibility of bilingualism in autism, some practitioners believed that bilingualism had negative consequences for autistic children in the school environment. Consistent with previous research (Baker, 2011; Frederickson & Cline, 2009), educators in England reported that identifying special educational needs was more difficult in children who speak English as an additional language. This issue was particularly pertinent in schools with a higher percentage of EAL pupils; as Debbie noted, 'the difficulty for us is how do you determine if the student has a learning difficulty in their home language, especially when you've got students who are new to England'. Equally, Dawn acknowledges that EAL pupils 'end up getting diagnosed later or we end up identifying it later because we put things down to it being an EAL need'. She comments on two further cases, noting how ascertaining the causes of children's difficulties can be problematic:

> *We have recently had two children having autism assessments, who have English as an additional language, and they have both come back as not being autistic but again, we weren't sure. The parents raised the concerns, and we couldn't hand-on-heart say, "no, it's the language barrier that's causing difficulties with communication".*

Although addressing these delays in identifying additional needs in bilingual children is important, Cath suggested that it can take time to decipher whether children who are new to English have special educational needs, and diagnoses should not be rushed. Instead, she advised:

> *You do have to leave it a while to see what's going to happen. It's much more challenging to diagnose and it's only after a matter of time that perhaps things will become a bit clearer.*

Targeting interventions and support for bilingual children may be more problematic when the underlying causes are unknown or multifaceted. Processing time is particularly important for children who are new to English. Cath refers to the 'silent period' (Bligh & Drury, 2015) that many newly-arrived children undergo: 'we're all aware of how long it can take some children

to actually even use spoken English, so that's always in the back of your mind when you're thinking about new children who come'.

Others expressed concerns that bilingualism may have a detrimental impact on autistic children's literacy development. Paula, for example, argued that a lack of English spoken at home was hindering Daniel's literacy: 'it would help if they [Daniel's parents] are speaking English at home, especially because of literacy in school. Supporting that. But most of them as soon as they get home it's back to speaking Polish'. Her use of 'most of them', however, suggests that Paula believes exposure to the home language in the family setting impacts all bilingual children, not just those on the autism spectrum. She continues by stating that the lack of consistency between the language spoken at home and at school is a key factor in Daniel's difficulties, arguing that bilingualism is 'probably a disadvantage for his autism'. Discussing Daniel's difficulty processing instructions, Paula was asked whether she believed it was the result of him being an EAL learner or being autistic, to which she responded: 'I think it's a combination. Probably more so his language I think. I would say the language more so. Definitely'. This initial uncertainty underscores the challenge for practitioners in disentangling language needs associated with being new to English and additional educational needs unrelated to the child's bilingualism.

Paula also argued that code-switching may be negatively affecting Daniel's school experience and academic progress: 'it must be so hard for him, to come in and switch into thinking about the English language. It must be so hard for him. So hard'. Her repetition of 'so hard' accentuates her view that bilingualism is cognitively demanding for Daniel. A similar concern was expressed by other practitioners interviewed. Lucy, a bilingual teaching assistant in Wales, remarked that 'I couldn't get him to switch between the two languages'. As her school's SENDCo, Dawn tried to facilitate William's Spanish by arranging sessions for him to practise his home language with a Spanish-speaking teaching assistant. However, she reflects that these attempts were not useful as 'he is not willing to engage in Spanish at all in school' and 'it didn't work. It just made William look very uncomfortable'. Nevertheless, Dawn acknowledged that the interventions were attempted because William's mother 'didn't want him to lose the Spanish'. Other practitioners recognised the difficult linguistic choices parents faced in deciding whether to maintain the home language(s). Emma, for example, noted how Suvrat's parents had altered their language practices to support his development of English:

I know at home, when mum and dad realised that he was struggling, they tried to speak to him in English more at home because they feel like that might support him more in school.

Emma's insight reveals that educational attainment and progress may be a crucial factor in parents' language decisions and practices at home, as will be further explored in chapter 5.

4.5.2. Analysis

It is clear from the findings presented above that practitioners held a variety of views about the value of bilingualism for autistic pupils. Many believed that bilingualism was beneficial for typically-developing children and for some – but not all – autistic children. Practitioners highlighted cognitive, cultural and communicative advantages of bilingualism in principle, but were reluctant to apply such benefits in practice to the autistic children they supported. This finding mirrors the disconnect between attitudes and practice in previous studies investigating professionals' perspectives about bilingualism for children with developmental conditions (de Valenzuela et al., 2016; Marinova-Todd et al., 2016). Like in Haukås' study (2016) into mainstream teachers' views of multilingualism, the educators in the current study were reluctant to claim that bilingualism was universally advantageous.

Rather than equating home language maintenance with academic progress, practitioners emphasised the importance of English for children's success in school. As such, a tension also documented by Robertson et al. (2014) emerged, whereby parents (such as William's mother) want to prevent home language loss, while educators want to increase the child's English proficiency (even though the two are not mutually exclusive). It is perhaps not surprising that in England educators' focus was on the development of the child's English proficiency, given that it is a significant predictor of the academic success of EAL pupils (Strand et al., 2015) and many autistic children, even in mainstream schools, have moderate to severe language difficulties (Kjellmer, Fernell, Gillberg, & Norrelgen, 2018). However, prioritising English over the home language may result in fewer opportunities for bilingual autistic children to develop both languages than their typically-developing bilingual counterparts (Marinova-Todd et al., 2016; Pesco et al., 2016). This is especially true in a monolingual educational system, such as the one in England, in which bilingual children may be subject to 'linguistic mainstreaming'. Practitioners rarely mentioned home language maintenance, and only in reference to the child's parents. It is possible, then, that the tension

between parents' desire to maintain the home language and practitioners' focus on English may have negative implications for family-school partnerships.

Some practitioners expressed concerns about the feasibility of bilingualism for the child they supported. The cognitive demands of code-switching led many practitioners to conclude that bilingualism was perhaps a disadvantage for their autistic pupils. They indicated that moving between two languages may be confusing for the child, findings echoed by the parents interviewed in Hampton et al. (2017) and Ijalba (2016). This view is epitomised by Bethan's question: 'if it doesn't come naturally, is it going to be holding them back?'. Bethan's case is of particular interest; she held highly positive views about the merits of bilingualism, based on personal experience, but still believed that bilingualism was not possible for Dyfan, as his difficulty acquiring Welsh was seen to be hindering his academic performance. These findings mirror those of Bird et al. (2016b), who concluded that there may be both positive and negative influences of bilingualism on children's development depending on individual contextual factors. It is therefore too reductionist to conclude that practitioners' views of bilingualism in autism are entirely dependent on their broader attitudes and experiences of bilingualism, as the educational environment in which they are operative will inevitably condition their perspective.

While some educators did not believe that bilingualism was suitable for the autistic pupil(s) being discussed, there was an acknowledgement that is was possible for other autistic children. As such, the possibility of maintaining two or more languages for autistic children is dependent on the individual profile, and autistic traits, of the child. Crucially, some practitioners noted that bilingualism was possible if sufficient time was given. Taken together, these two findings suggest that not only should language advice be given on a case-by-case basis (Hampton et al., 2017), but it should also be re-evaluated and modified according to the child's on-going linguistic development. In this vein, one-off advice to parents about which language to use with their autistic child may be damaging, as it does not account for changes to their developmental trajectory over time. Anwen's concerns about bilingualism for Ryan one year had dissipated by the following year, which indicates that not giving children adequate time to develop both languages may deprive them of the opportunity to become bilingual. One teacher, Emma, recognised this need for time by saying that bilingualism was currently challenging for Suvrat, but in the future, could be advantageous.

Educators described the various ways in which being bilingual may have impacted their autistic pupils' school performance. The initial challenge of identifying special educational needs in bilingual pupils was mentioned by a number of practitioners in England. This difficulty is reflected in the wider literature, which suggests that children from linguistically diverse backgrounds are frequently under- or mis-diagnosed (Strand et al., 2006; Yamasaki & Luk, 2018). Although late diagnosis may deprive children of the services and support they need, one practitioner warned that rushing into a diagnosis could be equally damaging. She suggested that it takes time to decipher the language profile of a newly-arrived child, and therefore observation, assessment, communication with parents and crucially, time, help to determine if there is an underlying condition. Practitioners also discussed the impact of bilingualism on children's literacy and ability to process information. Many felt that an English-dominant or Welsh-dominant school environment was more appropriate than facilitating and encouraging the use of the child's home language. One teacher believed that parents could better support the child's literacy development by speaking more English at home rather than the home language, which again highlights the perhaps conflicting language priorities of parents and educational practitioners respectively.

4.6. Theme 2: Comparisons across two linguistically different settings

4.6.1. Results

A) Differences between England and Wales

There were notable differences between the perspectives and experiences of practitioners in England compared to those in Wales. These distinctions could be partially attributed to linguistic differences in the English and Welsh educational systems. In Wales, many of the staff were bilingual themselves so could adapt their language use more readily and have more flexible expectations for language in the classroom. For example, Lucy's bilingualism impacted her support of the two children under discussion, as she states: 'when I knew they both knew Welsh I tried to include more Welsh when I work with them'. As a Welsh-speaker, Lucy reflected on her own linguistic identity, commenting, 'if I speak English to my parents, they would be quite upset that I'm not utilizing this language that I've got… it feels like something is wrong'. This notion of it feeling 'wrong' to use a non-native language with family members resonates with Bethan's earlier suggestion that language use should be determined by how 'natural' a language feels to the child. Bethan also asserted that the Welsh language was an integral component of her identity, remarking, 'I speak to friends in Welsh outside of

work, and it's just a pleasure for me'. Both Bethan and Lucy are indicating that being bilingual – or having access to their home language of Welsh – contributes to their sense of well-being.

The linguistic identity of staff may therefore play some role in their reflections on the challenges and opportunities of bilingualism in autism. As practitioners in Wales were bilingual themselves, they may have identified more – linguistically-speaking – with their students than practitioners in England, who tended to describe themselves as monolinguals: 'I don't speak any other languages' (Cath), 'I'm not a bilingual learner, I am a person who just dipped in and dipped out' (Debbie), and 'I'd love to speak two languages' (Emma). It is likely, then, that within a bilingual educational system, in which staff are also bilingual, bilingualism is more likely to be promoted and understood than in a more monolingual system, like in England. This finding gives further credence to Yu and Hsia's call (2018) for greater linguistic and cultural diversity among professionals who support bilingual children with special educational needs. This diversity is needed among the staff body in both monolingual and bilingual educational settings.

In England, there was both less confidence about supporting bilingual pupils and less promotion of bilingualism than in Wales. Discussing the support of EAL pupils, Emma stated that 'as a new teacher it's something I'm a bit unsure about', which suggests that increasing knowledge and understanding of EAL could be more effectively embedded into initial teacher education. In a similar vein, Natalia had not received any formal training on supporting EAL pupils and Dawn noted that a recent rise in EAL pupils in her school 'has been a real learning curve for everyone'. The fact that practitioners did not view pupils' multilingualism as a central facet of their profiles may further reinforce monolingual practices in England. For example, in schools in England with fewer EAL pupils, a number of teachers asserted that the language expectations for the classroom tended to be 'English only'. Dawn remarked that 'we certainly can't support his Spanish language needs at school because we're in England, and speak English'. Other teachers expressed similar sentiments: 'we don't offer an option of speaking in Polish' (Paula) and 'I wouldn't be expected to learn Italian to try to communicate with him [Luke]' (Robert).

While in England the language of instruction is almost exclusively English, practitioners in Wales highlighted the difficult choice parents had to make about whether to

send their child to a Welsh-medium (WM) or English-medium (EM) school. Suzanne noted how her pupil, Glyn, was about to move to a WM mainstream secondary school from a specialist autism unit within an EM primary school. She expressed concerns about the impact of a different language of instruction on Glyn's school experience: 'if they are purely Welsh and it's a different structure, I just don't want him to get too anxious'. Moving in the opposite direction, Bethan believed that a move from a WM to an EM school was the right decision for Dyfan, because she believed that a Welsh-medium environment was 'holding him back' and 'making a difference on his confidence'. Deciding on the most appropriate language of instruction was evidently not an issue for practitioners in England, given the principally monolingual educational system.

B) Commonalities between England and Wales

Although practitioners' perspectives and experiences differed somewhat between the two linguistically different educational settings, there were some distinct commonalities between the accounts in England and Wales. As in the children's accounts, the linguistic profile of the school in which practitioners worked seemed to be indicative of their perceptions of bilingualism; those working in schools with a higher proportion of bilingual pupils (both in Welsh-medium schools and schools in England with a higher percentage of EAL pupils) tended to hold more positive views about the merits of bilingualism. In Cath's school, for instance, every student spoke a different language at home. She noted that pupils 'are not discouraged to speak their own language' and suggested that the language expectations for the classroom varied according to the task at hand: 'when they're doing a more free activity, you'll get some children who will speak in their own language'. Cath also described ways in which the school supported children's home language maintenance, such as sending dual language books home so that parents who are less confident in English could actively engage in their child's literacy development in both languages. Similarly, Emma and Debbie worked in more multilingual schools and indicated the possible advantages of drawing on children's multilingual repertoires. Instead of viewing bilingualism as a barrier, Debbie highlighted the importance of 'complementing the skills they have from being an EAL learner'. In Wales, Anwen also emphasised that Ryan's access to two languages, rather than one, enriched his natural inquisitiveness and will have significant benefits for his educational outcomes. Accordingly, the views of practitioners working in schools in England with high numbers of EAL students

were more akin to those of practitioners in Wales than to educators in England who worked in more monolingual school environments.

Whether in a bilingual or monolingual education system, educators asserted that the children were more comfortable in English than in their home language, or than they were in Welsh for those with English as a first language. In England, even practitioners who were concerned about the effects of bilingualism in autism highlighted that the child tended to use English: 'I've never heard him speak Polish at all' (Paula) and 'he is very used to English here' (Natalia). This may be unsurprising given the previously discussed findings that in England an 'English only' approach was the norm. However, in Wales, a similar finding emerged whereby practitioners noted that children often reverted to English when communicating with peers, despite being in a Welsh-medium environment. Gill summarises this trend: 'it causes a lot of conflict within the mainstream because they're obviously in a Welsh-medium environment that they're learning, but they seem to always pick English'. Bethan reinforces this point by suggesting that, 'there are lots of schools who have difficulty having the children speak Welsh in the yard because all the children prefer to speak English'. Even in a bilingual educational system, then, there may be challenges in ensuring opportunities for children – particularly those with limited desire or capacity for social interaction - to utilise both languages.

Another challenge faced by educators in both Wales and England was how to assess bilingual autistic pupils. Suzanne commented that 'assessing Jack's language in either English or Welsh has been very difficult'. She continued by underscoring the possible differences between language use at home and at school, inferring that children's linguistic performance in school may not be a true reflection of their ability: 'as every parent says, whether their child speaks English, Welsh, both, nothing, the child will perform differently at school to when they're at home'. Gill adds that Jack and Glyn's mother 'feels they understand more in Welsh', despite being educated in an English-medium environment. Difficulty assessing students was also raised by practitioners in England. Debbie, for instance, stated that 'the reading material that you ask a child to read for an assessment is culturally biased'. Finding ways to assess pupils in both languages, wherever possible, and providing assessments that are culturally appropriate may help to alleviate this issue (Bird et al., 2016a). These findings also suggest that advice to parents to adopt an 'English only' approach may be particularly harmful if the child is more confident expressing themselves in the home language, as it may further deny them opportunities for interaction in the familial environment.

4.6.2. Analysis

Certain differences emerged between practitioners' attitudes towards bilingualism in Wales and in England. These attitudes could well be attributed to the fact that practitioners in Wales were generally bilingual themselves, while those in England tended to identify as monolingual. This finding reflects conclusions drawn in the children's accounts in chapter 3, whereby children educated in more multilingual environments tended to hold more positive attitudes about being bilingual than those in more monolingual school settings. It is unsurprising that practitioners who belong to a bilingual educational system, as in Wales, are more convinced by the benefits of dual language use. In England, by contrast, particularly in schools with fewer EAL pupils, practitioners regarded English as the sole language of instruction in the school environment and home languages as the domain of familial life. Educators in England also had less confidence in supporting bilingual students, which tallies with the findings that EAL training in England is insufficient (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016) and that teachers frequently have to 'learn on the job' (Murakami, 2008, p.268).

Although there were linguistic differences between the two contexts, practitioners in England and Wales also faced similar challenges. In fact, educators in schools with a higher percentage of EAL pupils often had more in common with practitioners in Wales than those in England with few EAL pupils when it came to perceptions of multilingualism. Most notably, practitioners in more multilingual environments held more positive views about the merits of bilingualism. Despite positive attitudes to bilingualism in Wales, practitioners reported that many children in Welsh-medium schools still preferred English when communicating with peers, in keeping with the findings of Thomas et al. (2012). This may be because adolescent learners often associate the Welsh language with more formal domains such as educational and nationalistic discourses (Price & Tamburelli, 2016).

Educators in England reported a similar situation, in which the multilingual children they supported tended to value and use English more in school than their home language. This tendency to give superior status to English has also been documented in the EAL literature (Liu & Evans, 2016) and could be the result of 'linguistic mainstreaming' (Bracken et al., 2017). Another commonly held view between practitioners across the two settings was that assessing bilingual pupils was problematic. This finding runs parallel to the sub-theme discussed in 4.5.1. that describes the challenges educators face when trying to identify special educational needs

in bilingual children. Although providing assessments in both languages is recommended (Bird et al., 2016a), most assessments rely on literacy skills, which the child may not have in their home language. This can compound issues in assessing bilingual children with accuracy and equality. It highlights the need for further research into the effective assessment of bilingual learners, both in identifying additional needs and capturing their ability in different areas of the curriculum.

4.7. Theme 3: Creating inclusive learning environments

4.7.1. Results
A) Identifying barriers to learning

Educators reported that their bilingual autistic pupils faced several barriers to learning, and, with only two exceptions, described their school experiences as difficult. The following barriers were identified by practitioners and will be discussed in turn: challenges with literacy; social interaction; emotion regulation; transitions; a lack of support in the classroom; and, a lack of autism awareness.

Most educators described literacy-based tasks as either the least preferred or the least accessible part of the curriculum for their bilingual autistic pupils. Given that literacy skills are needed in most subject areas, this presented a major stumbling block to their academic progress. Practitioners identified both reading comprehension and writing as key areas of challenge. Emma described difficulties in comprehension as a barrier to Suvrat's progress: 'he's not able to pick out the key points of things that people say, so he is missing out at the moment on a lot of learning'. In Daniel's case, Paula noted: 'in terms of writing, it's not great at all… sentence structure, grasping spellings and translating from Polish'. For Dyfan, not being able to write in Welsh was pivotal in the decision for him to move to an English-medium school. Bethan commented that, 'when it comes to writing anything, he knows what he wants to say but he can't automatically think of it in Welsh'. In the latter two examples, practitioners believed that bilingualism may be impeding the child's literacy development.

However, unpicking the distinct impact of autism and of bilingualism on a child's development was by no means straightforward, as Dawn highlights in her reflections on William's reading and listening comprehension:

> *William has very, very slow processing speeds so he needs a lot of time to process things and who knows whether that's purely autism or whether it's slightly language and the autism, but that's very significant how much time he needs to respond.*

Similarly, Paula highlights that not having enough time to process information was a barrier for Daniel: 'everything is at a slower pace for him and he does need it broken down so much more. Just having that time, he does need that support and without it he does get lost'. As highlighted in theme 1 (sub-theme C), several practitioners cited pupils' bilingualism as a barrier to developing oral and written proficiency in English.

In keeping with the findings of Symes and Humphrey (2010), many practitioners also described social interaction as a major challenge for pupils, which could be attributed to autistic symptoms, a language barrier, or both. Most notably, educators described children's difficulty in making and maintaining friendships. Paula reported that Daniel 'finds it very hard to socialise with peers', while Debbie noted the social vulnerability of her pupil, Jokubus, commenting that when he first arrived at the school 'he provided the entertainment and therefore he would be encouraged to behave in that way'. Educators frequently reported children's preference for being alone during break times. For example, Emma remarked that Suvrat 'plays with his peers for about a minute and then he'll run off and want to be by himself', and suggested that 'he doesn't quite understand children's behaviour'.

Language barriers also hindered children's social interaction. Bethan commented that: 'Dyfan finds it hard socially because he is constantly speaking English and everyone else is speaking Welsh'. Given the evidence in the literature that social interaction in school is already more difficult for autistic pupils (Rowley et al., 2012), it seems that Dyfan's difficulty acquiring Welsh was further diminishing his opportunities to socialise with peers. There were, however, some positive stories of children's social interaction. For example, Natalia described Rahul as having 'real friendships, it's not pity or anything. They genuinely do like being with him and they make him laugh'. Equally, Anwen and Robert both reported no issues with their pupils' friendships and social interaction with peers, and bullying was rarely mentioned as a major issue for the children being discussed, despite its prevalence in the existing literature on autistic children's school experience (Cook et al., 2016; Maïano et al., 2016).

Regulating emotions was another barrier for students, according to the professionals working alongside them. For two pupils, anger was a frequent – and often intense – emotion.

Robert recounted Luke's interpretation of his own emotions: 'he would say that "I get red hot anger", he describes it as a "volcano of anger", that no-one can calm him down. And you sort of couldn't even get him out of that'. Although Robert believed that Luke is beginning to manage this anger by leaving the classroom and having time to himself in a quiet room, his teacher described him 'flipping tables and ripping down displays and… physically interacting with children'. He elaborated by saying that:

> We have seen probably 4 situations where we've had to evacuate the classroom. Probably for a spell of about 15 to 20 minutes, just for long enough for him to calm down and then start putting the classroom back together again.

Paula also describes Daniel's difficulty in managing his emotions, noting, 'he gets very angry. Even today, we've had an incident where he's got very angry'. In keeping with other research about the school experiences of autistic children (Carrington & Graham, 2001; Moyse & Porter, 2015), 'masquerading' behaviour was also present in educators' accounts. 'Masquerading', also known as 'camouflaging', involves the child attempting to mask their autistic traits in the school setting, and often results in a release of tension or emotion when the pupil returns home. Dawn described William's experience of 'masquerading': 'he tends to hold it together more at school and it shows more at home, but there are certainly things that come through at school'.

Like others, Dawn also noted that William is 'not motivated to learn' and is 'easily distracted'. Practitioners commonly described difficulties in managing pupils' distractions and helping them to re-focus. As such, many reflected on the pressure of balancing the pupils' individual needs with the requirements of the rest of the class. With regard to distracting behaviours, Debbie noted: 'you want to do what's right for him but you have 20 other children in the class, who do not deserve the distraction'. Trying to create a stimulating and fair environment for all and being inclusive of the pupil's particular needs proved to be a challenge, as Bethan describes: 'we needed consistency with Dyfan in the classroom and for the sake of the children who are in the classroom around him'.

Consonant with previous research (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Makin et al., 2017), transitions – whether between school years, classroom environments, or even lessons – emerged as another key challenge for many of the children, according to practitioners. Suzanne raised concerns about Glyn's transition to secondary school with particular reference to changes in routine: 'what worries me for when he starts secondary school is that here we

virtually do the same routine every day'. She explained that each year after the school holidays Glyn was very withdrawn on his return to school, and that he 'would clam up and he'd go back into his shell'. Bethan, whose pupil was set to move from a Welsh-medium to an English medium primary school, also reflected on the potential challenges of moving school:

> *I think when he goes to the next school now, he'll definitely need support straight away. It's going to be a different school, a different routine, different members of staff and children, so it's going to be a big step for him.*

Accordingly, another barrier mentioned by educators was a lack of support for students, particularly the need for more one-to-one support in the classroom. For example, Paula reflected on how the high incidence of SEND needs in her class meant that Daniel did not have access to a teaching assistant (TA), even though 'he would benefit from having one, because he works so much better having someone with him'. Equally, two teachers discussed the difficulties of getting an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for their bilingual autistic learners, which in turn meant that they were not assigned a TA despite the acute need. This chimes with previous findings that the application process for EHCPs lacks transparency and decreased funding means that applications are often rejected (Boesley & Crane, 2018).

