

## Welsh Experience in Supporting Regional Languages in Education

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### ABSTRACT

The topic relevance is justified by the mankind intention to protecting and reviving a native language as a process of saving a self-identity and an authentic culture, the modern tendencies on reducing globalization risks regarding the regional and minor languages, search for new effective ways to facilitate and develop them in the modern world. The paper deals with the modern language and education policy of Wales regarding the Welsh language with further adoption of the best practice. The basic methods of the current research are the contrastive analysis of the statutory acts of the government of Wales regarding the results achieved that allow bringing to light the main tendencies and evidences of Welsh in the education sphere of Wales, methods of analysis, synthesis, and systematization. The synthesis of the analysis results shows the trends and handicaps in the implementation process and facilitating the Welsh functional potential in the education system. The statistics analysis of the quantitative indexes of Welsh in the education system is generalized in the tables, displays the positive tendencies of Welsh developments, and the education system acts as the main tool in the process of boosting the Welsh functional potential in the modern world. The paper reveals the problematic parts of the processes involved in the education system. The materials can have practical application when planning the language and educational policies regarding the minor languages in Europe and the Russian regions.

### KEYWORDS

Language policy; Welsh;  
European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;  
primary and secondary school

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### Introduction

#### *Urgency of the problem*

The modern understanding of multiculturalism and bilinguals' advantages forms the linguistic situation of the United Kingdom. The state language policy is defined by two key needs of the population: self-identity and mutual understanding.

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The need of self-identity is expressed by their aspiration to resort to their “mother tongue” in any situation (Alpatov, 2013). Revival of Welsh serves as shining example of preventing self-identity and the cultural heritage from vanishing. Currently, Welsh is protected by European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (‘the Charter’) is a unique document aiming at protecting and reviving regional languages. The possibility to communicate in a native language unrestrictedly corresponds to the basic ideas of European Convention on Human Rights. Moreover, regional languages need preventing according to Charter since they allow us to track and revive nations’ identity. A Cultural and language diversity facilitates forming a multicultural and democratic Europe that considers the interests of all (European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, 2016).

Within the Charter framework education is greatly emphasized as a regional language has to function in society, and its learning in educational institutions encourages its survival and popularity among the nation. Education is a complex system and introducing a minor language in the system is a time-consuming and painstaking process as it requires providing linguistic continuity throughout the phases (Mustafina, 2012).

The process of Welsh reviving and its prestige regaining strikes as a successful language policy of Wales, and education is an essential element of the process. Having been eliminated from communication up to the 19th century, today the Welsh language is compulsory as a part of the national curriculum since 1999 (Ball & Müller, 2010).

Today, the functional development of European minor languages has not been studied thoroughly. However, the research of the current processes in Wales allows learning and adopting the experience of successful minor languages functioning and avoiding possible handicaps whilst implementing the language policy in the sphere of education.

### **Methodological Framework**

In the paper the following methods were employed: the contrastive analysis, result synthesis, content analysis. The contrastive analysis was applied to the official documents and the statutory acts of the government of Wales regarding education.

The research was undertaken in several steps. Firstly, the Welsh history and functioning process since the 6th century were studied. The next step presented the analysis of the Welsh-medium education current state and statutory documents focusing on Welsh boost and strengthening its position in society.

### **Results and Discussions**

The Acts of Union of England and Wales in 1536 and 1542 are cite to mark the beginning for Welsh extirpation. The Acts pronounced English to be the language of legislation, court, and administration. Welsh was losing the position and was associated with the poor class and illiteracy. The gentry opted for English as the medium of communication and sent their children to study in England.

In 1547 humanist William Salesbury claimed the necessity of translating the Bible into Welsh since everyone had the right to familiarize with the Word of God in

their native language. Nevertheless, the translation of the Bible was completed only in 1588 by William Morgan. His Bible presented the standard of the Welsh language. As the Bible in Welsh appeared, there arose the need to make peasants literate. Pursuing the aim, the priest Griffith Jones set up schools where peasants acquired basic skills in reading. By 1761 there had been arranged up to 3495 schools and approximately 158 thousand people were educated to read in Welsh. According to Griffith Jones, teaching a native language means to show reverence to the will of Christ and is a religious obligation.

In 19th century when the primary school was developing, the Welsh language was lacking in the sphere of education altogether. The 1870 Education Act targeted at inculcating English. As a result, the children were severely punished for using Welsh at school; a child caught speaking Welsh was to wear a board running WELSH NOT. The board was passed from one child to another who opted for speaking Welsh. At the end of the day a child wound up with the board was punished. The 1889 education Act reduced Welsh learning to minimum and suggested it as an optional subject. Welsh was mainly employed as a medium to teach English. Such Welsh extirpation from the sphere of education led to the diglossic situation. The areas where Welsh had prevailed before now opted for English as a medium of education and communication. It is worth noting that industrialization and migration of workers in Wakes greatly afflicted the region: the population showed the tendency to use English as a communication medium.

