

# The Intersection of French Immersion Teachers' Identities and Teaching French Immersion

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**Abstract:** This scoping review explores how French Immersion (FI) teachers in Canada construct their professional identities within the sociopolitical landscape of official bilingualism. Drawing on published scholarship between 2012 and 2022 ( $n=15$ ), the review surfaces central themes, including tensions in content and language integration, program accessibility, shifting roles of educators, and contested notions of linguistic authenticity. Across these themes, FI teachers often navigate systemic barriers including limited preparation, resource scarcity, and ideologically charged narratives about language and identity that shape pedagogical decisions and self-understanding. The findings underscore the need for more inclusive and culturally responsive practices, as well as institutional support for teachers in holding complexity rather than simplifying it. Broader research that includes multiple interest-holder perspectives and French as a Second Language (FSL) program types to respond to and consider the layered realities of bilingual individuals and education in Canada.

**Keywords:** French Immersion; French as a Second Language; Teacher Identity; Official Bilingualism;

## Introduction

Living in Canada can mean living in bilingual contexts. As part of the *Official Languages Act* of Canada, the federal government promotes learning French outside of Québec, and devised legislation that allows both Francophone and Anglophones to participate in higher levels of government (Roy, 2020). There is clear recognition and value placed on Canada's official languages; English-French bilingual culture is often regarded as a key component of Canadian identity (Mady, 2010). As a result of federal commitments, ministries of education across Canada offer French educational programs led by French or bilingual educators that focus on language and cultural education. Barkhuizen and Mendieta (2020) suggest that conceptualizations of teacher identity develop cognitively and socially, are connected to teacher beliefs and emotions, and formed through negotiations built across time in specific settings. Furthermore, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) theorize that traditional schools act as societal institutions that reproduce the legitimate manner of using the authentic culture in the society it serves, normalizing dominant societal ideologies.

A preliminary search of the Open Science Framework (OSF), Figshare, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), and Google Scholar was conducted and no scoping reviews from the last decade were found in this particular context. The aim of this review is to assess the extent of the literature available in French as a Second Language teaching and identity construction. This review first provides the context of the inquiry and then discusses the eligibility criteria and rationales for inclusion in the search protocol. For complete transparency, I detail methods used, which include the search strategy, source selection, and data extraction. I present the findings from the data extraction and analysis in the findings section of this review, concluding with interpretations and implications.

## Key Terms

This review focuses on literature that concerning bilingualism, identity, and educational programs, using key terminology to contextualize the nature of this paper. Throughout this review, the key terms are FSL, French Immersion (FI), bilingualism, identity, and teachers. The Ontario public education system offers both English and French education to align with Canada's national identity, commonly referred as FSL (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2020a). Students in Ontario public schools participate in FSL from grades four to eight, as well as obtain a credit in secondary school to receive the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OME, 2020b).

FSL is offered across Canadian educational systems. In Ontario, for example, there are three levels of FSL available to students: Core French (CF), Extended French (EF), and FI (OME, 2020a). CF is the minimum requirement of French education in Ontario, requiring a minimum of 600 instructional hours in

French by the end of grade eight and one secondary school credit in French. EF is the intermediary level, requiring that students receive at least 25% of all instruction is in French and acquire seven credits in French (i.e., four FSL courses, and three subjects in French). The FI program is offered to all students in English-language school boards and offers students an opportunity to learn French as a subject and learn two or more subjects with French as the language of instruction. For elementary students, 50% of all instruction is in French, and secondary students can take different courses in French. Secondary students enrolled in FI must complete 10 credits in French, with four FSL language courses and six other subjects taught in French.

Although identity is an omnipresent and multidisciplinary concept, Stryker and Burke (2000) propose that it is often used in three separate contexts: (1) referring to the culture of people; (2) referring to common identification in collective or social categories; and (3) referring to parts of a self-fabricated meanings that people attach to the multiple roles they play in differentiated contemporary societies. Stryker and Burke's definitions are linked to identity theory; stemming from structural symbolic interactionism which aims to understand and explain how social structures affect the structure of self, and how the self affects social behaviours (Stryker, 1980). Identity theory itself stems from Mead (1934) but was elaborated upon to meet the development of sociologists' understanding of society, which was seen as a mosaic of patterned interactions and relationships that were differentiated yet organized, and embedded in an array of groups. These groups, Stryker and Burke (2000) elaborate, were composed of individuals living their lives in small and specialized networks of relationships through roles that support participation in those networks. The researchers interpret these interactions as the presence of structural symbolic interactionism in the ways social structures outside of social networks act as boundaries that may affect the inclusion of that person into those networks.