Finally, practitioners mentioned a lack of awareness about autism both among school staff and the public as another potential challenge to their work. Debbie stated that, 'the whole perception of what it means to be autistic is quite a shame really', while Robert cited a persistent 'lack of understanding about autism' as inimical to autistic children's school experiences. Similarly, Bethan highlighted the stigma around autism:

> *Obviously you hear the word "autism" and "autistic child" and people tend to be on their tiptoes around someone like Dyfan and be scared of the term. But you can't be scared of the term, you just need to know the child and know their needs and work from there.*

Two teachers reported incidents of supply teachers coming into the classroom and not accommodating the differences displayed by the individual child:

> *We had a supply teacher in for the day and she told Luke to "stop using that stupid voice". The class absolutely went for her, and I thought "fair play for sticking up for him", because people just don't realise. (Robert)*

> *It can be quite easy for a supply teacher to get quite cross because it looks like he's not listening. (Emma)*

A lack of awareness about autism and EAL respectively were cited by practitioners as a significant barrier for the children they supported. This highlights the importance of raising awareness of neurodiversity and linguistic diversity in the classroom and curriculum, as well as providing teachers with opportunities for continuing professional development.

B) Best practice in the classroom

Despite the major barriers mentioned, practitioners also highlighted best practice in creating inclusive learning environments for bilingual autistic pupils. First and foremost, many participants argued for person-centred approaches. For example, as her school's SENDCo, Debbie stressed that 'the whole point of the SEND code of practice is that it takes a person-centred approach'. In practice, Natalia explains that 'it was difficult at first getting used to him, knowing what he likes and how he learns', however, she added that understanding Rahul's unique needs and personality enhanced her ability to support him effectively. Bethan reinforces this point by suggesting that teachers 'need to make sure that they look at the child as an individual. Not as the term "autistic"'. These accounts give further weight to the argument that school support for bilingual autistic children should be tailored to the child's individual needs. To ensure that this is implemented in practice, Robert suggested that professional dialogue should be balanced by the voices of the children themselves. Drawing on a similar theme, Dawn asserted that an autism diagnosis gave William more opportunity to articulate his difficulties:

> *He's voicing that he's finding school harder, whether it's got harder, or whether he's more able to articulate that, we just want to get his input into that. So that door has been opened, through the diagnosis.*

In terms of pedagogy, practitioners identified some key strategies for engaging their bilingual autistic learners. As is evident in children's accounts of their school, time to process information was identified as crucial to pupils' academic progress. Rachel recommended short bursts of information, while Paula suggested that collaborative tasks with different students greatly improved Daniel's social interaction with peers. Other practitioners noted that they or the school provided particular social clubs for autistic children to encourage their social interaction. Clear expectations and routines were also identified by many practitioners as essential for their students:

> *Everything here is very structured and he knows what's expected. (Lucy)*

> *I think it frustrates him if he doesn't know what's going on in the day. So he needs to know. (Natalia)*

He's used to what we're expecting of him, he's used to our firm but fair attitude. (Bethan)

Several educators also highlighted the need to reinforce instructions and suggested that visual prompts were useful in conveying information in a different way. To this end, five practitioners mentioned that art was their students' preferred subject. Embedding more creative tasks into the literacy curriculum may therefore be useful for this group. For example, Cath noted: 'we had literacy-based subjects where we would do story maps and that would really draw her in'. Similarly, Emma reflected on the possible benefits of creative tasks for Suvrat: 'I think because of his autism, he has a lot of sensory overload, so I think that calms him down'. Nevertheless, Debbie provided a caveat to using art in literacy-based subjects, in that Jokubus' 'desire to be focused on artistic work that wasn't relevant' impeded his academic progress in other areas.

C) Whole-school approaches

Along with individual strategies, educators also suggested some whole-school approaches to cultivating more inclusive learning environments, some of which apply to bilingual or autistic school populations respectively, and some of which are of particular importance for children who are both bilingual and autistic.

Practitioners considered how to best integrate children into mainstream classrooms. Bethan, for instance, noted that her pupil 'wasn't used to being part of a classroom, he just wanted to work on his own. So he really needed that extra help'. Building on the concept of 'mainstreaming' (Leung, 2007; Morewood, Humphrey, & Symes, 2011), Debbie argued that 'the educational system needs to support them, not isolate them'. This is crucial for bilingual autistic pupils, who may feel different or isolated from their peers. While being sensitive to a possible desire to fit in with their peers, practitioners also underscored the importance of celebrating children's linguistic and neuro-diversity when appropriate opportunities arise. Debbie and Robert highlighted the need to recognise the linguistic repertoires of their bilingual students:

We need to be celebrating what they can do and reminding them that to move to another country, to speak a different language in another country, to be successful, is pretty blooming amazing. (Debbie)

*You sort of go "Wow! How have you got all this knowledge inside your head? Cos
I've not got a clue what you're talking about". (Robert)*

Debbie also points to the need to balance the support required for autistic pupils with an acknowledgement of their achievements: 'what the children with autism can achieve needs to be recognised and valued'.

Practitioners identified effective collaboration with parents as a vital strategy for supporting bilingual learners on the autism spectrum. This is particularly pertinent for parents of EAL children, who may lack access to important information regarding their children's education because of linguistic and cultural differences (Evans et al., 2016). Dawn observed that her school had recently implemented a coffee morning for parents of children with SEN, and had plans for a similar initiative with EAL parents. She also mentioned that sharing William's timetable and intervention plan with his mother was a useful approach for promoting parental collaboration. Cath added that collaboration with parents is also key in identifying educational needs in the first place, given that families have a unique insight into the child's home language development:

*If parents are concerned, that is another kind of indicator really, cos if they're
concerned about their development in their own language, that's something that we
would consider.*

Finally, practitioners discussed creating an educational culture in which staff themselves are well-supported and have opportunities to develop their professional competencies. Debbie, for instance, described the impact of supporting young people on practitioners' well-being: 'emotionally, you are working with the most vulnerable and the ones that have the need. And *you* need so much time and energy to devote to that'. Describing his first experience of teaching an autistic child, Robert reported that 'it was a lot of learning as you do it', which indicates a need for more autism-specific training for school staff. These two examples demonstrate that one of the most effective whole-school approaches for supporting bilingual autistic children is to invest time and money into educators' own development and well-being.

4.7.2. Analysis

Several challenges specific to this group of learners came to light during the interviews with practitioners. However, these dovetailed more readily with the literature on school experience

for autistic pupils than the research on experiences for EAL learners. Many of the children being discussed were born in the UK and had received their entire schooling in England or Wales, therefore it is possible that for practitioners the child's autistic identity was more prominent than their linguistic one. The barriers identified that were particularly consistent with extant autism research, rather than the EAL or bilingualism literature, included challenges with social interaction, transitions and emotion regulation.

Educators noted that social exchanges with peers and staff were often difficult for their bilingual autistic pupils, which is consistent with previous findings (Locke, Ishijima, Kasari, & London, 2010; Wainscot et al., 2008). However, unlike previous research (Maïano et al., 2016; van Roekel, Scholte, & Didden, 2010), no practitioners mentioned bullying as a major issue for the children being discussed. The findings of this study also build on existing evidence suggesting that periods of transition may be more difficult for autistic children than their typically-developing peers (Makin et al., 2017). In line with the children's accounts presented in chapter 3, some educators mentioned that their students had difficulties regulating emotions and frequently experienced anxiety or anger. This suggests a need to better understand bilingual autistic individuals' possible 'camouflaging' behaviours (Hull et al., 2017), and the ways in which they express mental health difficulties, given that communicating their feelings may be more difficult. Teaching this group of learners coping strategies that minimise their anxiety is also essential (Williams et al., 2017). Practitioners identified strategies for overcoming such difficulties, such as a separate space for the child and visual timetables to illustrate their routine. Evans et al. (2016) found that newly-arrived EAL students also experience high levels of anxiety, so it is possible that bilingual autistic children may be particularly affected.

There were many cases in which practitioners felt that there was insufficient support in place for their student(s). In particular, they felt that students needed but did not have access to a designated teaching assistant. Given that the barriers faced by students were not only academic, but also social and sometimes psychological, these findings echo the conclusions of Bolic Baric, Hellberg, Kjellberg, and Hemmingsson (2016), who argue that academic support for autistic pupils should go hand-in-hand with psychosocial support. Consistent with both the autism and EAL literatures, most practitioners highlighted that literacy was an area of challenge for their bilingual autistic pupils. This mirrors findings from the children's own accounts in chapter 3 and existing research into the literacy development of autistic (Brown et al., 2013) and EAL (Murphy, 2018) children.

As well as highlighting barriers, educators also identified some useful examples of best practice for supporting bilingual autistic pupils. Many emphasised the importance of person-centred approaches and argued that advice and support provided by the school should be given on an individualised basis. This bolsters calls for the child's voice to be present in the collation of Education, Health and Care Plans (Palikara, Castro, Gaona, & Eirinaki, 2018). Other recommendations for supporting this group of learners included allowing more time for processing information, in keeping with participants in Hall's study (2019), who recommended giving instructions more slowly and visibly demonstrating tasks as a way of facilitating EAL students' understanding. Embedding creative activities into literacy-based tasks was also highlighted. In accordance with the children's accounts, practitioners identified art as a subject preference; if verbal communication is more challenging for this group – as a result of autism or emergent bilingualism – then giving them opportunities to express themselves in different ways is crucial in creating more inclusive learning environments. Similarly, well-structured collaborative tasks also provide them with safe spaces in which to develop important social skills (Symes & Humphrey, 2010) and learn content and language simultaneously (Liu et al., 2017).

Existing research indicates that cultivating a sense of inclusion across the whole school is paramount in improving autistic pupils' school experiences (Danker et al., 2016; Sproston, Sedgewick, & Crane, 2017). As such, educators recommended several whole-school approaches to inclusion. Most notably, practitioners highlighted the need to celebrate children's differences. This chimes with existing research that emphasises the importance of recognising and embracing children's linguistic repertoires and identities (Liu et al., 2017) and highlighting autistic individuals' strengths rather than solely focusing on difficulties (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2018). By contrast, practitioners in England cited a lack of awareness about both bilingualism and autism within the school community as a challenge for staff and students alike. Such a finding resonates with previous research demonstrating the need for greater awareness and more training in schools about autism (Roberts & Simpson, 2016) and bilingualism (Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2017). Celebrating strengths and diversity is also an important step in promoting acceptance among peers (Saggers, 2015). These whole-school approaches rely on a move away from negative stereotypes of autism (Treweek et al., 2019) and bilingualism (Jaworska & Themistocleous, 2018), and on societal shifts that may only be possible through education, training and public awareness campaigns.

Finally, educators in England and Wales placed a high importance on communication and collaboration with families. This is consistent with research suggesting that family-school partnerships can play an important role in children's academic achievement and social adjustment in school (Castro et al., 2015). Practitioners identified sharing resources and timetables with parents, as well as discussing interventions and assessments, as crucial steps in building stronger family-school partnerships. Given that under-developed partnerships have been reported between schools and parents of both autistic children (Zablotsky et al., 2012) and EAL children (Wesely, 2018), it is particularly crucial that schools establish contact and build a rapport with parents of bilingual autistic children, and view families as an important asset rather than a problem (Evans et al., 2016).

4.8. Discussion

Given that educators' views have hitherto been neglected in existing research, the findings presented in this chapter offer unique insights into the perspectives and experiences of educational practitioners who support bilingual autistic pupils in two linguistically different educational settings. These findings contribute to the wider literature on stakeholders' experiences when bilingualism and developmental conditions interact (de Valenzuela et al., 2016; Marinova-Todd et al., 2016). While differences of opinion emerged regarding the value and feasibility of bilingualism in autism, there was evidence from multiple interviews that practitioners believed that bilingualism has cognitive, cultural and communicative advantages for typically-developing children, but these benefits may not always translate to autistic pupils. Practitioners believed that bilingualism was possible for some but not all autistic pupils, and an autistic child's capacity for bilingualism depended on their individual language profile. Several participants were concerned that bilingualism was hindering the student's literacy development and that code-switching was too cognitively demanding.

As in Robertson et al. (2014), these findings reveal an underlying tension between practitioners' concern for developing the child's English proficiency and families' desire to maintain the home language (Robertson et al., 2014), as will be further explored in the next chapter. Striking a compromise, some practitioners advised considering how naturally the two languages come to the child. Most crucially, however, was the need to give the child time to develop both languages as evidenced by one practitioner's experience of seeing her pupil gain proficiency in both languages, even though it took longer than for typically-developing

children in her class. One-off advice given to parents to adopt a monolingual approach may then have serious, negative consequences and prevent a child with the potential to be bilingual from having the opportunity to even try.

Practitioners' views about the possibility of bilingualism in autism did not always converge with existing research, which posits that monolinguals and bilinguals perform similarly on measures of expressive and receptive vocabulary and language (Dai et al., 2018; Reetzke et al., 2015). However, this certainly does not mean that these perspectives and experiences should be disregarded. Instead, their accounts provide crucial insights into the challenges of supporting bilingual autistic children in educational settings. Major challenges for practitioners included identifying special educational needs in bilingual pupils and finding adequate ways to assess bilingual autistic children. This was especially difficult in Wales' bilingual education system, as practitioners were uncertain about which language was most appropriate for assessment purposes. In England, practitioners were clear that the school setting was an 'English only' environment; they were not expected to know the home language nor devote curriculum time to its development.

In part, practitioners' views were influenced by their own linguistic experiences and the linguistic profile of the school in which they worked. For example, educators in Wales, who were bilingual themselves, and those working in schools in England with a high number of EAL pupils, tended to hold more favourable views about bilingualism than practitioners in more monolingual educational settings. In both England and Wales, there was a sense that children gave superior status to English than to their home language, or Welsh, which is consistent with previous findings (Liu & Evans, 2016; Mills, 2001; Thomas et al., 2012).

4.9. Implications for educational practice and policy

The disconnect between some educators' belief that bilingualism is detrimental to autistic children's development and the lack of evidence to suggest that it is (Lim et al., 2018; Uljarević et al., 2016) is problematic. On one hand, this disconnect implies that research in the area of bilingualism and autism needs to be more readily accessible and available to educational practitioners who are supporting bilingual autistic pupils and advising families about language choices. Raising awareness that it is possible for autistic individuals to be bilingual could result in more targeted classroom support and enable educational practitioners to provide research-informed advice to multilingual families with an autistic child. On the other hand, it would be

injudicious to ignore educators' concerns about the challenges of bilingualism for autistic pupils. To this end, a clear recommendation to emerge from these findings is that sufficient time and support for home language maintenance should be given to children before any irrevocable language decisions are taken. In practice, this could mean that instead of offering one-off advice to families about the impact of bilingualism in autism, schools and practitioners could monitor the child's language development over time and regularly discuss options with parents. In their accounts, practitioners noted that while it may take autistic children more time than their typically-developing peers, bilingualism is possible for many of them. While practitioners believed that monolingualism was a better choice for some children, such decisions should be taken in the context of ongoing discussions with their family and be re-evaluated periodically to ensure that children are not unfairly precluded from the opportunity to be bilingual.

In England, it was clear that more training on EAL is needed, which could be embedded into initial teacher education and continuing professional development. Practitioners should also be encouraged to recognise and reflect on their own linguistic and cultural experiences, assumptions and biases (Welterlin & LaRue, 2007), given that attitudes did fluctuate according to the linguistic profile of the school in which the educators worked and their own linguistic profiles. In Wales, a more systematic approach to supporting bilingual pupils with special educational needs is required, especially consideration of how specialist units within mainstream schools might best support students' bilingualism when appropriate. In both England and Wales, practitioners also highlighted the need for more resources, support staff, and communication with families to support student' linguistic development, both in the home language and the language of instruction.

These findings also indicate a strong need to simultaneously employ person-centred approaches to educational practices and to increase understanding and awareness of autism in schools. In the classroom, more time to process information is crucial, given particular challenges associated with autism and the time needed to acquire or maintain multiple languages. This could be practically achieved through reinforcement of instructions, multi-modal teaching approaches, and giving students opportunities to express themselves through different mediums, such as art. Whilst it is important to acknowledge and respond to the challenges faced by this group of learners, improving inclusion for bilingual autistic children

also involves facilitating opportunities for social interaction with peers and celebrating their strengths and differences.

4.10. Chapter summary and conclusions

This chapter sought to delineate and analyse the perspectives and experiences of educational practitioners supporting bilingual pupils on the autism spectrum. Reporting the accounts of thirteen educators, including teachers, teaching assistants, SENDCos, and a speech and language therapist, the chapter traces their beliefs about bilingualism in autism and how these beliefs translate into classroom practice. Like in chapter 3, practitioners' experiences were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The first theme, 'perspectives on bilingualism in autism', showcased practitioners' varying attitudes about the effects of bilingualism on autistic pupils and the unique challenges that accompany their education. Many felt that bilingualism was valuable in principle, but had concerns that its benefits carried less significance for their autistic pupils. To this end, the findings reflect the emerging disconnect in existing literature (Marinova-Todd et al., 2016; Yu, 2016) between linguistic attitudes and practices when bilingualism meets autism. The second theme, 'comparisons across two linguistically different settings', found that bilingual staff in Wales held more positive views about bilingualism than monolingual staff in England; however, both reported that children tended to choose English over their home language or Welsh when communicating with peers. Finally, the third theme, 'creating inclusive learning environments', underscored the barriers facing bilingual autistic children in educational settings and provided individual strategies and whole-school approaches aimed at supporting them.

The findings of this chapter suggest a need for greater awareness in schools that it is possible for autistic pupils from multilingual families to grow up bilingually, despite concerns expressed by educators. However, practitioners also need to be better supported in identifying additional needs in bilingual pupils and in adequately assessing bilingual autistic pupils. Strategies such as giving extra time to process information, reinforcing instructions, and recognising linguistic and neuro-diversity would help to ensure that children who are 'doubly different' from their peers not only have the requisite support in school, but have opportunities to harness and celebrate those differences. Crucially, monitoring a child's language development over time and regularly re-evaluating the possibilities of bilingualism in conjunction with parents would safeguard against children missing out on the opportunity to be bilingual. In emphasising the importance of developing English proficiency, some

practitioners suggested that the home language was having a detrimental effect on the education of their autistic pupil(s). This poses serious questions and implications for multilingual families, who are faced with difficult choices about what language(s) to use with their child. The next chapter will bring this possible tension between the school and familial settings to the fore.

5. Autism and Bilingualism in the Family Setting

5.1. Chapter aims and questions

Misconceptions about bilingualism are commonplace and can complicate families' decisions about whether to speak one or more language(s) to their children. Such decisions are made even more complex when a child is on the autism spectrum. This chapter considers the language choices of 16 family members (14 mothers, 1 father and 1 grandmother) when bilingualism meets autism. After discussing the aims, research questions and procedures of this part of the study, four superordinate themes will be presented. Discussion of the four themes will be grounded in the words of the participants themselves in order to draw out their 'insider perspectives' (Reid et al., 2005).

The principal aim of the current chapter is to elucidate what Baker describes as the 'texture and nuance that exists in the lives of all multilingual families of children with autism' (2013, p.527). The four themes discussed in this chapter build on existing literature about language maintenance in autism (Hampton et al., 2017; Ijalba, 2016; Yu, 2013) and draw on Yu's distinction (2016) between 'bilingualism as conceptualised and bilingualism as lived' in their consideration of inconsistencies between attitudes and linguistic practices. Chiefly, this chapter seeks to shed much needed light on families' perceptions of bilingualism in autism, the factors affecting their language choices, the consequences of these decisions, and their expectations regarding their child's future linguistic development. Finally, in keeping with the thread running throughout the thesis, the commonalities and differences between families' experiences in England and Wales are discussed.

This chapter seeks to provide answers to research question 3, as posed in chapter 1:

What are parents' experiences of raising an autistic child in a multilingual family?

Understanding the interaction between bilingualism and autism in the family setting means discerning initial perceptions about the impact of bilingualism on a child's development, as well as how families come to make decisions about the languages they use. By drawing on the micro-perspective of individual families' language practices, and the macro-perspective of the

language contexts in which they are operative (England and Wales), the current chapter was informed by the following research sub-questions:

1) What are parents' perceptions about the value of bilingualism when raising a child on the autism spectrum?
2) What factors influence families' language choices?
3) What are the consequences of choosing a more monolingual or multilingual approach respectively?
4) How do parents' aspirations for their children's language development evolve over time?
5) How do perceptions of bilingualism and actual language choices differ between parents who are raising their children in a country where the education system is predominantly monolingual (England) and parents raising their children in a country where the educational system promotes bilingualism (Wales)?

5.2. Participants

Participants (n=16) consisted of fourteen mothers, one grandmother and one father. Five participants lived in Wales and eleven lived in England. For the analyses in this chapter, participants have been divided by the language approach they chose to adopt with their child. Eight families indicated that they had opted for a more multilingual approach to raising their autistic child (group 1), while six families reported opting for a more monolingual approach (i.e. using mainly English) (group 2). This distinction will be further explained in the results overview (see 5.4.). Demographic information, interview details and families' language approaches are detailed in Table 13. Two pairs of participants were interviewed together (Hira & Davesh and Anna & Mary) as this was requested by participants. Note that rows 11 and 15 are incomplete as in these cases children and educational practitioners were consulted but not parents.

Table 13: Parents' demographic information

	Participant	Relation to child	Child (age)	Language(s) other than English that child is exposed to	Interview length (location)	Interpreter	More multilingual (1) or monolingual (2) approach
1	Molly	Mother	Dyfan (6)	Welsh	30:50 (school)	No	2
2	Hira Davesh	Mother Father	Nish (7)	Bengali Hindi	35:17 (home)	No	2
3	Roshan	Mother	Zehra (7)	Turkish	18:53 (home)	No	2
4	Katherine	Mother	Thomas (8)	Welsh	22:23 (home)	No	1
5	Magdalena	Mother	William (8)	Spanish	27:43 (home)	No	2
6	Chandra	Mother	Suvrat (9)	Hindi	28:10 (school)	No	1
7	Baheela	Mother	Amira (9)	Urdu Punjabi	12:58 (school)	Yes	1
8	Eleanora	Mother	Luke (9)	Italian	26:59 (school)	No	1
9	Lena	Mother	Daniel (9)	Polish	16:21 (home)	Yes	1
10	Anna Mary	Mother Grand-mother	Ryan (9)	Welsh	35:32 (school)	No	1
11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	Nabani	Mother	Rahul (10)	Hindi Gujarati	42:37 (school)	No	2
13	Julie	Mother	Gareth (11)	Welsh	26:28 (home)	No	1
14	Roberta	Mother	Marco (12)	Italian	46:04 (home)	No	1
15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

16	Dasia	Mother	James (18+) Zoe (18+)	French Arabic	23:13 (public space)	No	2

5.3. Data analysis

Interview data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis, as outlined in chapter 2. Following the initial analysis, 327 emergent themes were identified related to parental experiences of raising a bilingual child on the autism spectrum. This list of emergent themes then underwent a process of de-duplication and refinement, resulting in a decrease from 327 to 180. The subthemes were subsequently reduced again following a process of abstraction and subsumption (stage 6 of Table 6) based on the research questions posed in this chapter.[38] The 58 remaining subthemes became 4 superordinate and 13 subordinate themes, all of which are detailed below in Table 14.

Table 14: Reduction of themes process (parents)

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes	Previous subordinate themes
Theme 1: Perceptions about the value of bilingualism	A) Impact on communication	1. Home language as an extra means of communicating 2. Bilingualism increasing empathy 3. Communicative advantages to bilingualism in autism 4. Bilingualism builds confidence 5. Bilingualism useful for social skills 6. More opportunities for socialising
	B) Cultural value	1. Language and identity 2. Culture in home language 3. Fear of losing cultural identity/heritage 4. Cross-cultural comparisons
	C) Impact on cognition	1. Bilingualism increases cognitive flexibility 2. Possible 'isolating noise' advantage 3. Bilingualism and confusion

[38] The subthemes identified in the process of de-duplication and refinement are available on request.