At the end of 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century the situation about Welsh started changing for the better. The Welsh supporters promote its usage in primary school as a medium of teaching English and achieving bilingualism in the region. The 1907 Code of Regulations for Public Elementary Schools is noted that any subject of the curriculum can be taught in Welsh (where it is preferable), and every school should provide teaching history, geography, and literature of Wales.

The first welsh-medium school was arranged in 1939 in Aberystwyth. By 1950 there had been 7 primary schools and by 1960 the number had increased up to 28. Moreover, there appeared the first secondary school in Ysgol Glan Clywd in the north-east. In 1988/89 academic year 22 638 students attended Welsh-medium schools.

In 1950-60 it was problematic for parents to raise children speaking Welsh as the only place to spoke welsh was home. As for mixed families, it was impossible to bring up bilingual children. The only way out was to attend Sunday Welsh schools. According to Ministry of Education in Glamorgan there was 42 % of parents who communicated with their children in Welsh in 1950; in Meirionethshire where Welsh prevailed such families reached up to 96%. The Welsh-medium schools appeared in the English-speaking regions changed the situation significantly.

**Table 1.** Bilingual Schools in Wales between 1950 and 1988

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1988
Primary schools	7	28	46	54	67
Quantity of students	-	-	6253	9769	12112
Secondary schools	0	1	4	11	16
Quantity of students	-	-	2017	7860	10526

Table 1 reveals the increase in bilingual schools in the region. Since 1970 the quantity of both schools and students is seen to be increasing. The primary school index proves that Welsh-medium education at early age prevails due to a large number of schools and continuous influx of students. Despite the few bilingual schools, the number of students goes dramatically up. The tendency shows linguistic continuity whilst transferring from primary to secondary school and Welsh boost in society. (Ball & Müller, 2010). Establishing such bilingual schools pursues two targets: to improve the children's linguistic skills who are native Welsh speakers, and familiarize those who do not speak Welsh with the language. The non-Welsh parents' impression on how easy their children acquired the language pushed them to start learning the language themselves.

The detailed information on Welsh functioning starts since 1987. In 1987/88 the number of Welsh-medium primary schools reached 363 and approximately 12,2 % studied there, for 8,4% some subjects were taught in Welsh; 47, 2 % learnt Welsh as a second language; for 32,4 % Welsh was not in the curriculum.

The number of secondary schools where some subjects were provided through Welsh in 1987/88 was 53: in 16 schools less than 9 subjects; in 14 schools - 11-16 subjects; in 23 schools more than 16 subjects.

In 1984 the first language center was established in the Welsh speaking region for helping adapting and preparing English speaking children between 7 and 11. The aim of the center was to facilitate students' integration at school without damaging the existing language policy. By 1988 6 similar centers had been set up. The course duration was one term.

The Education Reform Act 1988 influenced significantly Welsh position in education: it proclaimed that Welsh is the main subject of the national curriculum for Welsh-medium schools and compulsory for the rest.

The improvement of the bilingual situation in Wales depends on the quality of teacher staff training. Pursuing the target, in the north of Wales the National Practitioners' Training Program was developed and subsidized by Welsh Assembly Government. The practitioners were sent to the centers so as to brush up on Welsh for basic conversational skills. Welsh is considered to be socially important to acquire it successfully.

Since the Charter was signed, Welsh-medium education is given significant attention; the measures are taken to save and promote it throughout the phases. Due to the reports on the Charter ratification cycles one can observe the following tendencies in the field of education.

Education in Wales in 2002. The opportunity of attaining Welsh-medium pre-school education is provided. For the children under 3 there exist 448 nursery groups, for children 3+ the number of such groups is 580. As for primary education is concerned, in 440 schools Welsh is a single and main education, and 87 schools provide bilingual education (Initial Periodical Report presented to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in accordance with Article 15 of the Charter, 2002). In the rest schools Welsh is studied as a second language. There are 52 secondary Welsh-medium schools. Since 1999 Welsh is a compulsory subject for all students up to 16. Welsh Government reports that the percentage of subjects taught in Welsh in some schools is less than 20 %. Moreover, the Welsh Language Board informs that when transmitting from K1 to K2 more than 40% of students from Welsh-medium

schools opt for schools that teach welsh as a second language (Report of Committee of Experts on the Charter, 2004).