		4. Bilingualism difficult for child
		5. Language a barrier to understanding
		6. Bilingualism as cognitive challenge
Theme 2: Factors influencing language decisions	A) Communication with family	1. Language and family relationships 2. Bilingualism as natural to family life 3. Language choices and family 4. Forced monolingualism and family tensions
	B) Advice received	1. No advice given 2. Advised to speak one language 3. Advised to maintain both languages 4. Language advice irrelevant as diagnosed later 5. Told lack of English was the problem
	C) Feasibility of bilingualism	1. Bilingualism is possible for child 2. Communicating basic need 3. Multilingualism not manageable 4. Language does not come naturally
	D) Practical considerations	1. Reflecting on own linguistic experiences 2. Natural interest in languages 3. Parent modelling language learning
	E) The role of English	1. Prioritising English 2. UK not conducive to multilingualism 3. Bilingualism is a barrier to English proficiency 4. Child's preference for English
Theme 3: Consequences of language choices	D) Family well-being	1. Language and emotional bond 2. Parent well-being and language 3. Child's well-being outweighs being bilingual 5. Regret about monolingualism 6. Siblings miss out on learning language
	E) Children's language use	1. Receptive v expressive 2. Mixing languages 3. Literacy in home language 4. Literacy 5. Vocabulary

	F) Education	1. Compartmentalises languages
		2. Welsh is language of education
		3. Lack of WM specialist schools
		4. Bilingualism in specialist schools
Theme 4: Shifting expectations	A) Future language learning	1. Bilingualism helps other language learning
		2. Other languages / MFL
		3. Languages and employability
		4. Languages open doors
	B) Language choices are not fixed	1. Multilingual aspirations
		2. Differing parental linguistic expectations
		3. Readiness for language is essential
Total	13	58

5.4. Results overview

Given the chapter's focus, the findings presented here relate to autism and bilingualism in the family setting. The four superordinate themes along with their concomitant subordinate themes are presented in Table 15.

Table 15: Superordinate and subordinate themes (parents' accounts)

Superordinate themes	**Subordinate themes**
1. Perceptions about the value of bilingualism	A) Impact on communication
	B) Cultural value
	C) Impact on cognition
2. Factors influencing language decisions	A) Communication with family
	B) Advice received
	C) Feasibility of bilingualism
	D) Practical considerations
	E) The role of English
3. Consequences of language choices	A) Family well-being
	B) Children's language use
	C) Education
4. Shifting Expectations	A) Future language learning
	B) Language choices are not fixed

For the purposes of the analysis, participating families were divided into two groups (Table 16): the eight families who opted for a more multilingual approach to raising their child are in group 1, and the six families who reported opting for a more monolingual approach (i.e. using mainly English with their child) make up group 2. These labels were formulated based on parents' descriptions of their own language use in the home.

Table 16: Parent groups based on language choices

	Language choice	**Number of families**
Group 1	Adopted a (more) multilingual approach	**8** (5 in England, 3 in Wales)
Group 2	Adopted a (more) monolingual approach	**6** (5 in England, 1 in Wales)

It is important here to dissect the use of 'more' in both labels; language use and proficiency fluctuate over time and between individuals. As such, a family who are described as adopting a *more* multilingual approach is one that reported using two (or more) languages in daily exchanges with their child, using their own first language with their child in most exchanges (if the child was educated in English) or had chosen for their child to be educated in a different language than their own first language (i.e. in a Welsh-medium school). By contrast, a family adopting a *more* monolingual approach is one that (whether intentionally or not) had chosen to limit the child's exposure to two languages or reported that English was used in most familial exchanges. Just as presentations of autism are extremely heterogeneous, so too are families' language patterns and practices. It is recognised that dividing participants into binary groups may not capture the particularities of families' language use. However, this approach gives us a broader understanding of the experiences unique to each group, and has been coupled with detailed interpretative analysis to ensure that individual nuances are identified.

Situating the groups in their localised contexts, three out of the four families interviewed in Wales opted to raise their children as Welsh-English bilinguals (group 1), while only one moved from bilingualism to a more monolingual approach (group 2). In England, five out of ten families opted to maintain the home language (group 1) and the other five chose more of an 'English only' approach (group 2). The presentation, analysis and discussion of the results that follow will draw out the distinctions between the two groups.

5.5. Theme 1: Perceptions about the value of bilingualism

5.5.1. Results

Parents unanimously reported benefits to being bilingual for typically-developing children. However, perceptions diverged when it came to the value of bilingualism for children on the autism spectrum. Families from group 1 believed that being bilingual may bring some advantages to their child on the autism spectrum, whereas families from group 2 reported either no effect or concerns about possible detrimental effects of bilingualism. This theme focuses on parents' perceptions of the impact of bilingualism on their child's communication, its cultural value, and possible effects on cognition.

A) Impact on communication

Parents from group 1 commented on the potential communicative advantages of bilingualism for children on the autism spectrum. When referring to her son's dual language use, Julie suggested that:

> *It's made him have to gauge somebody else's preferences before he opens his mouth, he's making those judgements: "do I speak to them in English or Welsh?". So that's really important, especially when you know, this sort of stereotype of information about autism.*

There is some evidence that Julie's hypothesis that bilingual children show advantages in perspective-taking is true for neurotypical populations (Greenberg, Bellana, & Bialystock, 2013), however its impact on neurodiverse populations is less clear. Julie's reference to the 'stereotype of information about autism' may relate to the notion that autistic children show less empathy, which she believes could be in some way mitigated by bilingualism. She continues: 'I don't know if that has helped Gareth be more sensitive to others than he would have been or… I don't know, but I feel like it has. I feel like it has benefitted him definitely'. Along similar lines, Eleanora gave a practical example of how her son, Luke, distinguishes between languages according to the interlocutor: 'He would know to speak English at nursery but he would know that my mother-in-law only speaks Italian, so he would use the language in context, connected to what person he was speaking to'. This demonstrates that Luke's bilingual context provides him with opportunities to enact perspective-taking in a communicative setting.

Also in group 1, Roberta suggested that her son's communication is enhanced through his acquisition of two vocabularies: 'it's almost as if for everything you've got a richer vocabulary in that you've got vocabulary on two sides, you know, on two fronts'. Further she added that there is a cultural element to Marco's social persona, commenting, 'you should see him when he's in Italy, I mean he's friendly anyway, but he'll like strike conversations with people on buses… Italians tend to be chattier'. Roberta intimates that exposure to both Italian language and culture may provide Marco with more opportunities for social interaction and thus improve his socialisation. Magdalena, who opted for a more monolingual approach, also noted a communicative advantage of bilingualism for her son, William, namely that having Spanish as well as English would offer him another means of communication, and therefore increase opportunities for social interaction.

B) Cultural value

Regardless of their ultimate language choices, parents from both groups noted that bilingualism is an intrinsic part of the child's cultural identity. While Molly commented that she wants her children 'to be proud of where they're from', Baheela noted, 'we mostly use our own language, not the English, we tend to speak Punjabi, our own language'. Her repetition of 'our own language' stressed her sense of ownership of, and identification with, Punjabi. Nabani raises the potential tension faced by multilingual families with children on the autism spectrum, namely how to maintain the child's cultural heritage while supporting their linguistic and communicative development (often in the dominant language):

> *We don't want to lose their culture. That is kind of like the conflict there. I don't want him to just speak English because I want him to explore other languages where his roots are and when we do go back to our country I want him to be able to speak in our language as well, where he can communicate confidently.*

To this end, Nabani is emphasising that the cultural and communicative benefits of bilingualism, often go hand-in-hand; by maintaining Rahul's knowledge of his home language, he has access to his cultural heritage and can communicate with family more easily.

C) Impact on cognition

With regard to advantages specific to autism, four parents suggested that being bilingual may offer benefits for their child's cognitive development. Roberta described each language as a 'whole universe' and suggested that code-switching may increase Marco's cognitive flexibility:

One of the issues with autistic kids is, you know, that they can find it difficult to be flexible in situations, so the fact that he has to switch codes, so with the codes comes a whole universe almost, I think that actually is a good way of practising, you know, flexibility.

In a similar vein, Eleanora highlighted the fact that she had read that bilingual children tended to show advantages in isolating noise and thus hypothesised: 'I don't know whether autistic children need encouragement in that but…I think it might help him later on…like in a big, noisy secondary school, that might help him with isolating, blocking out the noise'. This is consistent with the findings of Filippi and colleagues (2012, 2015), which show an advantage for bilinguals over monolinguals in resisting sentence-level interference.

More generally, Anna suggested that the increased challenge of switching between languages may encourage her son Ryan to 'keep his mind busy' and avoid distraction. Only Katherine discussed the possible protective effect of bilingualism on autism, but she did not suggest that her decision to raise her son bilingually was based on such a connection:

I think it's an interesting concept that somebody who is bilingual and has autism, there may be benefits for the autism, in terms of the cognitive flexibility and that kind of thing, but I don't know whether… that would just be my hunch.

Two parents from group 2 who had chosen to adopt a more monolingual approach did not believe that exposure to another language had been harmful to their child's development. Molly, who had recently decided to move her son, Dyfan, to an English-medium school from a Welsh-medium setting, said, 'there's no harm in trying two different languages, he hasn't suffered, that's for sure and, there's no harm in taking them out, he's had three years now'. Similarly, Magdalena commented that bilingualism is 'inbuilt' in William, who is 'constantly hearing Spanish in the house', even though she predominantly uses English with him.

However, some parents from group 2 expressed apprehension that their children were becoming confused by the presence of two languages:

We thought it's confusing, he's getting confused. Which one to pick up. And obviously he stopped and he's not like other neurotypical children that we see, so better to focus on one. (Hira)

Sometimes he can kind of get mixed up as well, because there's so much learning in his mind. (Nabani)

This idea that bilingualism may cause confusion or language delay is common among parents of typically-developing children (King & Fogle, 2006a) and autistic children (Hampton et al., 2017). In the current study, there was some consensus among parents that 'another layer of challenge' (Julie) in the form of bilingualism may be inappropriate for some children who have autism. Dasia, who at the time of the interview had a grown-up son and daughter, both on the autism spectrum, expressed regrets about raising her children monolingually, but nevertheless commented that her son may have found two languages difficult: 'it's hard to know because there still would have been limitations because of his autism, I don't know how far he would have gone because of the abstract side of languages, let's say, the grammar'. Likewise, Magdalena reflected on her own experiences as a language learner and concluded that her son could become distressed when surrounded by the Spanish language, which she described as an 'overloading' experience: 'you're thinking "oh what are they talking about?" and that makes him spiral, you can see he is then overloading because he's concentrating so much'.

5.5.2. Analysis

As is typical of small-scale IPA research, parents in this study modelled in microcosm a diversity of experiences of raising an autistic child in a multilingual environment. Despite wide variation in the linguistic and social contexts of the participating families, all parents in this study expressed highly positive attitudes towards bilingualism, unlike the mothers consulted in Yu (2009). Parents reported certain benefits of bilingualism specific to autism, most notably enhanced cognitive flexibility and increased social awareness, as a result of having to account for the linguistic profile of the interlocutor.

Participants also highlighted the cultural pertinence of bilingualism for their child, and many felt strongly that speaking the home language was akin to inheriting a cultural identity. This complements the findings of Jegatheesan (2011) and Yu (2013) that maintaining bilingualism in autism may develop children's multicultural identities and help to preserve their heritage. However, concerns about confusion, consistency and 'overloading the brain' were cited by families from group 2, who had opted for a more monolingual approach. This is consonant with existing research into language choices for multilingual families with a child on the autism spectrum (Hampton et al., 2017; Ijalba, 2016; Yu, 2013, 2016).

The emerging field of family language policy posits that families' language ideologies are not always consistent with their language practices (Schwartz, 2010; Yu, 2016). This was certainly the case for some of the participating families in this study. While all parents held positive views about bilingualism, six out of fourteen families opted to raise their child in a more monolingual way. This suggests that parental perceptions of bilingualism are by no means the sole consideration in making decisions about how many and which languages to use. Our attention now turns to the other factors affecting multilingual families' language choices in the context of autism.

5.6. Theme 2: Factors influencing language decisions

5.6.1. Results

Language choices were complex for all families in this study. Parents discussed the key factors in their decision-making, namely: communication with family, the advice (or lack thereof) received, the impact of their child's autistic presentation on their language development, parents' own linguistic profiles, and the role of English.

A) Communication with family

Being able to communicate with family members emerged as the most significant factor for parents from group 1 who chose to raise their child in a more multilingual manner. Baheela, Lena, Roberta, and Chandra all commented that bilingualism was a pre-requisite for relationships with wider family members:

> *When she grows up she'll be able to speak it and communicate with our parents. (Baheela)*

> *All family is in Poland. He's going on holiday and he's going to speak Polish. (Lena)*

> *My family don't really speak English, with the exception of a cousin and her children, so basically, he has to speak Italian, especially when I'm not there. (Roberta)*

> *My mother-in-law, she is 70 now, she can speak English, but obviously, you know, broken English. Hindi is her first language. She is comfortable in Hindi. And then my husband's mum and my mum, very little English. So it's better. (Chandra)*

To a certain extent, these accounts indicate that bilingualism was less of a choice and more of a communicative necessity. Roberta and Chandra intimate that a bilingual environment felt instinctive, suggesting that bilingualism came naturally:

It's not really based on a theory even though there are theories to say that's what you should do, it's just what comes naturally. (Roberta)

With my children – I never noticed actually – but they understand Hindi and they can speak Hindi, so it's mostly Hindi because it comes naturally to us at home. (Chandra)

Along similar lines, Roberta suggested that only using English with her son 'would be asking me to do something that was really unnatural to me'. Families from group 2, who had opted for a more monolingual approach, also acknowledged the benefit of bilingualism for communicating with the wider family network. Nabani comments that her son 'would speak Gujarati because all my in-laws are back in Punjab, so when we actually go and visit them he does understand them'. This raises the important distinction between expressive and receptive language for children on the autism spectrum; Nabani decided that understanding the language was perhaps more realistic for Rahul than producing it.

In a similar vein, Hira comments that an understanding of the 'basics' is important for Nish's integration with his wider community: 'I think he should learn the basics because obviously if you go to our community some of them can't talk English, in that case at least he can manage that'. Hira clarifies that a *more* English approach does not mean an *exclusively* English approach, suggesting that Nish speaks some Bengali to his grandparents: 'when he talks to his Dadu or his grandma – especially with my mum – I told my mum it's better for him, so I tell him in Bengali, "ask Nana this"'. Magdalena reports that William 'has to see his Papá, so it'll make his life a hell of a lot easier if he can communicate 100%'. In this sense, being able to speak Spanish fluently would facilitate William's communication with his father, who lives in a Spanish-speaking country.

B) Advice received

Another factor in parents' decision-making was the advice received from practitioners and other family members about bilingualism. Eight families (six from group 1, two from group 2) were given no advice about whether bilingualism would be possible for their child when they were diagnosed with autism, while two parents were advised by practitioners to continue raising their child bilingually. Chandra received no advice about bilingualism because Suvrat was already bilingual at the time of his autism diagnosis. However, she reflects that she would have given up speaking her home language if someone had advised her to do so: 'if somebody

had said to me "oh please don't speak to him in Hindi because it can be a drawback" I would have stopped doing it. But nobody said this to me'.

Four out of the six families in group 2 were advised by professionals around the time of diagnosis that one language may be more appropriate for their child:

> *We were advised to stick to one language because sometimes it can be very confusing jumping from one language to another, and just to keep that consistency as well. (Nabani)*

> *Unfortunately, we were told at the time when he was diagnosed with autism that it would be best if I spoke one language. (Dasia)*

> *We did ask the question and they did suggest that it's better to stick to one language. (Davesh)*

> **Interviewer***: Were you advised to speak just English?*
> **Roshan***: Speech therapy wise, yes […] We had to be consistent.*

While Nabani intimated that she agrees with the advice to opt for a more monolingual approach, Dasia's use of 'unfortunately' suggests that in hindsight she believed this to be injudicious advice. Roshan noted that linguistic consistency was the rationale for such advice, especially given that 'it was very difficult to make her [Zehra] talk and we knew how important it is to be verbal so really we made a very conscious decision to do that'. For Roshan's family, the advice to use only English was justified by Zehra's initial reluctance to speak, however she noted that 'we speak Turkish between ourselves, and I think she knows quite a lot of Turkish words too'.

Both Roberta and Eleanora received mixed advice about language. Roberta, who chose to raise her son bilingually, received advice from family members, who raised concerns that 'it would be very confusing if I spoke Italian to the kid and would he be able to speak English?'. By contrast, Eleanora and her husband were encouraged to maintain a bilingual environment for their son, Luke. She describes this process:

> *We did ask the health visitor when he was little and he just said, "No speak both languages and he'll be fine", and that's what we did and his first words were a mixture, some in English, some in Italian.*

However, Eleanora expressed frustration at the advice she received from nursery staff to speak more English at home.

He was in a nursery before and all they were saying was "Oh he just sits by himself and doesn't talk to anyone, you should speak more English to him at home". And we were like, "we do. He watches TV in English all the time, our friends don't speak Italian, he speaks English with them. He's just not talking to you".

This excerpt provides an important insight into how autism may go undiagnosed if practitioners suspect that language delays or limited social interaction are the result of bilingualism rather than an underlying condition. Eleanora's comments illustrate a possible tension between parents and practitioners; family language choices are deeply personal and there may be times when families feel that professional advice about language practices is unwelcome, untimely, or unjustified. It is therefore crucial, as highlighted in chapter 4, for parents and practitioners to work collaboratively in supporting the linguistic development of bilingual autistic children.

C) Feasibility of bilingualism

Several parents suggested that their language decisions were based on how feasible bilingualism was for their child. Families in group 1 discussed the extent to which maintaining both languages was possible for their child. Anna, Katherine and Eleanora commented that children who are deemed to have 'high-functioning autism'[39] would be better placed to manage two languages:

If they were the same ability as Ryan, obviously he's high-functioning, I think it's good for him because his brain is so busy anyway that he can absorb everything. (Anna)

If they had a child like Thomas who was high-functioning I would definitely push for it, if the child was non-verbal then it's tricky isn't it? (Katherine)

Of course, it depends on the type of autism, if it's high-functioning, that doesn't sort of come into any of the difficulty. (Eleanora)

Further, Katherine suggested that it is the child's ability to communicate their basic needs that should ultimately determine whether bilingualism is a possibility in autism:

We've been fortunate that for Thomas being bilingual hasn't had an impact on his ability to communicate his basic needs, whereas if he was having difficulties communicating his basic needs then probably we would have gone with just one language.

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[39] The term 'high-functioning autism' is discussed by Alvares et al. (2019), who argue that the term is an inaccurate clinical descriptor that fails to represent the functional abilities of autistic individuals without intellectual disability. However, it is widely-used in existing autism research.

Julie added a similar sentiment by noting that Gareth 'can communicate his needs in whichever language he chooses'. For other families, making a distinct choice between monolingualism and bilingualism was not necessary as their children were diagnosed at age 5 or older and were already bilingual at the time of diagnosis. Chandra notes that 'it was not a conscious decision to be honest. Maybe it was too late because Suvrat was already speaking in English [and Hindi]'.

Conversely, some parents felt that the severity of their child's autistic symptoms rendered bilingualism unfeasible. After seeing her son distressed by her code-switching, Hira opted for a more monolingual approach:

> *Slowly I started working with him at mix-matching and he used to cry and then I said, "it's fine" and I used to let him cry. "OK, you're crying, it's fine" ....and we decided just one language.*

In this example, it was a combination of seeing her child in distress and his difficulties acquiring two languages simultaneously that contributed to Hira's decision to opt for one language. However, Nish's father, Davesh, expressed a slightly different opinion, arguing that Nish does have the capacity to learn another language: 'I think fundamentally he has the ability to learn things so whichever language we present to him, he'll be able to understand that'.

Building on her previous rationale for a more monolingual approach, Roshan asserts that Zehra's lack of desire to communicate meant that bilingualism did not seem attainable: 'I don't think also we would've managed it. I don't think. Because the whole point of the initial stage of speech therapy is making her want to communicate. So we didn't think "Oh what language?" at that stage'. Magdalena also discusses the feasibility of bilingualism within everyday family life: 'I've got my husband who constantly says, "we need to do it at home", and I do, but it's just so hard with day-to-day life'. Roshan and Magdalena's descriptions of how difficult it is to integrate bilingualism into family life stands in tension with Chandra and Roberta's previous comments about bilingualism coming 'naturally' to their family dynamics. Others from group 2 recognised that bilingualism was tenable for some children on the autism spectrum, even if it was not suitable for their own child.

> *My situation would be that… it's hard for him. You know and I personally would say don't push it, but then another kid might be totally different, cos it's such a spectrum. (Molly)*

It's the severity of the spectrum, where you are on the spectrum, how it affects the language. (Magdalena)

D) Practical considerations

Parental proficiency in English also played a key role in language decisions. While the two mothers interviewed with an interpreter were both able to speak some English, it was undeniably easier for them to communicate with their child in their own language. By contrast, many of the parents in Wales, who were often English speakers with Welsh-speaking partners, expressed a desire to have been brought up bilingually themselves:

I wish I'd been bilingual from birth. (Julie)

I wish I'd been bilingual. (Katherine)

I wish I had a second language. (Molly)

In Wales the pursuit of bilingualism for their children was different to that of families in England, as it relied on a bilingual education system rather than language exposure in the home. Positive attitudes towards bilingualism were more foregrounded in the experiences of families in Wales than those in England, and these attitudinal differences, at both an individual and societal level, may have been salient in parents' language choices.

While in Hampton et al. (2017) parents mentioned the child's own motivation to speak the home language was an influential factor in their language choices, such a finding was less prevalent in this study. Nevertheless, three parents also raised the fact that their child had an interest in languages:

He's interested in other languages for specific words. So there are a lot of other languages around the house. (Roberta)

He likes learning languages, because he is also learning how to read Arabic... He is keen to learn languages. (Davesh)

When he was little, he watched Disney films in different languages, so he would change from English to German, to French, to Italian, so he would change. (Dasia)

However, two of the parents cited above (Davesh & Dasia) opted for a more monolingual approach, suggesting that the children's interest in languages was not a decisive factor in the families' ultimate language decisions.

E) The role of English

In certain cases, parents felt that bilingualism was not an achievable goal, concluding that priority should be given to the child's acquisition of spoken and written English. Davesh, for instance, believed that English should remain the priority for his son. He viewed other languages, including his own native language, as optional:

> *For me, I prefer him to master English properly in terms of understanding [...] Basically, because that's gonna be his primary language for communication. Beyond that, if he wants to learn, I mean I think it's optional, I think we'd like him to learn Bengali and Arabic.*

Similarly, Molly highlighted the importance of English for Dyfan, which was central to her decision to move him from a Welsh-medium school to an English-medium setting:

> *I feel that if he doesn't have the English sooner rather than later I might have disadvantaged him.*

Dasia suggested that the institutionally monolingual context of England contributed to her raising her children in a more monolingual manner: 'I think the fact that we were living also just in England all the time, I think it didn't help much'. She expanded on the influence of the societal context by noting that, 'there was no encouragement to learn another language. And I think that is just nationwide'. Dasia then claimed that her daughter 'went through a stage where it wasn't cool to speak another language, so she resisted learning French at school, she dropped French, because everyone thought it wasn't cool to speak another language'. Such attitudes may reflect the 'worrying decline in uptake of languages' in the UK (Ayres-Bennett & Carruthers, 2019, p.5). It is certainly possible, therefore, that societal attitudes towards language learning play some role in parental choices about home language maintenance, both for typically- and atypically-developing populations.

Even parents who had opted for a more multilingual approach recognised the importance of English in their children's lives. For example, Julie highlighted that Gareth's interest in technology meant that 'all his interests and idols are English medium'. Similarly, many parents noted how their child often replied in English, despite speaking to them in the home language:

> *He generally answers back in English, even when I speak Italian to him. (Roberta)*

> *He will go to English more than Italian. (Eleanora)*

5.6.2. Analysis

The contributions of parents highlight the paradoxical nature of home language maintenance in autism; on the one hand, language decisions appeared instinctive, on the other, highly complex. This section therefore sought to shed further light on the multifactorial decision-making process when bilingualism meets autism. Yu's study (2009) involving the language choices of 15 Chinese-English bilingual parents of children on the autism spectrum found that parents were unanimously advised to adopt an 'English only' approach. The findings from the current study suggest that – in England and Wales at least – language decisions may be far more nuanced.

Among the eight families who decided to maintain bilingualism, the most commonly cited factor was that exposure to the home language would allow children to enjoy relationships with extended family members in a way that monolingualism would not. A growing body of research in typically-developing populations suggests that children's language proficiency in the home language is positively associated with good familial relationships (Boutakidis et al., 2011; Tannenbaum & Berkovich, 2005). The advice to speak just one language to children from multilingual families may then have detrimental effects on relationships; this could be particularly problematic given the social and communicative challenges associated with autism (Paradis et al., 2018; Peña, 2016). Other factors reported in favour of maintaining bilingualism in autism included the fact that their child could feasibly cope with more than one language. In some cases, bilingualism was more a necessity than a choice. Indeed, parents' use of their non-native language to communicate with their autistic child was not only impractical, but could be detrimental if it is incorrectly modelled (Drysdale et al., 2015). This might be particularly important for children on the autism spectrum, who are often more influenced by parental language use than peer language use; for example, Baron-Cohen and Staunton (1994) found that children on the autism spectrum were far more likely to acquire their mothers' (non-English) accent than their typically-developing peers. As a result, imitating the phonology and syntax of non-native parents may have a more negative impact on the linguistic development of autistic children than typically-developing children.

Among those who opted for a more monolingual approach, the severity of the child's autism and its impact upon their language and communication emerged as a key factor. This links to Hampton et al.'s finding (2017) that parents whose children were less verbal tended to

have more concerns about the effects of bilingualism. In this sense, many reported that building up the child's proficiency and use of English was a greater priority than raising their child bilingually. While in typically-developing populations balanced bilingual exposure seems to have a positive correlation to a child's well-being (Müller et al., under review), Hira's example of her son's distress at her code-switching indicates that multilingualism may also engender negative effects on a child's well-being. As such, the finding that for some families a more monolingual approach was more viable corroborates Baker's view that 'neither the pole of single-language nor multilingual immersion should prevail unilaterally' (2013, p.533). Instead, balancing the myriad factors affecting language decisions and addressing the needs of the individual should be prioritised. Advice given by practitioners should therefore take heed of the child's existing social and linguistic profile, the language proficiency of parents, and the implications of language practices on family well-being. Drawing together the factors affecting language decisions for both group 1 and group 2, these findings add credence to the recommendation that language choices and practices should be made on a case-by-case basis (Hampton et al., 2017).

5.7.   Theme 3: Consequences of language choices

5.7.1.   Results

Families' language decisions inevitably engender real-life consequences. The third theme explores the implications of parents' language choices on (A) family well-being; (B) children's language use; and (C) education.

A) Family well-being

Broadly speaking, maintaining two (or more) languages served to engender positive effects on family well-being, in line with De Houwer's concept of 'harmonious bilingual development' (2015). Roberta, for instance, discussed the importance of parental well-being and identity when raising a child on the spectrum, advising:

> *Absolutely speak to your child in your own language. No question about it. Because, you know, it can only do good, there is no way it can be bad for the kid. And certainly good for you the parent. Because in everything, you know, I don't like to be this martyr to my child's autism. So, it's like, obviously I would do anything but, you know, let's not lose myself.*

This notion of 'let's not lose myself' underscores the emotional impact of language maintenance in autism not only on children but on their parents too. Home languages can play a crucial role in both establishing and fostering the emotional bond between a parent and their child, which means that language choices may have significant implications for familial well-being. Roberta adds that, 'while I've lived here I haven't come across many babies even, so it's almost as if all my vocabulary to do with babies was in Italian'. This implies that for her, from the very beginning, it felt natural to use her own language with her child in order to establish an emotional connection.

Parents in group 2, who had opted for a more monolingual approach, tended to report more adverse effects on well-being. Some expressed a sense of guilt or frustration over having adopted a more monolingual approach:

> *When he goes to see his dad, that inability to be able to express himself must be… it fills his bucket, because he can't release. He can't get his frustrations out. So yeah, that's my fault really, but… it's life. (Magdalena)*

> *I think had he been given the opportunity to learn the language properly, you know, taking into consideration his autism, I think he would have learned another language. (Dasia)*

Magdalena's use of 'that's my fault really' demonstrates how problematic the choice between monolingualism and bilingualism can be, and the weight of responsibility felt by parents. She went on to justify her decision, suggesting:

> *I thought he needed to catch up. He was so behind… with the English vocabulary-wise, so we just did some English for a good two years, and now… you get stuck in a rut don't you.*

Again, the use of 'you get stuck in a rut' represents the feeling expressed by many parents that the demands of daily life can overshadow language choices, particularly given that parenting a child on the autism spectrum can be more stressful than parenting typically-developing children or children with other developmental disorders (Estes et al., 2013). This sense of culpability persists in Dasia's account too:

> *She always makes me feel guilty for not having spoken to her in Arabic. Because she's very interested in the culture.*

In this case, Dasia chose to raise her children monolingually due to the severity of her son's symptoms. However, this option clearly had implications for the linguistic and cultural identity of her daughter, who was later diagnosed with autism at the age of eleven, and was far more

verbal than her brother. The consequences of language choices on the wider family, particularly siblings, are also considered by Roshan, who talks about her non-autistic son:

> *He completely missed out learning it [Turkish]. They have a one-and-a-half-year difference and he was learning fine so everybody forgot about teaching him any language. He sort of picked up here and there English by himself. He completely missed out because we were focused so much on Zehra. (Roshan)*

Roshan continued by describing possible judgement by the wider family that her son did not speak Turkish: 'so going to Turkey everyone thinks it's really weird that he doesn't… they think we did it on purpose, not teaching him Turkish'.

B) Children's language use

Parents' language choices have inevitable consequences for their child's language use and development. Unsurprisingly, several parents from group 2 noted that their child could understand the home language but lacked oral proficiency:

> *He understands everything but when it comes to talking he does struggle. (Nabani)*

> *He understands but he's not talking, he's giving me the answer in English. That's the difference. (Hira)*

> *William speaks on the phone to his Papá every Thursday, which is very broken, I mean he understands a lot more than he speaks now. (Magdalena)*

Roshan and Molly, also in group 2, mention the 'incidental' use of the home language in family conversations:

> *She uses Turkish sometimes. She is very aware that they are different languages. So she says "thank you" in Turkish. Maybe like toys, we had, like bilingual toys. So she does say words from that. We use a lot of Turkish words for day-to-day things, like bath and food … she knows when to use which. (Roshan)*

> *He does use just the Welsh word for some things sometimes, like "doiled", which is "toilet", so he does use these incidental Welsh phrases, which will help him out in the English class. (Molly)*

These comments chime with the 'translanguaging practices' in the family home described by Song (2016), in which children and parents use two or more languages flexibly in order to create and negotiate meaning.

Despite these receptive language skills, both groups identified literacy as a major challenge for the children in school:

Spoken language came quickly but the writing came a bit slower. A lot slower than the other kids in the class. (Lena)

She can't read books properly and her writing isn't very good either. (Baheela)

I think any subject where he has to write a lot, I think he finds that frustrating. (Eleanora)

He said something like, in his own little words, basically, "I find it hard to read, I can't put the letters together". (Molly)

Some parents also discussed the fact that their children were bilingual speakers, but not biliterate:

We never pushed him to read or write in Italian. We figured it would be better for him to read and write with the English phonetics first and then eventually if he's interested in doing it he will. (Eleonora)

They can't read or write [in Hindi] because I never taught them. (Chandra)

Katherine pertinently identified the difficulty in understanding language proficiency in bilingual children on the autism spectrum, namely that disentangling the bilingualism from the autism can be problematic: 'it's really hard to know […] how much is because he's been brought up bilingual and how much is that he's autistic. I think it would be impossible to tease out'.

C) Education

The relationship between language and education rarely featured in interviews conducted in England but was much more prevalent in the accounts in Wales, where parents had to choose between sending their child to an English-medium or a Welsh-medium school. Molly, for example, was in the process of moving her son to an English-medium school because he was not learning Welsh at the same pace as his peers and therefore could not be appropriately assessed in Welsh:

I just need him to move schools and I'll feel more comfortable I think. And it is literally just because of the language barrier. You can't assess him if he's not speaking the Welsh and I don't want to disadvantage him.

Anna, whose son was three years older than Molly's, considered the same option for her son but decided that it may be too disruptive to change his social setting.

I thought maybe I'll give him a better chance if he's in an English school, but then I thought about the social side of it and he wouldn't have coped with that at all, because all his peers know him and are used to him.

Julie and Katherine both discussed a major challenge for bilingual Welsh-English parents with children with special educational needs; namely, that there are very few Welsh-medium specialist schools, so choosing to raise a child bilingually is not an option in many cases.

We really want him to be educated through the medium of Welsh because we want him to be bilingual and we want him to have all those advantages of being bilingual. But finding a specialist school that will be able to do that is unlikely […] I think the only thing that is going to be difficult for us, on-going, is whether he is going to be able to stay in a Welsh-speaking school, so in that sense there is not enough Welsh-medium provision for children with additional needs like Thomas. (Katherine)

When we were making that decision about whether to stay in Welsh-medium mainstream or move to specialist education, where it's such a small pool anyway in specialist education, we weren't going to find a Welsh-medium specialist school. (Julie)

Katherine's statement that she would prefer a bilingual education for her child that provides the specialist support he needs highlights the dilemma faced by many parents in Wales: choose an English-medium specialist education and the child may lose their bilingualism, or choose a Welsh-medium mainstream school and risk the child not receiving sufficient specialist support. Julie confirms this issue by stating 'we weren't going to find a Welsh-medium specialist school'. However, Julie continues by suggesting that the bilingual profile of the staff, even in an English-medium school, gave rise to Gareth's bilingual development:

It hasn't been a problem because although the education is through the medium of English there are so many Welsh speaking staff amongst the staff, and he can chat to them in Welsh.

Parents in Wales also articulated how their children compartmentalised English and Welsh; with the former used at home and the latter in school. When the right language was not used in the right context this caused Ryan distress, which ties in with the discussion in 5.6.2. about the relationship between bilingualism and children's well-being:

I did used to read to him in Welsh, but then as soon as he started school he associated Welsh language with school and he'd have meltdowns if I tried to speak to him in Welsh at home.

Also in Wales, Katherine noted a similar phenomenon when distinguishing between language contexts with her son, Thomas: 'Welsh is for school and English is for home. If we

speak Welsh to him at home, he will just reply in English anyway'. In like manner, Lena suggests that Daniel almost exclusively uses English in school, despite having several Polish classmates. This is consistent with the findings in chapters 3 and 4, and reflects Liu and Evan's conclusions (2016) that bilingual pupils tend to prefer to communicate in the dominant language of the school setting, in this case English, and have less positive associations with their home language when at school. As highlighted by Dawn in chapter 4, Magdalena also noted that William was given the opportunity to practise his Spanish with a bilingual teaching assistant. However, she suggested that because his interventions tended to take place with other children, English was the primary language used.

5.7.2. Analysis

This theme has examined the consequences of language choices in autism for family well-being, the child's language use, and education. Language choices are inextricably bound to familial well-being. In this study, parents who had selected a more multilingual approach reported more positive effects on well-being than those who opted for a more monolingual approach. Two parents noted how speaking two languages was the most natural choice for the whole family, as it enabled them to connect emotionally with their children in their own language. These results mirror the findings in Hampton et al. (2017) in which families with an autistic child cited the advantages of bilingualism for family relationships. In the present research, Roberta's warning to not 'lose myself' showcases how parents' use of their home language may be important for their own well-being, which may in turn have positive effects on their parenting. Parents in group 1 also believed that a bilingual environment would enhance the child's well-being, serving as a conduit for developing their emotional, social and cultural identities (Jegatheesan, 2011; Yu, 2013). This finding is congruent with the notion that a child's knowledge of the home language enhances familial cohesion and reduces emotional stress (Müller et al., under review; Tseng & Fuligni, 2000).

As the results demonstrate, the children in group 2 also had receptive knowledge – if not production – of the home language, therefore it is difficult to comment on their well-being directly. However, there were clear negative effects of opting for a more monolingual approach for the parents themselves in group 2. For example, some parents reported a sense of guilt about their child's difficulties communicating with extended family members. Others reported regret that their non-autistic child or children had also missed out on becoming bilingual because of their language choices. In Roshan's case this resulted in judgement – and perhaps even

rejection – from wider family members, with further inimical consequences for familial well-being. Given that the children of parents in group 2 tended to present with more language-specific challenges related to autism, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which language choices were affecting child and parental well-being when compared to the signs and symptoms associated with autism.

Parents who opted for a more monolingual approach reported that their children had good comprehension of the home language but little production. The gap between bilingual children's receptive and expressive skills is widely recognised in typically-developing children (Keller, Troesch, & Grob, 2015) and children with primary language impairment (Gibson, Peña, & Bedore, 2014). This is why the word 'more' was so central to labelling parents' language choices; children whose parents chose a *more* monolingual approach still had some exposure to the home language. Accordingly, future research should involve methods that accurately document children's exposure to different languages over time, for example using 'talk pedometers' in order to better understand the effects of bilingualism on autistic children.

Parents from both groups outlined their children's difficulties with literacy. Research suggests that reading comprehension may be an area of challenge for both children on the autism spectrum (Ricketts, Jones, Happé, & Charman, 2013) and children who speak EAL (Murphy, 2018). It is therefore unsurprising that bilingual children on the autism spectrum may face challenges in literacy, particularly with reading comprehension. Given that oral language skills are a good predictor of reading comprehension in the L1 (Nation, Cocksey, Taylor, & Bishop, 2010) and for bilinguals (Babayiğit, 2015), it is likely that the children whose families adopted a more monolingual approach would have had even greater difficulties in reading in the home language than those whose families chose a more multilingual approach. To this end, further research is needed to understand the effects of bilingualism on the literacy development of autistic children.

Parental language choices had more immediately obvious educational consequences for families in Wales than those in England. Positive attitudes towards Welsh-medium education were expressed in line with findings from Hodges (2012) and O'Hanlon (2014). However, the consequences of selecting a mainstream or specialist autism school were significant for the child's linguistic development. Katherine's statement that 'there is not enough Welsh-medium provision for children with additional needs' underscores the dilemma faced by some parents

in Wales of choosing between English-medium specialist education (and a potential loss of Welsh proficiency) or Welsh-medium mainstream education (without sufficient specialist support). Despite the growing promotion of bilingualism in Wales, Welsh-medium provision for children with additional learning needs is evidently insufficient (Roberts, 2017, p.15). These findings indicate that more opportunities should be available for children to access specialist education in two languages, both in Wales and beyond, so that the possibility remains open for autistic children to develop as bilinguals within bilingual education systems.

5.8. Theme 4: Shifting expectations

5.8.1. Results

It should not be forgotten, in analysing parents' perceptions about bilingualism, language choices and the consequences of those choices, that the information provided in the interviews represented one point in time. Language choices and practices are not fixed, but flexible. As such, given that the children in this sample were different ages and displayed varying presentations of autism, discussions about autism and bilingualism in the family must be prefaced by the fact that children's exposure to different languages inevitably changes over time. The final theme in this chapter considers shifting expectations regarding parents' future linguistic aspirations for their children, even among families who had, at the time of the interview, opted for a more monolingual approach.

A) Future language learning

Consonant with their positive attitudes about maintaining their home language, many parents considered language learning (beyond the home language) to be valuable. Lena, for example, wanted Daniel 'to learn more languages, if possible, French, Spanish'. Katherine described language learning as a particular skill of her son: 'he does pick up languages really easily'. In keeping with research by Cenoz (2013), two parents outlined that their children's bilingual profile meant that learning other languages both in the present and future would be easier:

> *It just opens the avenue to learn more languages if you're already used to using the two. (Julie)*

> *I think despite what he says he's finding French a lot easier than some of his friends, cos some of the kids have been doing after-school French and everything for years and he can think a lot quicker cos some of the words sound the same. So I think he's learning that a lot quicker. (Eleanora)*

Parents also discussed their instrumental motivations, that is the 'practical benefits for the individual' (Gardner, 2010, p.17), for their child pursuing bilingualism, and additional language learning. First, some parents discussed the impact of bilingualism on their child's employability. Molly recognises that by opting for a more monolingual approach, 'it probably will be tougher when he's older to get a job'. Conversely, Anna considered greater employment opportunities as a future benefit of bilingualism:

> When they grow up and they're looking for jobs and things... I work in a Welsh nursery, and I'm in childcare, whereas if I spoke English I don't think I would have got a job as easily, so I wanna give them that, even if they don't use it.

Anna's use of 'I wanna give them that' aligns with the characterisation in King and Fogle (2006b) of bilingualism as a gift that parents may choose to impart to their child.

Second, Roberta and Magdalena considered the possibility of their children excelling at languages in school. Roberta aspires for her son to gain a formal qualification in Italian: 'my hope is that one way or another, if ever he gets to the point of doing GCSEs, maybe he can shape up and do GCSE Italian'. Similarly, Magdalena comments that 'if he had the Spanish it would also open a lot more doors for him, it would give him another thing to be confident about'. She continues by saying 'so at least there's one class where he might have an advantage'. This narrative of bilingualism as educationally advantageous is perhaps only foregrounded for languages that are recognised by the curriculum. It is essential to recognise that the languages mentioned in the statements above (i.e. Spanish and Italian) are viewed in the UK school system as 'educationally valuable', while other languages are unfairly relegated to the margins (Handley, 2011).

B) Language choices are not fixed

While group 1 opted for a more multilingual approach and group 2 a more monolingual one, it is important to note that these are not dichotomous positions and language practices are, by nature, in a constant state of flux. As such, families with younger children who had initially opted for a more monolingual approach did not view their decision as fixed. Hira and Davesh discussed the possibility of introducing Bengali and Arabic to their son. The following excerpt demonstrates their somewhat differing expectations of their son's future linguistic development:

> **Davesh**: For me, I prefer him to master English properly in terms of understanding. Basically, because that's gonna be his primary language for communication. Beyond

that, if he wants to learn, I mean I think it's optional, I think we'd like him to learn Bengali and Arabic as well…
Hira*: And other languages as well…*
Davesh*: …I'm sure he'll learn it, but I'm expecting him to be…*
Hira*: …to master, no. I'm not expecting it no…*
Davesh*: …to comprehend it…*
Hira*: But I think he should learn the basics because obviously if you go to our community some of them can't talk, in that case at least he can manage that... it's hard to say.*
Davesh*: He'll pick it up on the go.*
Hira*: Otherwise he'll be blank and that's what I don't want. I said, "when he will be ready, we'll start".*

Both are seeking to have realistic expectations about their son's language acquisition, as exemplified by Hira's comment 'to master, no'. Davesh is slightly more optimistic, suggesting that his son will 'pick it up on the go', while Hira's comment that 'when he will be ready, we'll start' implies that there may be a certain level of English that she wants Nish to reach before the family increase his bilingual exposure. On the other hand, she would like him to develop expressive language to avoid a situation in which 'he'll be blank and that's what I don't want'.

Magdalena, who also chose a more monolingual approach, noted that William has 'not ever been completely disconnected from the Spanish so I think that's why it's still sort of there'. This draws us back to the notion of parental expectations and compromise; parents recognised that because the child will continue to have exposure to the home language, there are many opportunities for their receptive language skills to develop. In a similar vein, Molly commented that while her son would move to an English-medium school from a Welsh-medium one, he would still have some exposure to Welsh. This idea of language exposure fluctuating over time is exemplified by Mary's comment to Anna:

> *You went through a stage where you thought "right, OK, it's gonna be better if he just learns one language that we can teach him at home, you know, we can do everything". But it seems to be working itself out now.*

This notion of it 'working itself out' was a common thread among parents who opted for a more multilingual approach to raising their child; no parent claimed that it was an easy option, but as the findings of this study demonstrate, many believed their children were now reaping the benefits of being raised bilingually.

5.8.2. Analysis

This theme has documented how parental expectations about language maintenance in autism naturally shift over time. Parents from groups 1 and 2 both expressed a desire for their children to learn other languages, with some stating that additional language learning would be easier as their child is bilingual. However, in this sample, the narrative of bilingualism as educationally advantageous is perhaps only foregrounded for languages that are recognised by the curriculum and given status through academic qualifications. Only parents with 'high-status' languages (e.g. Spanish and Italian) discussed the instrumental utility of their child continuing to acquire the language for academic or vocational gain. The uneven distribution of cultural and linguistic capital within society (Blackledge, 2000; Bourdieu, 1991) leads us to re-examine parental motivations for their child's linguistic development and raises important questions about whether the status of the home language plays a role in parents' decisions about language maintenance in autism.

The second subtheme focused on the time parameters of parents' language decisions. While Dasia was reflecting back on her children's development in retrospect, for most of the families, issues of language choices were very much ongoing. For parents of children with atypical cognitive development, making firm decisions about language maintenance is even more problematic as their developmental trajectories may be more variable or unpredictable than their typically-developing peers. The dialogue between Hira and Davesh illustrates parents' changing expectations both over time and within families; these differing aspirations exhibit the complexity of language decisions in autism and their possible burden on parents. Nevertheless, in keeping with Anwen's views in chapter 4, Mary's reflection that her grandson's ability to develop two languages seemed precarious at first but 'seems to be working itself out now' showcases the importance of allowing time to see if bilingualism is a possibility. It is also consistent with the views of 'Mario' in Hampton et al (2017) who commented, 'the disadvantage [of bilingualism] was only at the beginning' (p.438). In this sense, families may perceive there to be a higher risk attached to opting for a more multilingual approach. Given the additional stresses placed on both children on the autism spectrum and their parents, some families may be less inclined to take such a risk. However, it is essential that parents receive evidence-based advice about language maintenance in autism so that they can make the most informed language decisions for their child and wider family.

5.9.   Discussion

This chapter builds on the existing research into parental perspectives on bilingualism in autism by offering unique insights not only into the decision-making process, but also the consequences of language decisions on various aspects of familial life. The following discussion examines the convergence and divergence of findings between groups 1 and 2 before discussing the distinctive contextual factors relevant to families in England and Wales. Finally, the implications of these findings will be presented.

5.9.1.   Convergence and divergence between groups

Across both groups, there was a pervasive sense that language decisions were neither simple nor taken lightly. The element of 'choice' in this study was more prevalent in group 2, who had to make a conscious choice to limit the child's exposure to the home language. By contrast, those opting for a more multilingual approach either did so out of necessity (due to parents' levels of proficiency in English) or by dint of what came naturally to the family. Parents from both groups expressed the notion that language proficiency is not static, but rather fluctuates over time, echoing the findings of Yu (2013). The inclusion of parents with children of different ages was useful in highlighting this point. In Wales, the 'choice' between bilingualism and monolingualism is often made at the point of deciding whether to send the child to a Welsh- or English-medium primary school, unless the parents themselves are Welsh speakers.

Attitudes towards the value of bilingualism were unanimously positive, with parents noting the benefits of bilingualism for children's social awareness, cultural identities and cognition. Nevertheless, these perceptions about bilingualism were sometimes at odds with language practices, as was described in Yu's case study (2016). Accordingly, this chapter has demonstrated that parents' beliefs about bilingualism constitute only one factor among many when deciding whether to raise a child on the autism spectrum in a more monolingual or multilingual way. Despite holding similar attitudes towards bilingualism, parents from group 1 diverged from those in group 2 in their actual language practices, which were influenced by multiple factors. Communicating with family members emerged as crucial to parents in group 1. In cultures where extended family relations and access to ethno-linguistic communities is more important, maintaining bilingualism might be particularly crucial for the child's social development and sense of cultural identity (Fahim & Nedwick, 2014). Widening the lens to consider these contextual factors is essential, given that language acquisition does not take place in a cultural vacuum.

Within extant literature, the prevailing finding is that many parents of bilingual families are advised to adopt a monolingual approach to raising their autistic child (Ijalba, 2016; Jegatheesan, 2011; Yu, 2013). However, this was less central to the decision-making of families in the current study, as only four out of fourteen families were advised by professionals to adopt a more monolingual approach. Instead, families from both groups commented that their decision was largely based on the feasibility of bilingualism with regard to their child's communicative profile. This corroborates Hampton et al.'s findings (2017) that parents who reported that their child had lower verbal ability tended to have more concerns that bilingualism would exacerbate their child's existing language difficulties. Katherine epitomises the perspectives of parents in group 1 by articulating a key factor in opting for a more multilingual approach; namely, that her son was able 'to express his basic needs' in both languages.

The consequences of parents' language choices also differed between groups. The findings suggest that adopting a more multilingual approach may positively impact upon children's communication with their family, expand their linguistic repertoires and increase parental well-being. By contrast, a more monolingual approach had some negative consequences for wider family life such as parental guilt, regret or sadness, also described by Bird et al. (2016b), or the prevention of siblings' bilingual development. Participants in group 2 also acknowledged that raising their child monolingually may have negative implications for social interaction with their wider family (Bird et al., 2016b).