Education in Wales in 2005. The Volunteers Organization provides children under 3 with the Welsh language in 435 nursery groups and children 3+ - in 586 groups across Wales. In 2004/5 the Welsh Language Board granted £1.03 million to Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin. It is 300 000 more than in 2003. Alongside the mentioned financial help, in 2004/5 the Volunteers Organization was granted £245000 through the Assembly Government's Children and Families Organisation and approximately £240 000 through Children and Youth Support Fund as a support for local projects. Welsh as a second language is taught to pre-school children in accordance with new Foundation Phase curriculum. The aim of the project is to provide children surrounded by English with opportunity to use Welsh as much as possible as a means of communication.

As for primary school, Welsh is the main language in 448 schools and in 58 bilingual schools (comparing to the first report, the number of bilingual schools has reduced). In rest 1082 schools it is taught as a second language. According to the Children Act 2004 Local Education Authorities (LEA) is to develop a single education plans. It is essential to undertake the survey among parents and guardians so as to define what school they will opt. The 1993 Education Act requires to develop a plan on Welsh promotion. New Welsh-medium schools are opened in the regions: at that moment 7 new primary schools are opened. However, 50 % of primary school students do not go to welsh-medium secondary schools. According to the Second Periodical Report secondary Welsh-medium education is available in the regions and there exist 54 welsh-medium and bilingual schools (Second Periodical Report presented to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in accordance with Article 15 of the Charter, 2005).

Education in Wales in 2009. In June 2007 the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin is available for children under 3 in 503 groups and in 551 nursery groups. In 2008/09 the Volunteer Organization funding reached £1.1 million through 5 the Welsh Language Board and £375,057 through the Assembly Government's Children and Families Organization. Welsh-medium education is provided in 466 primary schools, 28 schools are bilingual, in the rest 1033 schools Welsh is a second language. There are 54 Welsh-medium schools. 5 LEA (Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Newport) that do not have such schools cover the transportation costs of children who want to attain Welsh-medium or bilingual education (Third Periodical Report presented to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in accordance with Article 15, 2009).

Education in Wales in 2013. January 2011: 419 Welsh-medium primary schools, 48 bilingual schools and 968 schools that teach welsh as a second language and is assessed at the end of K2 (11 years). The results of the poll on Welsh-medium necessity among parents led to opening 10 new schools since 2009 and 5 more in 2012. Welsh Government keeps annually funding production of bilingual and Welsh-medium teaching materials. The secondary educaion: 32 Welsh-medium schools, 24 bilingual schools, 165 schools with Welsh a second language (Forth Periodical Report presented to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in accordance with Article 15 of the Charter, 2013).

**Table 2.** Schools and Students between 2010 and 2015

Year	Primary School				Secondary School			
	Welsh-medium	Quantity of Students	The whole number of schools	Quantity of Students	Welsh-medium	Quantity of Students	The whole number of schools	Quantity of Students
2010	473	59880	1462	257445	58	43432	223	203907
2013	452	63192	1374	264186	53	37692	216	191279
2015	435	65460	1330	273400	50	36485	207	182408

- “Welsh-medium” includes both Welsh-medium and bilingual schools.

Table 2 reveals data on schools in Wales between 2010 and 2015. The data analysis show that the number of Welsh-medium primary and secondary schools is decreasing, however, the quantity of students has increased by 0,9 % at primary school for the defined period. As for the welsh-medium secondary schools are concerned, the quantity of students has gone down by 1,2%; it signifies that the linguistic continuity transmitting from K1 toK2 is not still provided (Schools’ census, 2010, Schools’ census, 2013, and Schools’ census, 2015).

In 2010 the Welsh-medium education Strategy (‘the Strategy’) was published by Welsh Government. The Strategy sets goals for 5 and 10 years that allows analyzing the results of implementation. The Strategy emphases 6 main targets that zero in on strengthening the Welsh-medium education:

- improve Welsh-medium education planning at nursery and primary schools;
- improve Welsh-medium education planning after 14 and consider the linguistic continuity and further skill development;
- assure Welsh skills development among all students and facilitate the linguistic continuity when transferring from one phase to another;
- assure practitioners provision at all phases of education who have a high commands in Welsh and are able to provide high-quality Welsh-medium education;
- improve the main Welsh-medium education tool;
- facilitate Welsh acquisition and strengthen its positions at home and in society.

Alongside the displayed targets, the Strategy provides the tool to control and assess the implementation process into education. The tool includes five indicators:

- increase in students at age 7 learning Welsh;
- increase in students who continue learning Welsh after transmitting from primary to secondary school;
- increase in people who get occupation through Welsh;
- increase in students at age 16-19 studying subjects through Welsh;
- increase in people having high commands in Welsh.