5.9.2. Experiences in England and Wales

By drawing on two linguistically different contexts, this study has demonstrated how different types of bilingualism (i.e. societal vs. individual) may affect parents' perceptions and choices regarding language maintenance in autism. Although it would be ill-advised to make generalisations about such a small sample, it is possible that families' wider linguistic setting has some influence on their perceptions about language maintenance. In Wales, bilingualism is more integrated into the educational system than in England, which may be partially reflected in the finding that proportionately more families in Wales opted for a bilingual approach when compared to those in England. Consonant with Hodges' findings (2012), by sending their children to Welsh-medium schools, parents in Wales demonstrated their high regard for bilingualism, despite being mostly monolingual themselves.

Parents in England, by contrast, who were all bilingual, were more hesitant about the possibility of bilingualism for their child. For most of the parents in England, English was their second or third language, so some – like Davesh – may have considered proficiency in English to be a high priority for their children. Another important difference between the two settings was that, unlike in England, no family in Wales received advice about bilingualism; given that bilingualism is being encouraged in all aspects of Welsh society, particularly in schools, more support needs to be available so that parents can make research-informed decisions not only about the language used in the home, but also the type of education their child receives.

5.9.3. Implications

Given the lack of advice received by multilingual families about bilingualism in this study (over half of participants received no language advice at all), greater attention must be paid to providing clarity for parents on the potential consequences of their language choices – both for their child and the wider family. Nevertheless, the findings of this study confirm that there will be some children for whom a single-language approach may be most appropriate. It is therefore essential that those advising multilingual families take into consideration the feasibility of their suggestions for the individual child and family, giving particular attention to the child's cognitive profile and the family's socio-linguistic make-up.

Providing training and guidance for practitioners (speech and language therapists, paediatricians, psychiatrists, teachers, and health visitors) on the complexity and consequences of language choices would be a useful step in ensuring that families make appropriate decisions. In line with Beauchamp & MacLeod (2017) and Lim et al. (2018), there is a strong case for greater support for families who wish to adopt a multilingual approach to raising their child with a developmental disorder like autism. In practice, families could be encouraged to provide sufficient input in the home language (Beauchamp & MacLeod, 2017), especially if this is different to the language of instruction in school. This correlates with the literature on well-being in multilingual families, which suggests that 'balanced bilinguals' are likely to report higher levels of subjective well-being (De Houwer, 2015; Müller et al., under review).

The findings also suggest that in Wales there is a need for more specialist provision through the medium of Welsh so that parents do not have to choose between sending their children to specialist autism schools or raising them as bilingual Welsh-English speakers.

Drawing on the Welsh context, this finding may also be relevant to numerous settings around the world in which educational systems offer provision in two or more languages. This builds on recommendations that speech and language interventions for bilingual children on the autism spectrum should be conducted in both languages (Beauchamp & MacLeod, 2017; Bird et al., 2016a; Seung et al., 2006). In this vein, bilingual education systems could – and should – include and integrate neurodiverse populations more effectively.

5.10. Chapter summary and conclusions

Deciding whether to raise an autistic child in a more monolingual or multilingual way is a difficult task. This chapter sought to illuminate parents' experiences of making choices regarding bilingualism in autism. It reports the findings of semi-structured interviews conducted with sixteen family members in England and Wales, which, as in the case of children and practitioners in chapters 3 and 4 respectively, were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Although parents expressed highly positive attitudes towards bilingualism, these views were not always congruent with their actual language practices, which suggests that parental attitudes to bilingualism are not necessarily decisive in their language practices.

Several factors influenced decisions about language maintenance in autism, including communication with family members, the severity of the child's autism, advice received from professionals, and the role of English. Parents' language choices had significant consequences for familial well-being, the child's use of language, and in Wales, decisions about educational settings. The lack of specialist provision through the medium of Welsh resulted in difficult choices for parents between the type of school (mainstream or specialist) and the language of instruction (English or Welsh). This finding has important implications for policy makers and educational practice, which will be discussed in chapter 7. Taken together, the findings documented in this chapter suggest that families need greater support in making judicious choices about bilingualism in autism. On the whole, parents' views about bilingualism were more positive than the children and practitioners' accounts presented in chapters 3 and 4 respectively. However, several parallels can be drawn between the three participant groups. Accordingly, our attention now turns to delineating areas of consensus and contrast in order to gain a better understanding of different stakeholders' perspectives and experiences when bilingualism meets autism.

6. Shared and Conflicting Perspectives and Experiences

6.1. Chapter aims and questions

Having explored perspectives and experiences specific to each participant group, it is important to establish how the accounts of different groups fit together. Adopting a multi-perspectival approach, this chapter aims to synthesise the findings from children, practitioners and parents presented in chapters 3 to 5, and identify areas of consensus and contrast between the three participant groups. After outlining the chapter's guiding research questions along with the purposes and challenges of a multi-perspectival design, three main areas of comparison will be considered. The first area will explore participants' perspectives of bilingualism, and bilingualism in autism. Second, convergence and divergence between participants' experiences of bilingualism in autism will be examined, with a particular focus on children's language use, families' language choices, the challenges faced by bilingual autistic children in school, and the ways in which these can be overcome. The third area of comparison shines a much-needed light on how perspectives and experiences across participant groups in England differ to those in Wales. Throughout these cross-group analyses, phenomenologically-informed case studies (Bradfield & Knight, 2008; Martins, Walker, & Fouché, 2013) of dyads, triads and tetrads of participants will be employed to exemplify how views and experiences differed between a child, parent and practitioner within the same context. This chapter seeks to answer research question 4:

RQ 4: To what extent do the perspectives and experiences of children, educators and parents converge and diverge when bilingualism meets autism?

As in previous chapters, this overarching research question is divided into a series of sub-questions:

1) How are perspectives about bilingualism and the feasibility of bilingualism in autism similar and different across participant groups?
2) How do lived experiences of bilingualism in autism converge and diverge across the three groups?
3) In what ways do participants' accounts differ between England and Wales?

Each of these questions will be answered in turn, although it is important to note that certain questions were more prevalent for certain groups than for others. For example, as children were not asked specifically about autism, their perspectives feature less in discussions about the feasibility of bilingualism for autistic children. Before addressing the aforementioned questions, consideration will be given to the challenges and opportunities of a multi-perspectival design, and the analytical process undertaken in this chapter.

6.2. Multi-perspectival designs

6.2.1. Challenges and opportunities

As argued in chapter 2 (see 2.3.3.), multi-perspectival IPA designs focus on synthesising and integrating findings from single-sample IPA studies (Larkin et al., 2019). Exploring a phenomenon from different perspectives can result in a more nuanced analysis (Loaring, Larkin, Shaw, & Flowers, 2015; Mjøsund et al., 2017) and therefore provide readers with a more convincing account (Larkin et al., 2019). Such designs are particularly useful in autism research, where the perspectives of professionals, parents and autistic individuals can often diverge (Azad et al., 2016; Barnhill, Hagiwara, Myles, & Simpson, 2000). Divergence is also common in literature exploring different stakeholders' perspectives of bilingualism (Anderson et al., 2016; Slavkov, 2017). For individuals, including children, who may have less capacity to articulate their experiences, a multi-informant approach may enhance the researcher's insight into the phenomenon being explored (Larkin et al., 2019). Existing literature tends to focus on concurrence between two groups (e.g. parents and practitioners, or practitioners and students); few studies bring together the perspectives of three or more groups. This may be due to the practical challenges of a multi-perspectival design, to which our attention now turns.

As multi-perspectival designs are relatively new – given that traditionally IPA studies focus on one fairly homogenous sample – there are few precedents to follow and limited research-informed recommendations for implementing such an approach (Borg Xuereb, Shaw, & Lane, 2016). One challenge is providing a coherent account across different participant groups while retaining IPA's commitment to idiography and the individual participant's voice. Rostill-Brookes, Larkin, Toms, and Churchman (2011), for example, describe having to compromise individual variation within groups in order to present a coherent analysis across groups. Larkin et al. (2019) acknowledge two further challenges of multi-perspectival designs: (1) potential imbalances of socio-cultural capital between groups may distort the presentation

of findings; and (2) analyses may foreground one area of convergence at the expense of equally important, but divergent, themes. Researchers also have an ethical responsibility to ensure that internal confidentiality is upheld; in a multi-perspectival design, participants are more likely to identify themselves, and by default, recognise others within their dyad or triad (Ummel & Achille, 2016).

Along with the challenges outlined above, there were also specific challenges in applying a multi-perspectival design to the current research. Disparities between the amount of information given by different participant groups meant that an unequal coverage of viewpoints emerged. Most notably, parents and practitioners reflected in far more detail about their attitudes and practices in relation to bilingualism in autism, and gave far more lengthy accounts of the children's experiences than the children themselves. It is important to note, however, that children in this research may have provided far less information for multiple reasons. First, children could not reflect on the value of bilingualism in autism because many did not know they were autistic and others had only a nascent understanding of their bilingual profile. Second, as previously noted, children's language proficiency or communicative challenges associated with autism may have restricted the extent of their participation. Third, it is unreasonable to expect children – regardless of linguistic or developmental profile – to formulate and articulate detailed opinions in the same way as adults. A major challenge in this cross-group analysis was that children's voices could be lost, or regarded as less significant. As will be explained in the following section, precautions were taken to ensure that children's perspectives and experiences were given equal status, when synthesised with adults' accounts.

6.2.2. Methods for cross-group analysis

By integrating the three distinct IPA studies presented in chapters 3 to 5, this thesis draws on 'directly related groups', that is, groups who are 'involved with the same phenomenon, but that are likely to have distinct perspectives on it' (Larkin et al., 2019, p.187). The cross-case analysis in this chapter was not based on the frequency of themes across groups, but rather themes that are most relevant to answering the research questions posed in chapter 1, relating to the perspectives and experiences of bilingual autistic children, along with their parents and the professionals who support them in educational settings. Following Larkin et al.'s recommendations (2019), each micro-system, that is each participant group, was considered individually before moving 'outwards' (p.190). Another possibility was to treat each triad (child, practitioner and parent) as a micro-system, emulating the analytical process conducted

by Clare (2002). This was deemed less effective in this case, as it would have constrained the analysis of each individual group. Instead, the analytical process outlined in chapter 2 – and espoused by Smith et al. (2009) – was employed, whereby the three participant groups were analysed individually, before areas of convergence and divergence were explored across groups.

Drawing on the strategies outlined by Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, and Fadden for applying IPA to focus group data (2010, Table 1 [Point 8]) and recommendations put forward by Larkin et al. (2019), eight steps were taken to arrive at the cross-group analysis. These are presented in Table 17.

Table 17: Analytical process for multi-perspectival IPA

Step	Action
1	Superordinate and subordinate themes from each participant group were organised into two categories: 'perspectives' or 'experience' (see Table 18 in 6.3.).
2	Patterns were identified between the superordinate and subordinate themes within the 'perspectives' and 'experience' columns respectively. Two new themes were created for the 'perspectives' category ('attitudes towards bilingualism' and 'feasibility of bilingualism in autism') and four from 'experience' ('children's language use', 'consequences of language choices at home and in school', 'identifying challenges' and 'improving school experience').
3	All transcripts were re-read to ensure that the selected themes were appropriate. This also meant that data not previously presented in chapters 3-5 could be included.
4	Areas of convergence across all participant groups first for 'perspectives' category, then for 'experience' category, were identified.
5	Areas of divergence between two or more participant groups were identified, first for the 'perspectives' category, then for the 'experience' category.
6	Triads of participants (or in some cases, dyads and tetrads) were identified that reflected the specific areas of convergence or divergence.
7	Areas of convergence and divergence between the two linguistically different settings were noted in light of the above findings.
8	Findings were evaluated in the wider context of existing literature in keeping with IPA's interrogative approach.

6.3. Results overview

The title of the thesis focuses on the *perspectives* and *experiences* of children, educational practitioners and parents when bilingualism meets autism. As such, the superordinate themes discussed in chapters 3 to 5 have been organised into two categories: those related to perspectives (of bilingualism, or bilingualism in autism) and those related to experience (both of bilingual autistic children and of supporting/parenting this group). A number of issues arise when adopting this kind of approach that merit acknowledgement and further scrutiny.

First and foremost, there is considerable overlap between participants' perspectives and their experiences, which makes distinguishing between the two problematic. As such, for the purposes of this cross-group analysis, the quasi-definitions provided by Eatough and Smith (2008) will be employed. The authors define the 'personal perspective' as 'the standpoint of the conscious, thinking, unreflective/reflective, feeling person' (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.181), while they describe 'experience' as 'practical engagements with things and others in the world' (p.180). Within an IPA framework then, experience signifies active participation in past events or moments, while the word 'standpoint' implies a present state of thoughtful inaction (unless, of course, to think is to act). In light of this distinction, the analysis presented in the 'perspectives' section (see 6.4.) pertain to participants' beliefs about bilingualism and bilingualism in autism, while those explored in the 'experience' section (see 6.5.) relate to their reflections on real-life events or engagements that involve bilingualism in autism. It is also important here to remember that a 'triple hermeneutic' may be at play in this multi-perspectival analysis, as parents and teachers were reflecting not only on their own perspectives and experiences, but those of their children or pupils too.

Second, by taking the superordinate and subthemes from chapters 3 to 5, there was a risk of homogenising each group's perspectives and experiences; as we have seen from previous chapters, there was inevitably wide variation within each participant group, which needed to be maintained and reflected within the cross-group analysis. Third, this approach led to an imbalance in coverage as children's data was far more pertinent to the 'experience' category than to the 'perspectives' category, for reasons outlined in section 6.2.1. Fourth, by dint of varying perspectives, there were also issues regarding the pre-eminence of certain themes. For example, although parents provided in-depth insights into their children's experiences, both at home and in school, the focus in chapter 5 is on their perceptions of bilingualism in autism and their subsequent language choices. As a result, data related to

parents' views on their child's school experience and their own experiences of parenting are largely absent from chapter 5. Attempts have therefore been made to integrate some of the previously unused data into the current chapter in order to provide a richer comparison between the three participant groups.

As outlined in Table 17, step 1 of the cross-group analysis involved organising the existing themes into two categories: 'perspectives of bilingualism in autism' and 'experiences of bilingualism in autism'. These are presented in Table 18. The superordinate theme entitled 'comparisons between two linguistically different settings' from the practitioners' accounts does not feature in the table as it will be considered in section 6.6., which examines variation between England and Wales.

Table 18: Themes related to 'perspectives' and 'experience'

Participant group	Superordinate themes related to 'Perspectives'	Subordinate themes	Superordinate themes related to 'Experience'	Subordinate themes
Children	Identity Formation	Being bilingual	Identity Formation	Developing as learners
				Social identity
			School experience	Learning environments
				Well-being
Practitioners	Perspectives on bilingualism in autism	Bilingualism for typically-developing children vs. bilingualism for autistic children	Perspectives on bilingualism in autism	Consequences for the classroom
			Creating inclusive learning environments	Identifying barriers to learning
		Concerns about feasibility		Best practice in the Classroom
				Whole-school approaches
Parents		Impact on communication		Family well-being

	Perceptions about the value of bilingualism	Cultural value	Consequences of language choices	Children's language use
		Impact on cognition		Education
	Factors influencing language decisions	Feasibility of bilingualism	Factors influencing language decisions	Communication with family
		Practical considerations		
		The role of English		Advice received
	Shifting expectations	Future language learning		
		Language choices are not fixed		

Step 2 of the cross-group analysis involved finding patterns between the superordinate and subordinate themes in the two categories. From the 'perspectives' column, two new themes were created: (1) attitudes towards bilingualism; and (2) feasibility of bilingualism in autism. From the 'experiences' category, four themes were developed: (1) children's language use; (2) consequences of language choices at home and in school; (3) identifying challenges; and (4) improving school experiences. These categories, presented in Table 19, will now be discussed with reference to how the accounts of children, practitioners and parents converge and diverge.

Table 19: Perspectives and experiences across groups

Perspectives of bilingualism in autism	Experiences of bilingualism in autism
1. Attitudes towards bilingualism	1. Children's language use
	2. Consequences of language choices at home and in school
2. Feasibility of bilingualism in autism	3. Identifying challenges
	4. Improving school experiences

6.4. Perspectives of bilingualism in autism

6.4.1. Attitudes towards bilingualism

Children, practitioners and parents tended to hold positive views about bilingualism in this study. However, to end there would be to tell only half of the story. While participants in each group could identify benefits to bilingualism, only participants from the parent group noted

benefits of bilingualism that were specific to autistic children. By contrast, practitioners and children spoke of benefits applicable to the general population without recourse to autism or their specific circumstances. Some practitioners mentioned cognitive, cultural and vocational advantages to bilingualism, but none identified a benefit of bilingualism in relation to the child's autism and some were concerned that bilingualism had a negative impact on their autistic pupil. Overall, practitioners' views towards bilingualism were the least positive of the three participant groups. The majority of children discussed advantages of bilingualism using the second-person pronoun 'you', rather than relating those benefits to their own context. Many children minimised their own linguistic capacity and the intrinsic value of their home language. This is incongruent with the views of their parents, who unanimously commended home language maintenance, even if they had opted for a more monolingual approach to raising their child.

A possible reason for this disconnect between children's and practitioners' views on the one hand, and parents' views on the other, is that parents (or in some cases, their partners) were bilingual themselves. It stands to reason that bilingual individuals will hold more favourable attitudes towards bilingualism than monolinguals (like many of the educators) or emergent bilinguals (like many of the children), as they are able to draw on their personal experiences of bilingualism. This line of argument is bolstered by the manner in which practitioners working in more multilingual educational settings and children whose parents had adopted a more multilingual approach also held more positive views about bilingualism. Greater exposure to multilingualism either in the home (e.g. parents opting for a more multilingual approach) or in schools (e.g. bilingual schools or those with a high percentage of EAL students) was indicative of more positive attitudes towards bilingualism. It also chimes with existing research suggesting that attitudes towards multilingualism depend on opportunities to share multilingual identifications (Ceginskas, 2010). This meant that participants in multilingual environments in England often had more in common with participants in Wales than those in England who were based in more monolingual settings. Undoubtedly then, the context in which participants were operative had a significant impact on their attitudes towards bilingualism.

The difference in perspectives on bilingualism between parents, practitioners and children reveals a wider tension of priorities, also noted in previous studies (Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Namely, parents may be more inclined to maintain the

home language or, in Wales, enrol their child in a bilingual education system, whereas children and practitioners preferred – or at least, prioritised – English as the lingua franca. In their reluctance to acknowledge their home language or claim multilingualism for themselves, children gave superior status to English. In this sense, a strong divergence between parents' and children's accounts emerged in that children often reported being less proficient in the home language than their parents had indicated. Regardless of actual proficiency, what emerges here is an attitudinal difference. Children may have downplayed their bilingual abilities in order to assimilate to the monolingual norms of classrooms in England, while parents hoped to preserve the home language.

Like many of the children, some educators were also keen to stress the importance of English over the home language. This may have related to the fact that they associated English proficiency with academic success. Such a finding could also be partially attributed to a trend in which practitioners emphasised the child's identity as an autistic learner over their multilingual one. On the one hand, this trend may have been specific to the sample, as very few of the children were born outside the UK, therefore their levels of English proficiency were high. On the other hand, the challenges faced by autistic pupils described in existing literature tend to be greater than those faced by EAL pupils, therefore it is possible that practitioners foregrounded the child's autistic identity at the expense of their multilingual one. This was less prevalent in the accounts of practitioners in Wales, as all (or at least, most) of their students were bilingual in English and Welsh, therefore their pedagogy was centred around the teaching and learning of bilingual pupils.

Just as they were more likely to highlight the benefits of bilingualism, parents were also more positive about additional language learning (i.e. modern foreign languages) than children and practitioners. Nevertheless, some parents identified languages with higher status in the UK such as Spanish and Italian as instrumentally valuable, and sometimes regarded these languages as more useful than the home language (Handley, 2011). Other parents mentioned that they believed additional language learning would be easier, in light of the child's bilingualism; this notion was echoed by one child (Luke) and one practitioner (Emma). Other children described learning foreign languages as difficult and some as their least favoured subject. Given that many children did not identify themselves as bilinguals, or did not associate the benefits of bilingualism with their own circumstances, it is possible that they viewed additional language learning in a similar way to their own home language maintenance.

The picture becomes more nuanced still when we delve deeper into the value of bilingualism in autism. This time children's views tended to converge more readily with those of their parents. Both parents and children raised communicating with family members as a significant reason for being bilingual. This was even true for parents who had opted for a more monolingual approach, many of whom expressed frustrations or concerns that the child may miss out on important familial relationships. Conversely, only one practitioner (Cath) discussed this benefit. In many ways, it is unsurprising that educators would concentrate less on benefits of bilingualism that affect the familial domain, as their focus is on the child's educational development. A similar finding emerged with the cultural advantages of bilingualism; several parents noted an affinity between language and culture, whereas this point was again considered by all but one of the practitioners (Natalia). Like the practitioners, the children did not mention the cultural relevance of their language, with the exception of Suvrat, who suggested 'it's good to speak Hindi because it's good to pray to God'. Perhaps then, the relationship between language and culture was far more keenly felt by the parents than any other group in the study.

The triad of William, Magdalena (William's mother) and Dawn (the SENDCo working with William) models in microcosm the differing perspectives on bilingualism between groups. Consistent with the notion of children minimising their home language proficiency, William was reluctant to identify as a multilingual in his affirmation that 'I just know English and a tiny bit of Spanish'. He then highlights that bilingualism is beneficial because 'when you're older you can speak to people that are in those languages'. His use of 'you' and 'when you're older' in this instance establishes a distance between his own linguistic practices and his perception of the ideal multilingual individual. Meanwhile, his mother, Magdalena, highlighted William's daily exposure to Spanish, saying he is 'constantly hearing Spanish in the house' and describing his Spanish as 'inbuilt'. Although she conceded that William's understanding of Spanish was greater than his production, their accounts are partially conflicting. Despite opting for a more monolingual approach, Magdalena highlighted several benefits of bilingualism for William, including better communication with immediate family members, potential academic gains (such as increased confidence), and further opportunities for social interaction. Like many of the triads of participants, these sentiments were not shared by the educator, even though Dawn did acknowledge that William's mother did not want him to 'lose' his home language. Instead, she believed that bilingualism was problematic for William: 'having English as an Additional

language impacts on William's processing, therefore it would be a negative for him'. On the whole, William's mother was focused on the familial aspects of home language maintenance, whereas Dawn's perspective was shaped by her educational role in William's life, which led to her belief that bilingualism was more of a hindrance than a help. The conflicting priorities and perspectives in this triad are symptomatic of the divergence present across different participant groups in this study.

6.4.2. Feasibility of bilingualism in autism

Building on the case study of William described above, this section compares parents' and practitioners' perspectives on the feasibility of bilingualism in autism. The children's accounts are less documented here, as their opinions on this aspect of the study were not sought for reasons previously outlined (see 6.2.1.).

At the outset, it is important to note that opinions diverged about the value of bilingualism for autistic children not only between the parent and educator accounts, but also within the two participant groups. For example, within the parents' group, families who opted for a more multilingual approach believed that being bilingual may bring some advantages to their child's autism, while families who chose a more monolingual approach to raising their child reported either no effect or concerns that bilingualism may be inimical to their child's development. Within the educator group, participants were more likely to have concerns about the feasibility of bilingualism in autism, even though such concerns are incongruent with conclusions drawn by several studies that there is no detrimental effect of bilingualism on autistic children (Drysdale et al., 2015; Reetzke et al., 2015; Uljarević et al., 2016). That said, some educators did argue that – in the right conditions and with the right support – it was possible for an autistic child to develop both languages.

Some parents and practitioners shared the view that the feasibility of bilingualism depended on the autistic presentation and profile of the individual child. Accordingly, they believed that the ultimate decision was contingent on whether or not the child could communicate their basic needs in both languages. Suzanne (a SENDCo) argued, for example, that the child's ability to communicate their fundamental needs was more crucial than developing their bilingual proficiency. This view was corroborated by Katherine (a parent), who stated that she would not have pursued bilingualism if her son had not been able to express his basic needs. This idea dovetails with Bethan's aforementioned questions that can be used

to inform decisions about opting for a more monolingual or multilingual approach on the basis of how naturally the two languages come to the child. Families' language choices were often made, whether consciously or not, along these lines. Several parents reported that they used their own language with their child because it came more naturally, while others chose a more monolingual approach because using two languages came less naturally to the child. In this vein, some participants in both the parent and practitioner groups expressed apprehension that children were becoming confused by the presence of two languages, although this was a more prevalent belief among practitioners. Across the two groups, participants felt that bilingualism was possible for some, but not all, autistic children.

The example of Dyfan is useful in illustrating convergence between a parent and a practitioner when it comes to the feasibility of bilingualism. Molly (Dyfan's mother) and Bethan (Dyfan's teacher) were two of the strongest advocates for bilingualism in the study, yet they both believed that bilingualism was not suitable for Dyfan, stating that bilingual exposure was potentially 'holding him back' and 'making a difference on his confidence'. As a result, through consultation with Bethan and others in the school, Molly had decided that Dyfan would move from a Welsh-medium to an English medium primary school in the following academic year. In this instance, the Welsh-medium school had made significant efforts to support Dyfan's emergent bilingualism, but both the family and school agreed that a monolingual environment was more appropriate. It is important to note, however, that factors affecting familial well-being mentioned in section 5.7.1. (such as parental guilt and restricting siblings' opportunities for bilingualism) did not apply in Dyfan's case, as Molly was monolingual herself and Dyfan's brother was set to continue in a Welsh-medium setting. Dyfan's case illustrates that parents' and practitioners' beliefs about bilingualism may not be the decisive factor when choosing whether to raise a child on the autism spectrum with one, or more than one, language.

Views across participant groups were generally consistent when it came to the feasibility of maintaining two languages for an autistic child; however, within individual triads, parents and practitioners sometimes held differing views. For example, Paula believed that bilingualism was having a detrimental impact on Daniel's written and spoken English and subsequently suggested that his parents could speak more English at home to encourage his English proficiency. This advice, though well-intentioned, may be impractical to implement; it would be very difficult for Lena to use exclusively English with Daniel, given that Polish is the primary language spoken at home and the shared language among family members.

Moreover, the fact that Lena used an interpreter for much of the interview implies that she would not be comfortable conversing exclusively in English with her son. Asking her to model her non-native language may have unintended consequences for Daniel's development of English and for the wider family. Daniel's case highlights the fact that for some families in this study maintaining the home language was more of a necessity than a choice, and that parents' own language proficiency can play a significant role in language choices, echoing findings from Drysdale et al. (2015).

The disconnect between Paula's request for more English to be spoken in Daniel's home and the practical realities and linguistic proficiency of his family raises important questions about the extent to which practitioners should – and do – influence family language practices. While answers to such questions are by no means straightforward, the incongruity between practitioners' recommendations and the feasibility for certain families and children is well attested to in existing literature (Lim et al., 2018; Uljarević et al., 2016) and suggests that more collaboration and information-sharing is needed between schools and families. Interestingly, more than half of families received no advice at all about whether or not to maintain the home language when their child was diagnosed with autism. Teachers corroborated this finding in their report that neither they nor the school had given parents advice about language practices. This finding contrasts with other studies that found that parents' views were often informed by advice received by professionals (Ijalba, 2016; Yu, 2013) and perhaps suggests that such advice is more likely to come from clinicians than educators. As we have seen in this section, participants' beliefs about bilingualism and, more specifically, about bilingualism in autism, influence their experiences and practices. Our attention now turns to the convergence and divergence of experiences for children, practitioners and parents when bilingualism meets autism.

6.5. Experiences of bilingualism in autism

6.5.1. Children's language use

Just as participants had varying perspectives about bilingualism (in autism and more broadly), so too did their experiences of language inevitably concur in some areas and differ in others. One central area of convergence between participants' accounts relates to the way in which children compartmentalised their languages between different contexts, most commonly between home and school. Parents in Wales particularly emphasised this point, stating that

their child considered Welsh to be the 'language of school' and, in most cases, English was 'the language for home'. A similar trend was noted in England; children reported preferring to use English at school in line with previous findings (Hall, 2019; Liu & Evans, 2016) and did not wish to conflate their linguistic spaces. In fact, some children were surprised to be asked if they used languages other than English in school. Similarly, practitioners commented that they rarely heard the child use their home language in school. For example, Dawn described William's resistance to speaking Spanish with a bilingual teaching assistant in school, while other practitioners who had concerns about bilingualism in autism reported that they seldom heard the child using their home language in school. These trends may explain why less emphasis seems to be placed on the child's multilingual identity in the school environment. Perhaps if children in the sample had been new to English, these reflections and their compartmentalisation of language may have been different.

The accounts of all participant groups also converged to a large extent regarding children's use of English. First, most children stated that they felt more comfortable using English than their home language or Welsh for those with English as a first language, which was corroborated by practitioners and parents. In like manner, a common thread running through the three participant groups was that the child could understand the home language (or Welsh) but lacked proficiency – or at least confidence – in speaking it. Some parents had decided that developing the child's receptive knowledge of the home language was more realistic than expecting them to become fluent speakers. This chimes with children's own reported lack of confidence in the home language, as exemplified by the repetition of 'just' and 'only' in reference to speaking their home language. As expected, this was particularly the case for children whose families had adopted a more monolingual approach, such as Rahul, who affirmed 'I don't speak other languages'. What emerged was the idea that children may not identify as bilinguals if they cannot fluently speak the home language, even if they understand the language well. Such a finding is common within the literature on the linguistic identity of multilingual learners, many of whom are reluctant to claim multilingual competence (Dressler, 2010, 2014).

Some participants in the parent and practitioner groups also discussed the idea of the child's linguistic and developmental trajectory evolving over time. A sense emerged that bilingual development was possible for autistic children, although in certain cases it might take longer than for typically-developing children. As such, some participants indicated that there

was a different balance of challenges and benefits of bilingualism depending on the child's age; that is to say, there may be more challenges and fewer evident benefits in the earlier stages of development, but the balance may tip the other way as the child grows. This was typified by Emma's belief that 'at the moment it makes it more challenging, but from my understanding, I think when he's older it will be beneficial'. As children in the sample were different ages, it was relatively easy to identify examples of this phenomenon. In Wales, for instance, Molly and Bethan believed that bilingualism was not feasible for Dyfan at age 6, and Anna and Mary described having similar feelings about Ryan in his first few years of primary school. Like Molly, Anna considered adopting a more monolingual approach by moving Ryan to an English-medium school. However, at the time of the interview, the accounts of Anna, Mary and Anwen (Ryan's SENDCo) converged in their explanation that Ryan was now flourishing in a bilingual system. This suggests that, in some cases, it may be helpful to persist with a bilingual environment for as long as possible to ensure that the child has sufficient time, exposure and opportunity to develop as a bilingual.

However, it is important to acknowledge the arduous decision parents have to make about the timings of these language choices. For example, in the following excerpt, Anna suggests that she would have eventually opted for monolingualism, if Ryan was still having difficulties:

> *If it had taken another two years for his reading to come up and things, when he was coming to comp I'd be like, I'd be thinking now, questioning it again, like 'would it be better for him just to go to an English-medium school' cos everybody needs their Maths and English GCSEs at the end of the day don't they. But hopefully now everything's OK.*

Anna's reflections here showcase the difficult choice that parents of autistic children may face when making language decisions. Her suggestion that 'everybody needs their Maths and English GCSEs at the end of the day' demonstrates that parents may feel forced to compromise their child's bilingualism for the sake of their academic progress. The above excerpt also provides a further rationale as to why parents, like Molly, may opt for an English-medium education for their child. With time, bilingualism was the right choice for Anna's son, Ryan, as confirmed by his grandmother's reflection that bilingualism 'seems to be working itself out now' and Anwen's confirmation that 'last year I would have said he was struggling with the two but this year now it's just clicked'. However, the differences between Ryan and Dyfan

serve to demonstrate that again language choices must be made with the individual child's profile in mind.

Drawing on parents' and practitioners' accounts of their experiences, it emerged that the child's capacity for bilingualism may change over time. Especially among parents of younger children in the sample, there was a sense that language use was continually evolving and bilingualism may be possible in the future. This notion of language development and exposure changing over time also dovetails with the idea of a child being 'ready' for bilingualism. In this vein, parallels could be drawn between a child's readiness for bilingualism, and their readiness to be informed about their autism diagnosis; in Crane et al. (2019), parents highlighted that they were more likely to share their child's diagnosis with them when they felt they were ready. A similar trend emerges with language exposure; with regard to teaching Bengali to Nish, Hira noted that 'when he will be ready, we'll start'. Once again, this reinforces the idea that language choices should be contingent upon the profile of the individual child.

6.5.2. Consequences of language choices at home and in school

Several consequences of families' language choices, both positive and negative, were discussed by participants and provide another facet of their experiences. Consequences related first to children's familial environment and then to their educational settings will be discussed in turn. Inevitably, parents and children tended to discuss consequences at home, and practitioners and children talked about implications applicable to school, although there was some overlap between the two.

Within the familial setting, language choices had both positive and negative implications for children's well-being. Families who opted for a more multilingual approach tended to report more positive experiences related to well-being. Most notably, children were able to maintain communication with family members; both parents and children highlighted that being able to speak the home language was essential for relationships with immediate and extended family. As previously mentioned, only one practitioner (Cath) highlighted this communicative advantage. However, Suzanne also added that for her two autistic pupils 'Welsh is their home language so they're happy', inferring a link between language maintenance and well-being that is beginning to be established in research into the general population (de Houwer, 2015; Mills, 2001; Müller et al., under review). Other parents, like

Baheela and Roberta, indicated that being able to speak 'our language' (Baheela) had positive effects on parental well-being too, which, in turn, may positively influence parent-child relations. Research employing longitudinal designs is needed in order to further investigate the relationship between family well-being and multilingualism, in autistic and non-autistic children alike.

Parents who opted for a more monolingual approach reported some negative effects on well-being, both for the child and for themselves as parents. Some participants reported that their child could become distressed from either their code-switching (e.g. Nish) or using a particular language in the 'wrong' context (e.g. Ryan). This finding converges with the children's strong desire to compartmentalise their languages, and demonstrates that regardless of parental language choices, language use may have a significant impact – for better or worse – on autistic children's well-being. Beyond the child's own language proficiency, opting for monolingualism engendered some negative effects for parents and siblings. Some parents described their guilt or sadness at not being able to share their language with their child, a difficulty recognised by SENDCo, Dawn, when she acknowledged that William's mother did not want him to lose his home language. Others mentioned the impact of opting for a more monolingual approach on other siblings; both Dasia and Roshan mentioned that in reality a monolingual approach for their autistic child represented a monolingual approach for the whole family. As a result, their other children missed out on the opportunity to learn and maintain the home language.

Moving to the educational consequences of language choices, difficulties with literacy emerged as one of the biggest areas of convergence among the three participant groups. This was as true for children whose parents had chosen a multilingual approach as those whose parents had opted to raise them with a single language. Some practitioners attributed children's challenges with literacy to the child's bilingualism or code-switching practices at home, while parents described difficulties with reading comprehension and writing, but did not speculate on possible reasons. Children also highlighted that literacy-based subjects were among their least favourite or most difficult subjects. Reflecting on their own experiences as educational professionals, practitioners also highlighted the challenges they faced in distinguishing the causes of children's difficulties (autism, bilingualism or a combination), which inevitably resulted in multilingual children's learning needs being identified later than their monolingual

peers. This was more common in England, particularly in schools with a higher percentage of EAL pupils, than in Wales. Only one parent (Eleanora) questioned whether bilingual children may be more susceptible to being diagnosed with autism later than their monolingual peers. She expressed frustrations that staff at her son's nursery had ascribed his challenges with communication to his exposure to Italian, rather than an underlying condition. This experience of developmental issues being attributed to bilingualism is consistent with previous research that reports delays – and mistakes – in diagnosis for children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Strand et al., 2006; Yamasaki & Luk, 2018).

Another educational consequence of language choices, specific to children in Wales, concerned school placements. Three out of five children in Wales had moved, or were due to move, schools, either from Welsh-medium (WM) to English-medium (EM) or vice-versa. Their parents interviewed had to make difficult choices about whether to keep their child in a WM mainstream school without the specialist support they needed or send their child to an EM specialist school without access to a bilingual education. This difficult choice came about due to a lack of specialist autism schools educating through the medium of Welsh. Drawing on the pertinent example of Thomas, his mother, Katherine, wanted him to attend a more specialist school, given that 'school is where he has the most difficulty' and, more strikingly still, 'he will never achieve his potential in school because the environment is so set up against him'. However, she was also keen for him to maintain Welsh, given that she believed he had an aptitude for languages and in light of the cultural and cognitive benefits of bilingualism that she outlined.

Although these concerns were most prevalent among parents, practitioners in Wales also commented on the difficult choices parents of bilingual autistic children had to make. For example, Gill, Suzanne, Lucy and Rachel discussed their pupil, Glyn, who was due to move from an EM primary school to a WM secondary school. Suzanne expressed concerns that a change of language, along with a new routine and school environment, may be difficult for Glyn. Unlike Hampton et al (2017), parents did not discuss the children's preferences as a factor in making language decisions. However, Bethan raised Dyfan's own preferences for moving schools on linguistic grounds when she commented: 'it does affect Dyfan because we've had an interview for his review and things at the end of the year and he's said, 'I wish this was a [speaks Welsh and then translates] "an English-speaking school"'. By contrast,

another parent in Wales (Julie) recounted her son's positive school move from a WM mainstream to an EM specialist school, given that exposure to Welsh was not as compromised as she had first thought: 'it hasn't been a problem because although the education is through the medium of English there are so many Welsh-speaking staff amongst the staff, and he can chat to them in Welsh'. As this section has traced, language choices not only affected the child's actual language use, but also had far-reaching implications in their home and school environments.

6.5.3. Identifying challenges

While there was a shared endeavour by the interviewer and interviewees to highlight the children's strengths, several challenges at home and in school faced bilingual autistic children in this study. Literacy was described as a major difficulty by all participant groups, but will not be discussed here, as it has been previously considered in section 6.4.2. Instead, this section examines other challenges identified by children, their parents and their educators, focusing in particular on issues regarding socialisation, emotion regulation, and school inclusion. What is particularly interesting here is that, although these three categories reflect the wider literature on the school experiences of autistic children, the findings presented here uncover unique instances of how bilingualism may exacerbate or alleviate the challenges the child faces.

Across participant groups, social interaction emerged as a key challenge for bilingual children on the autism spectrum. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the diagnostic criteria for autism classifies challenges in social communication and interaction as one of the core features of the condition (APA, 2013). This finding also resonates with much of the existing literature on the school experiences of autistic pupils (Calzada et al., 2012; Tierney et al., 2016). Many of the children in the sample reported having few friendships, an experience that was corroborated by their parents and teachers. Nish, for instance, had difficulty articulating his social experiences – in contrast to his detailed description of his academic experiences, but his mother conceded that, 'the biggest challenge at the moment is making a good friendship'. In a similar vein, all three participant groups intimated that children were socially vulnerable in school. For instance, Suvrat's teacher, Emma, comments that 'he doesn't quite understand children's behaviour', which resonates with Katherine's view of her son, Thomas, who she says 'does not understand the rules of friendship at all'. These social challenges are also described by the children themselves, who report frustration at not being listened to by peers

and uncertainty in their friendships: 'sometimes I have friends. Sometimes I don't' (Jokubus) and 'I made just a little bit of friends' (Amira).

It is vital to note that, while the social challenges faced by children in this study reflect the wider literature, there are unique findings here related to how these social challenges may relate to their bilingual development. First, it is possible that difficulties acquiring the language of instruction (i.e. English or Welsh) may negatively impact upon children's social development in school. Dyfan, for example, not only faced academic challenges but social ones too, because he was not acquiring Welsh at the same rate as his peers. Bethan's statement that 'when it comes to playing with the children in the classroom there is no word of Welsh really' demonstrates how language barriers may be further exacerbating Dyfan's social challenges. His experience may resonate with many other bilingual autistic children, particularly those who are new to the language of instruction. Moreover, children, parents and practitioners all identified that many children either preferred to be alone or preferred adult company. This too may have implications for both children's social and linguistic development, which develop in tandem, according to research into EAL learners (Anderson et al., 2016). Preference for being alone, or for adult company, not only restricts bilingual autistic children's opportunities to develop social skills, but could become a stumbling block to acquiring the language skills requisite for making progress in school; if the child's main opportunity for developing English proficiency is in school (as parents speak a different language at home) then challenges in social interaction do not only affect their socialisation, but their oral English proficiency. Limited desire and opportunity for social interaction in English may have significant implications for children's language development.

While most participants noted challenges in children's social interaction, there were some notable exceptions. A small group of children, parents and educators reported positive social experiences. For example, there was strong convergence in Rahul's triad; Rahul stated, 'I have new friends', his mother, Nabani, said that Rahul 'could make friends with anyone, he's got that personality', and his teaching assistant, Natalia, noted, 'he's got a lot of friends in that class'. Similar patterns emerged in Wales, with Gareth and Ryan and their parents/educators, both of whom had developed strong friendships at school. There was, however, some divergence of opinion when it came to bullying, which, on the surface, seemed less commonplace than findings in other studies (Cook et al., 2016; Maïano et al., 2016). Bullying was mentioned by only two children (Marco and, less explicitly, Nish), yet their

parents did not mention this in their accounts. Four other parents (Dasia, Anna, Chandra and Magdalena) reported that their child had been bullied, but this was not reported by the children themselves. Most notably, although some educational practitioners discussed bullying (particularly Debbie), none mentioned it in relation to the child being discussed.

Regulating emotions was another challenge for the children in this sample, described by practitioners, parents and the children themselves. Anxiety and anger were most discussed by each participant group. First, both Nish and his mother, Hira, mentioned moments of anxiety, while Anwen and Anna's accounts were also in agreement that anxiety affected Ryan's daily experiences at school. Luke himself described instances where 'my mind goes into panic mode', which tallies with existing research suggesting that autistic pupils experience greater anxiety than their typically-developing peers (Kerns & Kendall, 2012; van Steensel & Heeman, 2017). Also consonant with existing literature (Hull et al., 2017; Lai et al., 2017), parents and practitioners described some children's 'camouflaging' behaviour, that is, making efforts to mask their autistic traits in the school environment, leading to emotional outbursts at home. This is most evident in William's triad, where Dawn's statement that 'he tends to hold it together more at school and it shows more at home' concurs with Magdalena's comment that:

> *I dreaded picking him up cos I knew, and he'd walk up to me and he'd nip me really, really hard and then kick the back of my chair all the way home in the car. And really angry, really angry.*

While Magdalena and Dawn shared a mutual understanding about William's difficulties at home, Anna's similar comments about Ryan's 'camouflaging' behaviour demonstrate a possible tension between families and schools. Noting that she was 'trying to get the support from the school then, like not to change his routine, like "he's fine here", yeah but you're not having you know the after-lash', it becomes clear that – just like children's language use – there is a need for schools to account for differences in behaviour and emotion regulation between home and school.

In some instances, challenges in emotion regulation and anger management led to difficult behaviours, although this was described by practitioners and parents rather than the children themselves. Both Luke's mother, Eleanora, and his teacher, Robert, described his difficulty in managing anger; in some instances, this led him to 're-decorate the classroom with tables and chairs' (Eleanora) with consequences for the whole class as Robert notes, 'we've

had to evacuate the classroom'. Other parents described similar circumstances in the school environment: 'if he can't cope he'll become violent and aggressive' (Katherine), 'he used to fight with a lot of kids in school' (Lena), and 'there were times when he'd have a meltdown and become aggressive' (Roberta). These challenges have been documented in existing literature (Jahromi, Meek, & Ober-Reynolds, 2012; Quek, Sofronoff, Sheffield, White, & Kelly, 2012), but it is difficult to assess the extent to which bilingualism is a factor. As such, further research is required that investigates the effects of children being disciplined in different languages across differing contexts, and possible implications for their well-being and emotion regulation.

Challenges were also identified across groups relating to the child's inclusion in the school environment. These include a lack of appropriate resources or support; tension between families and schools; and a lack of autism awareness, each of which will be discussed in turn. Participants from all groups noted a lack of appropriate resources, interventions and support, with some parents and practitioners suggesting that funding shortages had resulted in inadequate provision. The one-to-one support of a teaching assistant was highlighted as essential by practitioners and parents alike, although many children did not have access due to difficulties gaining Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Several families had concerns about the provision available to their children and believed that school support was at times insufficient:

> *They were more focused on making her feel happy and comfortable rather than challenging her academically. (Dasia)*

> *He's not achieving what he should be achieving for a child of his sort of intelligence. (Katherine)*

> *It's visual aids, it really lets them down. I think it's disgraceful really. Because that's all it would take. It would capture his attention instantly. (Magdalena)*

Magdalena's example illustrates how parents' expectations about support and the realities of provision in practice can create tensions between families and schools. Indeed, both Katherine and Dasia recounted difficult experiences with securing appropriate educational support for their children:

> *We've had to fight, fight, fight, fight, fight, we've had to put complaints in, we've had to go through mediation with the school, it's been really difficult. (Katherine)*

We had loads of fights with the authorities, the LEA, because they first refused to have him at school. (Dasia)

The repetition of 'fight' emphasises the struggles families face and emergent tensions with schools and authorities. These findings dovetail with existing research that suggest that parents of autistic children are not always satisfied with the educational support their child receives (Zablotsky et al., 2012). Given that family-school partnerships are essential for autistic children (Azad et al., 2016) and insufficient for EAL pupils (Schneider & Arnot, 2018), it is clear that further research is needed into schools' relationships with parents of bilingual autistic children. This collaboration is even more crucial given this group of learners' 'double difference' from their typically-developing, monolingual peers, but it is also a more complex collaboration, as families may have different linguistic priorities than educators.

A final barrier to children's inclusion was a lack of autism awareness in the school community. Participants argued that more awareness would lead to better inclusion and some reflected on their own understandings of autism. Jokubus' definition, that autism is when 'you think different to other people', tallies with discussions between Nabani and her son, Rahul: 'sometimes I do try to explain to him that "you're different". Your way of thinking is different to other peoples. I don't actually say "autism" because he gets really worked up'. Accordingly, Robert highlighted the fact that Luke was not aware of his diagnosis: 'Luke knows nothing at all, for him he's just a normal human being, and he's got his quirks like absolutely all of us'. Raising awareness also meant understanding that autistic children are not a homogenous group, as Bethan noted, 'what I find with autistic children is that they are all completely different'. Parallels could thus be drawn between the heterogeneity of autistic children and bilingual children; each child comes with an individual developmental and linguistic profile. As previously discussed, this profile may be more unpredictable and more changeable than the profiles of monolingual or typically-developing children. For this reason, parents and practitioners emphasised the value of person-centred approaches to improving the experiences of bilingual autistic children. It is to such approaches and strategies that we now turn.

6.5.4. Improving school experiences

Building on the challenges identified in the previous section, participants across the three groups also suggested ways in which to improve the school experiences of bilingual autistic

children. These strategies relate to social interaction, processing time, curriculum preferences, and person-centred approaches.

In light of children's challenges with social interaction described by the majority of participants, many recommended finding increased opportunities for students to integrate and interact with their peers. For example, some children stated a preference for collaborative work, which was corroborated by practitioners. One parent (Lena) also advised that her son's teachers 'should encourage social interaction. They can maybe move him around so that he's more part of the group so that he doesn't get left out'. As discussed in the previous section, bilingual autistic children may have fewer opportunities in school for social interaction, which impedes both their social and linguistic development. Adopting more collaborative approaches to learning, if well-structured, may go some way to remedying this issue. Several practitioners discussed social groups for autistic pupils within the school and collaborative pedagogies as ways to facilitate children's social interaction.