The reports on the Strategy implementation results are annually submitted to Welsh Government. March 10, 2016 the new annual report for 2015 was published on the official site of Welsh Government. The report reveals the following results of Strategy implementation in the education process.

The report points out that the quantity of students at age 7 educated in Welsh has soared from 6365 in 2009 up to 7594 in 2014; among the all students at age 7 learning Welsh 7 increase is 1,2 % from 30329 to 34175. It is noted that the tendency should not be completely attributed to the Strategy as when it was introduced the students either were educated in Welsh or the parents has opted for the Welsh-medium education regardless the Strategy. Moreover, the increase in students has not been illustrated throughout Wales: in 14 regions the students number has risen (Caerphilly shows the largest increase – 5,4%, Neath Port Talbot – 3,8%) and in 8 regions the students number has gone down (Pembrokeshire – 2,2%, Ceredigion – 2,1%). It is necessary to note that according to the Strategy, the quantity of students at age 7 is to be 30% by 2020. Therefore, it is required to set up extra 60 classes by 30 students that will be 1900 students so that the set target is achieved. Consequently, LEAs are to provide far reaching and thoroughly planned actions.

The second point of the controlling tool does not correspond to the planned indicators as well. According to the report, Welsh-medium education keeps losing students transmitting from K2 to K3 and K4. The expert estimations show that since 2008 the quantity of students has plummeted from 19.8% (Key 2) to 16.3% in 2011 году (Key 3), and to 15,3% (Key 4) in 2013. (the analysis was conducted on the bases of the one student group since 2008 through the stages).

Despite the marked decrease in the number of students who continue learning Welsh, the percentage of those who has reached the expected level of Welsh has increased (Evaluation of the Welsh-Medium Education Strategy, 2016):

**Table 3.**

Stage	Students with the high level of Welsh				
	2010,%	2011,%	2012,%	2013,%	2014,%
Key 2 (7-11)	81	82	84	86.7	88.1
Key 3 (11-14)	76.8	81.3	84.2	87.6	90.1
Key 4 (14-16)	73.4	74.6	73.8	73.5	73.7

The data presented in Table 3 show the steady increase in the number of students having achieved the high level of Welsh in Key stage 2 and 3, but Key stage 4 does not reveals the same tendency. It is possible to consider that the fact proves the intention of students at age 14-16 to focus on the subjects required when applying for college and university. Therefore, the interest in Welsh vanishes as there is no practical application of Welsh in the career paths altogether.

The poll amidst the headmasters proves that the increase cannot be associated with the Strategy but rather with other educational documents: Literacy and Numeracy Framework, PISA.

The teaching staff is to be considered as well. The current analysis emphasize that number of teachers wanting to work in Welsh-medium schools is significantly little rather than in English-medium schools. Between January and December 2014 in welsh-medium schools there were 275 vacancies and 2105 applicants that is 8 people per a position; in English-medium schools: 510 vacancies and 11747 applicants – 23 people per a position.

The Government policy on the Welsh language in education for the period between April 1, 2016 and March 31, 2017 is reflected in Welsh-medium Education



Strategy: next steps. The document points out the further actions in the education policy, teaching staff, teaching materials:

- publish the best practice of Welsh-knowledge assessment;
- analyze the options of e-courses development;
- continue to work in partnership with the Education Workforce Council capturing the data on Welsh skills of the teaching staff and their ability to teach in Welsh;
- conduct the research for better understanding of an immersion approach;
- review the approaches of fostering Welsh in families;
- raise the awareness of Welsh-medium education necessity and facilitate the further advantages for employment.

### Conclusion

Hence, it is worth noting that the Welsh-medium education is developing since there are some obstacles both at different stages and in the policy of the Local Education Authorities. In the course of the research after the detailed analysis we can conclude that Welsh-medium education in nursery and primary school is well arranged and is still developing that is undoubtedly a great accomplishment of the Wales policy. However, transmitting to secondary school the number of students gaining the Welsh-medium education is reducing. We can suppose that the reason for it is that Welsh is not demanded in further professional life. According to the research results the Strategy goals are supported by all engaged in the implementation process but nowadays the measures taken have not lead to the results planned by the document.

The current situation can show the balanced language policy of Wales implemented by means of education. The statutory enactments comply with the targets on Welsh promotion and development, and the intentions of the region to gain the linguistic continuity in the education process regarding the Welsh language as a teaching instrument require the following efforts.

We should note that the processes of the modern Welsh shows reviving of the citizens' national consciousness, willingness to save the self-identity the basis of which is the language.

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### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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