Children and practitioners' accounts converged in recommending more time to process information and finish tasks. There was a sense in which children felt under pressure to complete work within a certain time frame, which tallies with practitioners' reports that their students required additional time for processing. This may be especially true for students who are new to English or who have additional learning needs in conjunction with autism. Along similar lines, other children mentioned benefitting from extra support in the classroom, whether teacher and peer support or a designated teaching assistant. Parents also documented the benefits of their child receiving additional support, although many called for more to be put in place:

> *He is getting as much support as possible from school, that's what they say, but we would like some more. (Chandra)*

> *We just need a little help, if a teacher could come home and her studies would be at the top again. (Baheela)*

> *I think the only place I haven't been supported is in the home, and activities for him, cos I've had to really, really look. (Molly)*

> *Despite all of that support, and I cannot fault them this year, he is still struggling. (Katherine)*

Children also stated a preference for art and technology, both of which were corroborated by parents and practitioners. Several triads of participants reported the child's enjoyment of creative tasks. For example, Jokubus, William, Amira, Daniel, Rahul and Suvrat all discuss art as a subject preference, which is corroborated by their teachers and parents. Indeed, some participants commented that art may be used as a means to increase the child's well-being:

> He likes drawing. I think because of his autism, he has a lot of sensory overload so I think that calms him down. (Emma)

> Doing more of the relaxed, creative stuff is definitely what he prefers to do. (Paula)

> It's just when you see him [drawing] he's just so happy, so relaxed, which is fantastic really – it's a release for him. (Magdalena)

Magdalena draws parallels between art and language when she says, 'art he uses it as means of communication, if he had the Spanish it would also open a lot more doors for him, it would give him another thing to be confident about'. Not only does she suggest that developing his Spanish proficiency would increase William's confidence, but it would also provide him with an additional vehicle for communication. In this sample, the children's preference for art also has consequences for our understanding of their lived experience. Just as some parents talked about their child 'gaining their voice', by giving them other mediums of expression – such as communicating through artwork – professionals and researchers may understand their emotions and experiences with more clarity.

Similarly, almost all children in the sample mentioned that they enjoyed learning through technology; interestingly far more parents than educators mentioned the child's enjoyment of technology, perhaps because technology may be a more prominent feature of their home environment than their school setting. Although, like art, technology may provide children with further means of communication, their use of technology may have unintended implications for their bilingual development. Julie, for instance, noted how Gareth's special interest in technology and computer games resulted in him using more English than Welsh:

> Because all his interests and idols are English-medium, you know, so yeah the Welsh characters don't really…. they're not really there with minecraft or avengers!

> Anything to do with computers and gaming and things… and it's all English.

Research suggests that autistic children are more likely to use technology than typically-developing children (Mazurek & Wenstrup, 2013; Shane & Albert, 2008). Consequently, consideration should also be given to how a high use of technology may affect the linguistic development of bilingual autistic children, especially if the content with which they are engaging is in the dominant societal language.

More than any single strategy or possible pedagogic approach, what most emerged from the accounts of all three participant groups, was the need to treat each child as an individual. From children's curiosity for learning to practitioners' recommendations for person-centred approaches and parents' focus on children's strengths, as both autistic and bilingual children, improving this group's school experiences will ultimately involve understanding the individual child in their individual context. Parents and practitioners underscored the thirst for knowledge and desire to succeed exhibited by the children in their care:

> *He won't stop, when he's so passionate about a certain subject, he just wants to get it out of his chest. (Nabani)*

> *If you talk about anything learning, he loves to listen. (Hira)*

> *He's so inquisitive and that's gonna get him so far in life, because what he doesn't know he wants to find out. (Anwen)*

Although children themselves often described their frustration at making mistakes, they also demonstrated resilience in overcoming challenges. Drawing on children's special interests and celebrating their differences (in terms of both neuro- and linguistic diversity) within the school community will undoubtedly increase well-being and serve as a reminder to the wider school that being different is by no means a deficit.

6.6. Two linguistically different contexts

The most significant divergence identified in this research was neither between or within the three participant groups, but rather between the experiences of those in Wales and those in England. In many ways, this was unsurprising as participants in Wales came from a very different linguistic context to those in England. Most crudely, children in Wales were educated in a bilingual education system and most of their parents were native English speakers, whereas children in England were educated in a monolingual education system and their parents were not native speakers of English. This distinction between the two settings demonstrated that the

answers to the research questions posed in chapter 1 are, to some extent, determined by the context.

Having determined areas of convergence and divergence across participant groups in the whole sample, our attention now turns to issues faced specifically by participants in Wales and then in England. Similarities between the two contexts will not be explored here, as previous sections of the chapter have drawn out the congruence across settings. Instead, this section will focus on distinct issues for the two linguistically different contexts that may be applicable to other settings like them. It is acknowledged, however, that 14 individuals took part in interviews in Wales, compared to 27 participants in England; this imbalance in participants means that less information is available about the Welsh context. While this may reduce the reliability of the comparative analysis, it can be unhelpful to measure sample size sufficiency in qualitative studies in the same way as quantitative research (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018), especially as group sizes do not need to be equal in order to draw out experiential data. It is equally important to note that in this study no students who speak English as an additional language (not including Welsh) were recruited from Wales, even though these students make up 7% of the school population in Wales (WG, 2015). As such, the comparison here is between English-Welsh bilinguals in Wales on the one hand, and EAL pupils from a variety of language backgrounds on the other. While this simplifies the following comparison and adds to its coherence, it fails to account for linguistic variation in Wales and therefore represents a limitation in this study.

6.6.1. Wales

Some features distinct to Wales emerged during the cross-group analysis that may also be applicable to other contexts with a (partially, at least) bilingual educational system. First and foremost, across participant groups attitudes towards bilingualism (both for autistic and typically-developing children) were more positive in Wales than in England. This may have been the result, in part, of both the linguistic profile of the interviewees and the high status of the Welsh language in Wales (Hodges, 2012). Within this small sample, parents in Wales were themselves monolingual (often with bilingual English-Welsh partners), but clearly valued bilingualism as they had opted to send their children to Welsh-medium schools. Parents had made a conscious decision to pursue bilingualism at the point of choosing a school for their child, whereas for parents in England, the choice was almost inverted; either maintain the home language, or use predominantly English in the home. Unlike the parents, most practitioners in

Wales were bilingual themselves, so were able to draw on their personal experiences of bilingualism in the interviews and could relate – linguistically-speaking – to pupils more than their counterparts in England.

In Wales, the children being studied were different to their peers in that they were autistic, but they were not linguistically different to their peers, as the children in England were. Perhaps as a result, there was a sense in which children in Wales were more socially comfortable in their school environments than children in England. Learners in Wales were not experiencing the 'double difference' faced by some participants in England, and therefore more attention was given to alleviating the challenges associated with their autism. Unlike in England, bilingualism was not viewed as a barrier to the child's academic progress, except in the case of Dyfan. Moreover, the language of instruction seemed more flexible in Wales than the strict linguistic parameters set in England, whereby an 'English only' environment was the firm expectation. Although children in both England and Wales reported compartmentalising their languages, practitioners in English-medium schools in Wales still used and encouraged incidental Welsh; a more fluid approach to linguistic practices in the classroom also suggests that the promotion – rather than separation – of different languages is likely to lead to greater familiarity with bilingualism, and accordingly, greater acceptance.

Two major challenges arose in the Welsh context that were less applicable to England's monolingual educational system. First, no parent in Wales reported receiving advice about bilingualism when their child was diagnosed with autism. Despite the small sample size, this finding reflects a worrying trend also inferred by Roberts (2017) that bilingual support and provision for children with additional learning needs in Wales is inadequate. Of course, it is possible that some children will be diagnosed with autism once decisions about the language of instruction have already been made and the child is already attending a bilingual school. However, greater support and advice needs to be made available for parents of children diagnosed before they start school in Wales, so that families can make informed decisions about the suitability of an English-medium or a Welsh-medium environment. Second, and more concerning still, some parents in Wales believed that their children did not have access to appropriate educational services, due to a lack of Welsh-medium specialist autism schools. Parents may therefore be faced with an unenviable dilemma: prioritise the child's bilingual development (in a WM school) or prioritise their academic or learning needs (in a monolingual specialist school). This difficult choice brings inevitable compromises for the child's academic

or linguistic development and often restricts children with the capacity for bilingualism from becoming bilingual. The two challenges specific to Wales (a lack of language advice before starting school and a lack of specialist bilingual provision) could apply to other settings around the world where education is provided in more than one language, and therefore highlight a major gap in our current understandings of bilingual education for children with special educational needs.

6.6.2. England

Trends particular to participants in England were less conspicuous than those in Wales, possibly because the sample in England was more heterogeneous in terms of linguistic diversity and the developmental trajectories of the children discussed. Most notably, however, was the distinction between children and practitioners in more multilingual educational settings and those in more monolingual environments; the latter adopted far more favourable attitudes towards bilingualism than the former. In both instances, children and practitioners minimised the home language and gave precedence to English. For children, this manifested itself in a lack of confidence in home language proficiency and, as a result, in claiming a multilingual identity. For practitioners, minimising the child's home language involved re-asserting the 'English only' language expectations for the classroom, and expressing concerns about the feasibility of bilingualism in autism. Educators were less confident than colleagues in Wales in supporting bilingual children, which is reflected in one parent's observation that 'there was no encouragement to learn another language. And I think that is just nationwide'. Although some practitioners in England were keen to promote the child's multilingualism, it was clear that, in general, the multilingual facet of the child's identity was considered far less prominent than their autism, which suggests a need for greater understanding of the unique challenges and strengths of EAL pupils in England.

Moreover, the linguistic profile of parents and practitioners was almost directly antithetical to that of participants in Wales. In England, practitioners tended to describe themselves as monolinguals, which may have conditioned their views about bilingualism, for both the autistic and non-autistic pupils in their class. Conversely, parents were most often non-native English speakers; some considered English proficiency to be a high priority for their child, others opted for a more multilingual approach because it came naturally, or was a necessity rather than a choice. Unlike parents in Wales, parents in England carried sole responsibility for the transference of the home language to their children. This often put them

in a difficult position, particularly if they were advised to take a more monolingual (i.e. 'English only') approach. More than in Wales, parents who opted to maintain the home language in England reported familial and cultural benefits to bilingualism for their child on the autism spectrum. By contrast, families in England who had decided that bilingualism may be unfeasible reported negative effects for familial well-being, including parental guilt and (non-autistic) siblings being precluded from learning the home language.

6.7. Chapter summary and conclusions

This chapter has traced the ways in which the perspectives and experiences of different participant groups converged and diverged when autism meets bilingualism. A multi-perspectival framework was outlined and employed to undertake such a task, after the opportunities and challenges of this type of design were explored. Special attention was reserved in this chapter for comparing perspectives and experiences not only across participant groups, but between triads of participants (i.e. a child, a practitioner and a parent). Drawing on these phenomenologically-informed case studies helped to illuminate the intricacies and nuances of individual circumstances that may have been overlooked in a whole-group analysis. In this sense, the researcher sought to draw on the hermeneutic circle espoused by proponents of IPA, moving between the idiographic detail of one participant and the 'big picture' of participant groups and the whole sample. Attempts were also made to ensure that children's voices were given equal status and coverage (Greene & Hogan, 2005), despite the fact that the interviews with children yielded less data in both frequency and detail than interviews with adult participants.

The perspectives and experiences of the children, practitioners and parents who participated in the study converged most when it came to identifying challenges and recommending strategies to improve this group's inclusion within educational settings. However, perspectives and experiences of bilingualism in autism were far more likely to diverge. While some children and practitioners minimised the home language, and gave precedence to developing and using English, parents expressed more positive views about bilingualism. Many parents opted to raise their child bilingually, citing communication with family members as the primary factor in their decision-making. Even parents opting for a more monolingual approach identified benefits to bilingualism, despite expressing reservations about the feasibility of maintaining two languages for their autistic child. There was, however, enough convergence between different categories of groups (i.e. children vs. practitioners vs.

parents, and participants in England vs. participants in Wales) to draw out salient recommendations of this research for educational policy and practice. This chapter has sought to lay the foundations necessary for delineating the implications of the research, which now follow in the thesis' seventh and final chapter.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Chapter aims

Both bilingualism and autism exist on a spectrum. Yet, perhaps even the term 'spectrum' fails to acknowledge the diversity of bilingual and autistic individuals and implies a linearity that may be unhelpful when trying to get to the essence of a person's lived experience. Just as every autistic child is different, so is every bilingual one; acknowledging and accounting for this heterogeneity is imperative when seeking to address the day-to-day challenges that bilingual autistic children may face. This thesis has sought to elucidate the perspectives and experiences of bilingual autistic children, along with those of their parents and educators. Drawing on a multi-perspectival IPA design, the research analysed the convergence and divergence of accounts both within and across the three participant groups, in order to provide a nuanced and in-depth account of bilingualism in autism. The findings suggest that children who are 'doubly different' from their monolingual non-autistic peers may face additional barriers to inclusion in schools. However, just like any child in a multilingual family, understanding the individual context facilitates language decisions in the home and educational practice and policy in schools. Listening to the voices of families, practitioners, and crucially, the children themselves, about language use and opportunities for bilingualism is therefore paramount when bilingualism meets autism.

The aims of this final chapter are threefold: (1) to summarise the research findings; (2) to evaluate the efficacy of the research design in answering the research questions; and (3) to synthesise the implications of the research. Accordingly, this chapter will begin with an overview of the salient findings from each chapter and the ways in which they provide answers to the four research questions posed at the end of chapter 1. This will be followed by reflections on the research methodology, notably the strengths and limitations of the study's design and the role of the researcher within its IPA framework. Next, the implications of the research for supporting multilingual families with a child on the autism spectrum will be discussed and recommendations for educational practice and policy provided. The final part of the chapter will consider avenues for future research in light of the thesis' findings and implications.

7.2. Overview of research findings

This thesis sought to shed a light on the lived experiences of bilingual autistic children, whose voices have thus far been conspicuously absent from the nascent body of research investigating

bilingualism in autism. What follows will provide answers to the four research questions posed in chapter 1.

Research Question (RQ) 1: What are the lived experiences of bilingual children on the autism spectrum?

Data collected through computer-assisted interviews with twelve children in England and Wales was presented and analysed in chapter 3. First, children in the sample tended to minimise the value of their home language, or in many cases, downplay their own proficiency in it. The language choices of their parents, as well as the linguistic profile of their schools, had some bearing on children's perceptions about bilingualism and their own multilingual identities. For example, children educated in more multilingual environments provided more favourable accounts of their multilingualism than children who were one of very few from multilingual backgrounds in their class or school. Second, the chapter also explored the theme of the children's school experiences. It found that children had particular difficulties with social interaction and literacy, but stated a strong preference for creative tasks and technology, which, for some, may provide an alternative means of communication.

Chapter 3 also enriched understandings about how employing different methods may promote the participation in research of children from linguistically diverse backgrounds and children on the autism spectrum. The use of computer-assisted interviewing was particularly useful in actively engaging children in the research process, although broadening the range of communicative methods available to children may further facilitate this engagement, especially given many children's preferences for more creative mediums of expression such as art and technology. This chapter makes a unique contribution to our understanding of the lived experience of bilingual autistic children and, through its application of IPA, highlights the importance of giving children a voice, regardless of any communicative barriers they may face.

RQ 2: What are educational practitioners' perspectives and experiences of supporting a bilingual autistic child?

In chapter 4, thirteen educators' beliefs about the value and feasibility of bilingualism for children on the autism spectrum were considered. Although they held varying attitudes towards bilingualism in autism depending on their pupil's individual profile, practitioners often expressed concern that bilingualism was either irrelevant or detrimental to autistic children's development. This finding reveals a disconnect between the claim of extant research that there

is no detrimental effect of bilingualism for autistic individuals (Dai et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018) and educators' beliefs, which in turn affect their advice and professional practice. Nevertheless, a smaller group of practitioners argued that bilingualism was possible for autistic children if they were given sufficient time and opportunities to develop proficiency in both languages. These findings also provided keen insights about disparities between the two linguistically different contexts of England and Wales. Practitioners in Wales, many of whom worked in a bilingual education system, were far more positive about bilingualism than their counterparts in England; this finding is arguably influenced by the fact that practitioners in Wales were often bilingual themselves, while those in England were not.

Practitioners also shed light on their experiences of supporting autistic learners from multilingual backgrounds. This involved identifying common barriers faced by their pupils and recommending possible strategies to overcome these difficulties. Most notably, educators reported that their pupils had difficulties with social interaction and literacy-based tasks, which some attributed to bilingualism but more associated with autism or a combination of the two. To create inclusive learning environments, practitioners suggested giving more time to the student to process information and ensuring staff had more support when identifying additional learning needs in pupils from multilingual backgrounds. They also underscored the need for person-centred approaches to supporting pupils' unique needs, which could perhaps be formalised through Education, Health and Care Plans. Practitioners highlighted the need to find tailored opportunities – inside and outside of the classroom – for the child to develop social skills, which would, in turn, enhance their language and communication skills.

RQ 3: What are parents' experiences of raising an autistic child in a multilingual family?
Chapter 5 explored the experiences of parents, with a particular focus on the language decisions they took in the light of their child's autism. It reported the findings of semi-structured interviews conducted with sixteen family members in England and Wales. The chapter aimed to build on existing literature in this area indicating that multilingual families are routinely advised to use a single language if their child is diagnosed with autism (Hampton et al., 2017; Ijalba, 2016; Yu, 2013, 2016). Interestingly, unlike other studies into parental experiences, few parents in the sample received any advice at all about multilingualism in the context of autism.

However, while parents were unequivocal in their belief that bilingualism was beneficial in principle, some held reservations about the value of bilingualism for their autistic

child. Within the sample, six families opted for a more monolingual approach to raising their child, based on the child's language difficulties, advice received from professionals or family members, or concerns about English proficiency. Conversely, eight families opted for a more multilingual approach, citing communication with extended family and the notion that using the home language came 'naturally' as central reasons for their choice. For others, speaking the home language to their child was less of a choice and more of a necessity, given the parents' own levels of English proficiency. The variation in language choices among the sample suggests that, as in Yu (2016), parents' perceptions about bilingualism are not always consistent with their language practices and choices. The conclusion was therefore drawn that parental attitudes to bilingualism are not necessarily the decisive factor in their language choices when their child has autism, although they do have a role to play.

The consequences of parents' language choices were also discussed in chapter 5. Unsurprisingly, families who had opted to maintain the home language reported that the child had greater bilingual proficiency than children whose families had chosen a more monolingual approach. Among the latter, parents described some negative consequences of a single-language approach on familial well-being, such as parental guilt or frustration as well as linguistic and cultural implications for the child's sibling(s). Regardless of the language decisions taken, parents across the two groups highlighted the child's difficulty with literacy, although they did not attribute this challenge to bilingualism. In Wales, there were more obvious educational consequences to parents' language choices; some families underscored the difficult choice between sending their child to Welsh-medium mainstream school or an English-medium specialist autism school, given the lack of Welsh-medium specialist provision. The final theme of the chapter explored families' shifting linguistic expectations for their autistic child. Many of the families did not view language choices as fixed but fluid, and some were hopeful that their child would either become bilingual at a later stage, or that the challenges of bilingualism would dissipate over time.

RQ 4: To what extent do the perspectives and experiences of children, educators and parents converge and diverge when bilingualism meets autism?
While chapters 3 to 5 sought to identify commonalities and differences within each participant group, chapter 6 explored how perspectives and experiences concurred and differed across groups. As multi-perspectival designs are relatively new in IPA research, there were both opportunities and challenges to its application in this thesis. On the one hand, drawing on

multiple perspectives provided a richer account of experiences of bilingualism in autism. On the other hand, the challenge of losing the idiographic nature of the analysis was problematic. The researcher sought to overcome this barrier by including individual triads of participants to capture individual circumstances and by examining how specific contexts aligned and deviated from the wider group findings.

The accounts of children, practitioners and parents converged in their identification of the challenges faced by bilingual autistic learners. Most notably, participants across the three groups identified literacy and social interaction as areas of particular difficulty. The accounts were also united by their recommendations to overcome these challenges, including: embedding creative tasks into literacy-based subjects; more time to process information; more one-to-one classroom support; opportunities for social interaction such as collaborative tasks; and, crucially, person-centred approaches tailored to the individual child.

Despite notable agreement regarding the challenges faced by this group, and solutions to create more inclusive learning environments, participants' accounts differed widely with regard to bilingualism and language choices in autism. Educators and children tended to minimise the value of the home language and instead emphasise the importance of English, while parents adopted a far more pro-bilingualism stance. Parents mentioned both broader benefits of bilingualism and advantages specific to autism, whereas practitioners were more likely to express concerns that bilingualism was detrimental, particularly to the child's literacy development. The children themselves highlighted advantages of bilingualism, but did not associate these benefits with their own profiles and lacked confidence when discussing proficiency in their home language. While bilingualism was not only possible, but useful, for many children in the study, the analysis presented in chapter 6 suggests that there will be some children for whom a single language approach is most appropriate for a number of reasons, most prominently, due to their communicative difficulties. In this vein, the findings corroborate Baker's view that 'neither the pole of single-language nor multilingual immersion should prevail unilaterally' (2013, p.533). Instead, assessing and addressing the needs of the individual should be prioritised.

7.3. Reflections on methodology

This thesis has purported to extend current knowledge of perspectives and experiences of bilingualism in autism. Such a contribution has largely been made possible through careful

methodological decision-making and attempts to adhere to Yardley's four principles of good qualitative research, as outlined in chapter 2 (see 2.10). As such, our attention now turns to reflections on the methodological rigour of the thesis. Strengths and limitations will be considered and acknowledged in three areas: (1) the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis and the role of researcher reflexivity within an IPA framework; (2) the sample and context of the study; and (3) the efficacy of the methods employed.

Smith reasons that 'the best IPA is careful, insightful, surprising, and leaves the reader feeling they have learned something important and powerful' (2018, p.1957). IPA was considered the most appropriate approach to the current research because it served to illuminate the 'insider perspectives' (Reid et al., 2005, p.22) of all participants and to give expression to otherwise neglected voices, such as bilingual pupils and children on the autism spectrum. This study is strengthened by its use of IPA as the overarching methodological framework because it allowed the research to become 'a joint product of researcher and researched' (Smith et al., 2009, p.110). Goldspink and Engward argue that reflexivity has an important role in enabling the IPA researcher to 'recognise, celebrate, and use their own potential biases to inform novel interpretations' (2019, p.301). Having reflected on these potential biases and experiences in chapter 2 (see 2.5.), it is important to reflect on how these influenced my interpretations of participants' voices within the thesis (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

Principally, I was struck that my experiences seemed to resonate with all three participant groups in very different ways. For example, my 'pro-multilingualism' stance, outlined in 2.5., may have influenced the focus on familial wellbeing in my presentation of the parent data, because I resonated strongly with the difficult decisions parents had to make about their family's language use; parents wished to maintain bilingualism for multiple reasons, yet questioned its feasibility. In a similar vein, this same 'pro-multilingualism' stance may have led me to frame some of the children and practitioners in this study as 'minimising the home language', when their attitudes towards bilingualism could equally have been constructed as those that 'emphasised English'. I also empathised strongly with the educators' views by drawing on my own professional experiences in education, and understood the hesitancy among some to promote bilingualism in autism, given their professional responsibility – and possible external pressures on them – to ensure the child was making sufficient progress in English. Finally, the 'double hermeneutic' intrinsic to IPA also helped to bridge the 'double empathy gap' (Milton, 2012) between the autistic children in the study and myself as a non-

autistic researcher; for example, the children's tendency to downplay their language proficiency in their home language resonated with my own feelings of inadequacy as a language learner. In light of these reflections, using IPA certainly increased my sensitivity to, and resonance with, the experiences of participants (Goldspink & Engward, 2019).

However, there were limitations to using an IPA approach that require further consideration. First, traditional IPA that uses semi-structured interviews relies on a high level of language proficiency, and could therefore be rendered unsuitable for participants with neurodevelopmental conditions like autism, or whose first language is not English (when interviews are conducted in English), or both. Accordingly, adaptations such as computer-assisted interviews and the use of interpreters for parents were employed to mitigate this challenge and include, rather than exclude, participants. Second, there were difficulties in employing a multi-perspectival design to this research, as inevitably adult participants gave far more thorough responses than the children interviewed. The primary issue here was that many of the children were not aware of their autism diagnosis, and interviews therefore centred on their views on bilingualism. This led to the children's voices being less prominent in the analyses than was hoped, as the primary phenomenon under investigation was bilingualism in autism. As previously noted, children also spoke far less in the interviews than adults, which may have also led to an imbalance in their representation in the analysis, when compared to educators and parents. Third, although Smith et al. (2009) are not prescriptive about sample sizes, it is possible that having 41 active participants in this study diminished the idiographic quality of the data analysis. In this sense, having fewer participants would have enabled more in-depth analysis. However, the larger-than-usual sample size in this study arguably resulted in identifying more meaningful areas of convergence and divergence within and across participant groups.

Along with the strengths and limitations associated with IPA, the sample employed and the context of the study merit further scrutiny. The inclusion of children within this research is one of its major contributions to the field, and provides new and unique insights into the lived experiences of bilingualism in autism. Children came from a wide range of language backgrounds, which usefully reflects the diverse linguistic make-up of the UK. Focusing on children with a single linguistic profile would have reduced the diversity of the sample and introduced logistical barriers in terms of recruitment. However, there were some limitations in the sample of children selected for this study. Females were under-represented, even taking

into account the fact that fewer girls are diagnosed with autism than boys in the UK (Carpenter et al., 2019). Moreover, adolescent learners, rather than primary learners, may have articulated their experiences in more detail, as they are likely to draw on a greater linguistic repertoire and have more awareness of their autism diagnosis. This may have led to deeper insights and reflections on how autism interacts with bilinguals' identities and language use.

In addition, the sample in this research did not fully represent the spectrum of autistic presentation, as it did not include children with minimal or no speech. By recruiting from mainstream schools rather than special schools, non-verbal children and children with learning disabilities did not take part, resulting in an unrepresentative sample, which is a recurrent issue within autism research (Fayette & Bond, 2018). As the recruitment strategy focused on mainstream schools, it was likely that children would have larger vocabularies than many autistic children in special schools. Consequently, the parents of bilingual autistic children in mainstream schools are perhaps less likely to be advised to adopt a monolingual approach than the parents of bilingual autistic children who are educated in special schools. As a result, the findings from parent data in the thesis illuminate the experiences of one sub-set of families with children on the autism spectrum, rather than a more fully representative range.

Wider sampling limitations include the lack of fathers interviewed, which again is reflected in autism literature more broadly (Martins et al., 2013). The present study would also have benefited from a better representation of a wide range of practitioners; although teachers, teaching assistants and SENDCos were consulted, more research is needed to elicit the perspectives of speech and language therapists, who play a crucial role in autistic children's linguistic development. Similarly, as children's wellbeing emerged as a theme across participant groups, understanding and engaging with the growing workforce of educational and clinical psychologists and education mental health practitioners (DoH & DfE, 2017) is essential if suitable adaptations are to be made that promote inclusion.

Moving to the context of the study, the thesis provides an original contribution to the growing field of autism and bilingualism in its comparison of families in England and Wales. By drawing on experiences in two different contexts (i.e. EAL learners in England and bilingual Welsh-English learners in Wales), this study highlights the notion that the services and opportunities for autistic children to learn and maintain two languages differ from context

to context, and different educational settings necessitate different approaches. The cross-contextual comparison illuminated issues that may have otherwise been missed.

Although the different linguistic profiles within both the sample and the two contexts enabled comparative analysis, there were nevertheless some limitations to this approach. For instance, in Wales the parents interviewed were monolingual themselves and either had a Welsh-speaking partner or wanted a bilingual education for their child. It would have been helpful to interview more than one family member of each child to gain more in-depth insights into their linguistic experiences. This was possible in two cases (Anna/Mary in Wales & Hira/Davesh in England) but talking to both parents or other family members in all triads may have illustrated different priorities and perspectives within families, given that, broadly speaking, monolingual parents may hold different attitudes toward bilingualism than bilingual parents (Hampton et al., 2017). Moreover, collecting detailed information about all participants' language backgrounds would have provided sharper insights into their perceptions of the value of bilingualism, and for adults, their beliefs about bilingualism in autism. In particular, further information about the children's language proficiency and exposure – acquired through a language background questionnaire (e.g. the *Alberta Language Environment Questionnaire* (Paradis, 2011)) – may have enriched the contextual understanding of the analyses in this study.

As outlined in chapter 2, particular methods were selected to enhance the participation of both child and adult participants in the thesis. For example, the use of computer-assisted interviewing was particularly effective, as it served to redress the inevitable power asymmetry of the interview by giving the children a degree of agency over the pace of the interview and provided them with visual stimuli to ground the conversation. Accordingly, this thesis provides further evidence that computer-assisted interviews serve as a valuable consultation tool for interviewing children on the autism spectrum (Barrow & Hannah, 2012). However, as with the interviews conducted in Carrington et al. (2003), children were not always forthcoming with their responses to questions, especially when compared to non-autistic adult participants in the study. With this in mind, employing different methods to elicit the children's perspectives may have resulted in more in-depth responses or insights; drawing on the children's preference for art and technology may enhance their involvement or inclination to express themselves. To this end, this thesis has advanced critical dialogue on finding alternative ways to engage groups who are currently under-represented in research.

7.4. Implications

This research has varied and significant implications for the lives of bilingual autistic children. While some of the following implications are unique to England or Wales, many resonate with international contexts where both monolingual or bilingual education is available to children on the autism spectrum. Recommendations will first be made for how to better support families making difficult language choices about which – and how many – languages to use with their child on the autism spectrum. Implications for educational practice and policy will then be delineated, including strategies that promote the inclusion and empowerment of autistic pupils from multilingual backgrounds in schools as well as wider systemic policy changes.

It is clear from the paucity and inconsistency of advice received by parents in this study that greater support needs to be afforded to multilingual families whose child has been diagnosed with autism. Such support could be achieved by: (1) increasing awareness in schools that it is possible for autistic individuals to grow up bilingually; (2) providing tailored, routine advice to families adapted to the child's evolving developmental trajectory; and (3) forging stronger family-school partnerships so that the wider family's circumstances can be more deeply embedded into the advice and support given. Each of these recommendations will now be expounded in turn.

First, providing training and guidance for practitioners (educators, speech and language therapists, paediatricians, and health visitors) on the complexity of language choices would be a useful step in ensuring that families make decisions that are appropriate for the individual child's development and the wider familial context. Raising awareness about diversity should be integrated into educational practitioners' continuing professional development; for example, linguistic diversity should be present in SEND training, and neurodiversity should feature in EAL training. In a similar vein, recommendations for supporting learners with different needs should be formalised in school policies. Keeping practitioners up-to-date with the latest research findings regarding bilingualism in autism and highlighting the fact that existing evidence finds no detrimental effects of bilingualism in autism may have a positive impact on the language advice they offer to multilingual families (Hampton, 2017).

Second, the findings clearly show that with sufficient time and support children on the autism spectrum can develop as bilinguals. Advice to families should therefore be given

periodically, and should be responsive to changes in the child's development and the family's circumstances. Language advice could also be embedded into the diagnostic process; if parents are asked about language use in initial consultations, then there is greater time to hone and sharpen clinical interventions and educational support before parents make potentially irreversible language decisions. Outlining some of the unintended negative consequences of a monolingual approach (e.g. negative effects on parental well-being, siblings not having access to the home language, and the incorrect modelling of English) should be discussed at an early stage so that parents have the requisite information to make an informed decision. The findings also highlighted, once again, the need for person-centred approaches; asking the child directly about the languages they use and would like to use is therefore an important step in the decision-making process and gives them agency over – and awareness of – their own language development.

Third, given that different family members may have different motivations and beliefs about language choices and that half of the participating families received no advice about language use from professionals, research-informed discussions between families and practitioners may lead to more suitable decision-making. A major implication of this research is therefore the need for collaboration between families and schools so that the linguistic needs of the child are married with their educational needs, both of which impact upon their well-being. There needs to be greater understanding in schools that home language maintenance gives children access to relationships with their extended family; by enquiring about children's existing language practices at home, practitioners may be in a stronger position to make recommendations about bilingualism for their pupils on the autism spectrum. To ensure bilingualism is a viable possibility, autistic children may require more opportunities to hear and use their home language, especially those who receive more exposure to the dominant language (Paradis et al., 2018). If parents opt for a more multilingual approach, the child will need more exposure to the home language, not less. Where possible, schools should also provide parents with bilingual resources so that they can constructively engage with their children's education regardless of their proficiency in English and feel supported in maintaining the home language.

Further recommendations for educational practice and policy have also emerged from this research. Most notably, it is clear that allowing more time for bilingual learners on the autism spectrum to process information is crucial. This could be practically achieved through

the reinforcement of instructions, multi-modal teaching approaches, and giving students opportunities to express themselves through different mediums, such as art. Given children's preference for arts-based subjects, embedding creative tasks into the literacy curriculum may also contribute to increased engagement and facilitate academic progress. Moreover, increasing bilingual autistic children's opportunities for social interaction, both inside and outside the classroom, would not only benefit their social development, but may also consolidate their language and communication skills. Promoting linguistic and neuro-diversity in schools would also help to raise awareness that difference should not be so quickly equated with deficit.

More robust systems and procedures need to be put in place to identify special educational needs, and particularly autism, among multilingual children. To achieve this goal, more research is needed into why multilingual children are identified later than their monolingual peers and how to best detect autism in children who speak more than one language. Providing assessments in both languages is recommended (Bird et al., 2016a), but requires funding and staff with the requisite linguistic knowledge to administer the assessments. Ensuring that regional and national policy documents are up-to-date and consistent with the latest research is also essential. For instance, the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015b) currently states that 'difficulties related solely to learning English as an additional language are not SEN' and 'early years practitioners should look carefully at all aspects of a child's learning and development to establish whether any delay is related to learning English as an additional language or if it arises from SEN or disability' (p.85 [5.30]). However, the document should also include guidance on how to identify additional needs among multilingual pupils and, crucially, how to support students following the identification of an SEN.

Practitioners highlighted the need for more bilingual resources and support staff, which would in turn provide more fertile ground for autistic pupils to maintain their home language and develop the language and literacy used in school. The findings from Wales suggest a need for more specialist provision through the medium of Welsh so that parents do not have to choose between sending their children to specialist autism schools or raising them as bilingual Welsh-English speakers. This finding may also be relevant to a vast number of settings where educational systems offer provision in two or more official languages, and where parents with autistic children must make decisions about their child's language of education.

7.5. Future research

In pursuit of 'novel insights into human behaviour' (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p.1), qualitative research often leaves us with more questions than answers and opens up myriad avenues for further study. This is certainly the case with the present thesis. First, this research has demonstrated the need for further investigation into the cognitive and social impact of bilingual exposure on autistic individuals as well as how autistic traits affect children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Lim et al., 2018). More specifically, research is required to clarify the extent to which bilingualism may mitigate or exacerbate cognitive challenges associated with autism. For example, one parent highlighted the possible perspective-taking advantage of bilingualism for her child; she reasoned that having to consider the linguistic needs of his conversation partner increased his ability to consider others' perspectives, which is typically considered a challenge for autistic individuals. Research is also needed into the effects on bilingualism on the literacy development of both autistic and non-autistic children, given concerns expressed by all groups in the current study. The severity of the child's clinical presentation of autism and their ability to communicate their basic needs emerged as key factors in parents' language decisions in the present research. As such, greater critical attention should be afforded to the impact of bilingual exposure on non-verbal children on the autism spectrum and those with intellectual disabilities, as they are individuals who are frequently under-served by autism research (Russell et al., 2019).

This thesis has also set the wheels in motion for research into how the interaction between bilingualism and autism impacts upon children's well-being. Given that early signs suggest that bilingualism in the familial setting can, in the right conditions, promote children's well-being (de Houwer, 2015; Müller et al., under review), it is important to consider how this applies to children on the autism spectrum. This is particularly pertinent because most studies into well-being in autism focus on adults (e.g. Grove, Hoekstra, Wierda, & Begeer, 2018; Milton & Sims, 2016) or parents (Estes et al., 2013; Ilias et al., 2017; Kinnear et al., 2016) rather than on children. Given that autistic individuals are more likely to have co-occurring psychiatric diagnoses (Mattila et al., 2010; Salazar et al., 2015; Simonoff et al., 2008), research is required that investigates whether bilingualism may be an alleviating, neutral or even exacerbating factor in mental health difficulties within the autistic population. Future research should also focus on the impact of bilingualism and autism on both children's well-being and wider familial well-being, including how opting for a more monolingual approach affects the well-being of parents and siblings.

With regard to educational practice and policy, there is a need for further investigation into the types of learning environments and tasks that are most apposite to the learning outcomes of bilingual autistic children. Future research should explore pedagogical factors associated with supporting bilingual children on the autism spectrum as well as access to bilingual education (in bilingual settings) and support for home language maintenance (especially in monolingual settings). Given the findings of this study in Wales, further work is also required to understand the provision and support available for bilingual children in specialist autism schools. Equally, very little work investigates the experiences of EAL pupils in Wales; although children, parents and practitioners in Wales held very positive views about Welsh-English bilingualism, whether in relation to autism or not, it may not be the case that other types of bilingualism are so well-promoted in Wales.

In mainstream settings across the UK, concerns have been expressed that both EAL pupils and children with special educational needs are often withdrawn from language learning (Ayres-Bennett & Carruthers, 2019). It will therefore be important to establish the extent of this phenomenon, before considering its effect on the children's learning experience; for example, it may send a message to children that multilingualism is unimportant, with potentially damaging effects for their multilingual identities. Building on the findings of this study and work conducted by Strand et al. (2006) and Yamasaki and Luk (2018), research should establish the extent to which bilingual children are either under-identified or mis-identified as having a special educational need.

Finally, based on the methodological reflections made earlier in this chapter, it is more important than ever that research considers the perspectives of autistic (Stephenson & Adams, 2016) and bilingual (Evans et al., 2016) young people and highlights positive experiences of bilingualism and autism. Such an agenda will be best achieved when research is participatory, involving the researched community at each stage, from guiding the direction and designing the methods to the dissemination of results. The clarion call for a more participatory approach has been sounded by autism researchers (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2018; Pellicano et al., 2014, 2018), who argue that autism research must be more attentive to the needs of autistic individuals and must seek sensitive, creative and personalised ways of capturing experiences within the autistic community. This might include integrating more visual methods into research designs to cater for individuals with no or little productive language (Dewinter et al.,

2017) and devising more engaging, personalised approaches to elicit lived experiences (Williams et al., 2017). Similarly, more work is needed to consolidate the use of multi-perspectival designs in qualitative autism research, to ensure a fair balance of stakeholder views that includes, not isolates, the voices of autistic individuals.

7.6. Concluding thoughts

This thesis has explored a patchwork of perspectives and experiences when bilingualism meets autism. The findings indicate that while many participants considered bilingualism to be beneficial for the general population, such beliefs did not always readily apply to children on the autism spectrum. This disconnect between theoretical beliefs about bilingualism in principle and bilingualism for autistic children in practice was present across all three participant groups: children stated that bilingualism was helpful for others, but minimised the importance of their home language in their own lives; educational practitioners raised concerns about the impact of bilingualism on the literacy and language development of their autistic learners; and nearly half of parents in the study had made the difficult decision to limit the use of their home language in favour of English. Nevertheless, participants' perspectives and experiences also varied significantly depending on their context; those in more multilingual environments tended to be more in favour of a more multilingual approach, as did those in Welsh-medium settings in Wales.

The thesis' findings have significant implications for families, educators, and most importantly, bilingual autistic children themselves. Future policy should encourage tailored support for multilingual families in making difficult choices about which languages to use, starting with a greater awareness among professionals that bilingualism is possible – and perhaps beneficial – for individuals on the autism spectrum. Consequently, advice given to families should allow sufficient time for the child to develop as a bilingual and should be responsive to changes in the child's linguistic and developmental needs. Educational practitioners can better support bilingual pupils on the autism spectrum in school by giving them sufficient processing time, supporting their literacy development by encouraging their predilection for creative tasks, and adopting person-centred approaches to ensure their inclusion. The most notable implication for educational policy was the need for greater provision for bilingual pupils in specialist autism schools, particularly in Wales, where families were faced with an impossible choice between more tailored educational support or a bilingual education.

Striking parallels can be drawn between bilingualism and autism; both have long been viewed through the lens of deficit, despite growing evidence of advantage. For many, bilingualism and autism are important facets of identity and represent ever-evolving multidimensional spectrums. What emerged most clearly was that both a child's bilingual proficiency, confidence and identity and their autistic presentation change over time. Accordingly, one-off universal advice encouraging multilingual families to adopt a more monolingual approach could have profound and unintended consequences for the child, and for their immediate and extended family. Instead, there is an onus on parents, practitioners, researchers, policy-makers and the children themselves to work collectively to dispel the myth that bilingualism is detrimental in autism. It is only by acknowledging the value of bilingualism in the lives of autistic children from linguistically diverse backgrounds that such a task can truly begin.

8. References

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent form (signed by parents)

CONSENT FORM

Project title:
Life at School for Bilingual Children with Autism

Raised Faculty Building
Sidgwick Avenue
Cambridge CB3 9DA

Research team:
Katie Howard, Dr Napoleon Katsos & Dr Jenny Gibson

If you have any questions, please contact Katie Howard (kbh30@cam.ac.uk)

☐ I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above-mentioned study and, if appropriate, have discussed the procedures of the study with my child.

☐ I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she is free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without his/her rights being affected.

☐ I understand that any data that are collected will be used and stored anonymously, in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Results are normally presented in terms of groups of individuals. If any individual data were presented, the data would be completely anonymous, without any means of identifying the individuals involved.

☐ I understand that these data may be used in analyses, publications, conference presentations or by researchers at the University of Cambridge. I give permission for these individuals to have access to these data.

☐ I grant permission for my son/daughter to take part in the study.

I, _____[insert your name], grant permission for my

son/daughter [delete as appropriate] _____ [insert your

child's name], to participate in the above-mentioned study run by Katie Howard, a researcher at the

Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics (DTAL) at the University of Cambridge.

_____   _____
Signature of parent/guardian   Date

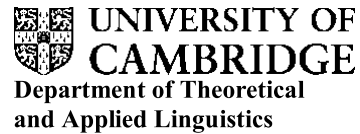_____   _____   _____
Name of researcher   Date   Signature of researcher

If you have any questions or complaints about the ethical aspects of this study, please contact ethics@mml.cam.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Consent form for adult participants

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics

Raised Faculty Building
Sidgwick Avenue
Cambridge CB3 9DA

CONSENT FORM

Project title:
Life at School for Bilingual Children with Autism

Research team:
Katie Howard, Dr Napoleon Katsos & Dr Jenny Gibson

If you have any questions, please contact Katie Howard (kbh30@cam.ac.uk)

☐ I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above-mentioned study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without my rights being affected.

☐ I understand that any data that are collected will be used and stored anonymously, in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Results are normally presented in terms of groups of individuals. If any individual data were presented, the data would be completely anonymous, without any means of identifying the individuals involved.

☐ I understand that these data may be used in analyses, publications, conference presentations or by researchers at the University of Cambridge. I give permission for these individuals to have access to these data.

☐ I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

☐ I agree to take part in the study.

I _____ agree to participate in the above-mentioned study run by Katie Howard, a PhD student in the Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics (DTAL) at the University of Cambridge.

_____   _____
Signature of participant   Date

_____   _____   _____
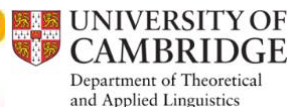Name of researcher   Date   Signature of researcher

If you have any questions or complaints about the ethical aspects of this study, please contact ethics@mml.cam.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Educators' themes summary

Results Summary

Thank you very much for participating in our research project about bilingualism and autism. I really valued hearing your viewpoint and appreciated you giving your time to talk with me.

Below I have summarised the main themes from conversations with Teachers, Teaching assistants, SLTs and SENCOs from across England and Wales. Although not every point will relate to our individual conversation, I have aimed to represent the wide range of views and experiences shared by practitioners.

Practitioners' views: is bilingualism possible for autistic pupils?

- Many practitioners believed that is was possible for autistic pupils to be bilingual *in principle*, but some believed it was not possible – or at least, not helpful – for the specific child being discussed.
- For those who felt bilingualism could be beneficial for children on the spectrum, the key advantages were: communication with family members, access to cultural identity, and (in some cases) employability.
- For those who felt bilingualism could be unhelpful for autistic pupils, the main reasons were: its impact on English literacy, challenges with mixing languages, and difficulties assessing the child in English.

Practitioners' experiences: challenges of supporting bilingual autistic children

- The major challenge raised by practitioners, especially SENCOs, was identifying special educational needs for bilingual pupils (particularly EAL pupils who are newly arrived to the UK).
- Literacy was considered by most practitioners to be a key challenge for this group of learners.
- There was no consensus about whether to encourage the home language in school: in schools with more bilingual children, educators were more positive about the child using their home language in school than those in more monolingual school environments.
- Some stated that their pupils had difficulties with social interaction, regulating emotions and transitions.

Practitioners' experiences: strategies for supporting bilingual autistic learners

What follows provides not so much recommendations applicable to supporting all bilingual autistic pupils, but rather the experiences of educators with particular students.

- Many practitioners highlighted the need to allow **extra processing time** for this group of students.
- Both students and practitioners recognised that **art** was a favourite subject for many of the pupils discussed. Therefore, **embedding creative tasks** into the curriculum could be encouraged, particularly in literacy-based tasks.
- Effective **collaboration with parents** was described by many as crucial. However, this was viewed as more difficult with parents of EAL pupils. Examples of good practice include: coffee mornings for parents of EAL pupils and pupils with SEN; drawing on staff members' languages, sharing timetables etc.
- Practitioners suggested collaborative tasks in which students have opportunities to **develop social skills**, as well as **short bursts of information** and **clear instructions** with **visual cues**.
- Many discussed the importance of **celebrating children's differences** (both linguistically and in terms of autism).

You are very welcome to contact me if you wish to add further information about supporting a bilingual child on the autism spectrum in school, or if you wish to clarify any of the views expressed during our conversation. Thank you again for being involved in the project; your time and insights are very much appreciated.

Katie Howard (Email: kbh30@cam.ac.uk)
University of Cambridge
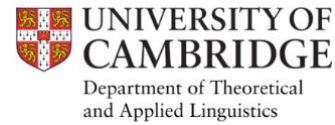
Thank you very much for participating in our project about different languages and autism. I really valued hearing your viewpoint and appreciated you giving your time to talk with me.

Below I have summarised the main themes from conversations with families from across England and Wales. Although not all the themes will relate to our individual conversation, I have aimed to represent the wide range of views and experiences shared in the most balanced way possible.

Language Choices

A number of parents suggested that there were benefits to their child being bilingual, including helping the child to be more flexible, increasing their ability to communicate with others and accessing their culture. Many parents felt that it is was possible for their child with autism to grow up bilingually. However, some felt that, for the moment, helping their child to develop their written and spoken English was the main priority.

School Experiences

Parents reflected on their child's experiences of school, giving both positive and negative accounts. Positive school environments were ones in which staff had a strong knowledge and understanding of autism and communicated well with parents. However, many families mentioned that transitions (either to secondary school or to a new school) had been a major challenge, while some felt that their child's current school was not a suitable setting for their learning. Children's favourite subjects included art, science and IT.

Family Life

Many parents highlighted how speaking more than one language enabled their child to enjoy relationships with wider family members and to participate in family life. Some parents discussed how using different languages was a natural part of family life and a crucial part of their child's cultural identity.

Social Development

Unsurprisingly, given the different contexts of the families involved in the study, children experienced different degrees of social interaction with their classmates, although most parents noted an improvement in their child's relationships with others over time. Parents described strategies to help their child to interact with others and some suggested the role of extra-curricular activities in their social development.

Having read the summary of the study, you are very welcome to email me if you wish to add further information about parenting a bilingual child with autism, or if you wish to clarify any of the views expressed during our conversation. Thank you again for being involved in the project; we hope this study and future research will provide a stronger evidence base about the interaction between autism and bilingualism, and will contribute to improving the lives of bilingual children with autism.

Katie Howard, University of Cambridge
Email: kbh30@cam.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Example of child-friendly summary

Dear XXX

Thank you so much for taking part in our project about different languages!

It was great to meet you and I hope you enjoyed our time together. During our chat, we talked about the following things:

☐ You can speak English and Welsh, and use both regularly.
☐ You mentioned that it is a helpful skill to be able to speak more than one language.
☐ You believe that technology can be a useful resource to help you learn and it could be used more at school.
☐ You're looking forward to gaming club in Year 7 (I hope it's good!).

If there is anything you would like to add or change about the summary above, you are welcome to do so.
Please ask your mum to email me on XXX
Thank you!

XXX