### **Review Question**

Previous examination of key terms provided a general context about the current established knowledge of FSL educational and pedagogical concepts within this review's scope; however, the review inadequately relates these concepts to one another. While this paper's aim is to explore themes related to Canadian FI, Ontario definitions of FSL were adopted as they were largely similar to other provincial definitions of FSL in Canada. This review seeks to explore what themes have emerged in FI teachers' beliefs about how Canadian official bilingualism affects FI programs in Canada, exploring the intersection of identity, linguistic ideologies, and FI education according to evidence in recent literature.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

Below, I detail the inclusion criteria relevant to participants, concepts, contexts, and source types for this study, ensuring that the search results validly address the review question. All sources that did not adhere to the inclusion criteria were excluded, with a brief rationale for the exclusion.

### **Participants**

In empirical studies, participants of interest included teachers that teach or have taught within any FI program in Canada. Teachers in included studies have either taught French, or any subject from a Canadian curriculum in French. Studies including teachers at varying levels of proficiency in English-French bilingualism were included; studies focusing on teachers without teaching experience in French or in FSL programs in Canada were excluded from the review.

### **Concepts**

Studies that focused on the concepts of linguistic, cultural or social identity, teacher identity construction, Canadian English-French bilingualism and bilingual education, and FSL programming were included. Studies focusing on other variations of bilingualism, identity, and bilingual education were excluded.

## **Context**

This review focuses on Canadian English-French bilingualism and inclusion criteria has been selected accordingly. Only studies that focused on Canada and Canadian provinces and territories were included. International or other bilingual communities are beyond the scope of this review.

## **Types of Sources**

Quantitative experimental and quasi-experimental studies which included but were not limited to analytical observational studies, analytical cross-sectional studies, before and after studies, case reports, case studies, and descriptive observational studies. These studies were examined for inclusion into this scoping review. Qualitative studies such as action research, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry were also examined. Dependent on their relevance to review questions, systematic reviews were also examined.

## **Methods**

### **Search Strategy**

The proposed scoping review has been conducted in accordance with the JBI Scoping Review Methodology (Peters et al., 2020). This strategy is well-suited for identifying, mapping, and reporting the concepts in various fields of study (Peters et al., 2020). In mapping Canadian FSL, this review located published studies in education through an initial limited search of the Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), and Google Scholar to identify topic-relevant articles. Words and terms used in abstracts and titles of preliminary articles were foundational in the development of the full search strategy (Burt, 2014; Byrd Clark, 2010; Masson et al., 2021). The search strategy which includes identified keywords (and their permutations) were adapted for each included source of information, and a final screening of the reference list was conducted for any additional studies in accordance with the inclusion criteria previously detailed.

The full search was conducted via EBSCOHost to simultaneously search three separate databases (i.e., Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and Education Source), followed by a full search of Google Scholar, and a full search of the Queen's University Library Summons Search Engine. The databases were selected strategically to provide broad coverage of the targeted concepts within the context of the social sciences. The review considered the first 50 results from each database to ensure the review remained focused and on topic. This approach aligned with the principles of rapid reviews, through streamlining the synthesis of evidence in a limited timespan and with finite resources (Khanuga et al., 2012).

### **Selecting Evidence Sources**

One reviewer screened titles and abstracts to assess validity against inclusion criteria. The identified potential sources were uploaded and aggregated with full citation details into Airtable (n.d.), a digital operations platform. From included citations, full texts were evaluated against the inclusion criteria outlined in the search protocol while excluded texts were accompanied by a brief rationale. Using a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR) flow chart, the outcomes of the search and inclusion process were described (Tricco et al., 2018). To ensure results reflected recent literature, only published studies from 2012 to 2022 in English or French were included.

### **Data Extraction**

After all included sources of evidence were gathered, the reviewer used a data extraction table (Cooper, 2022). Among the extracted data was distinct information relating to concepts, contexts, participants, study methods, and salient findings that address the review question. No additional or missing information was needed from article authors.

## Data Analysis

Scoping review findings have been charted (Appendix 1) to map findings from the search. A narrative summary follows to describe the relevance of results to the review question for this study. Irrelevance to the participants, concepts, contexts, and course types outlined in the search protocol led to the exclusion of sources from the final results.

## Summary of Evidence

Concepts emerging from the review included integrating content and language, accessibility of FI/FSL, critical literacy, and authenticity. These concepts appeared in two or more sources and were often contextualized within the broader themes.

## Integrating Language and Content

In second language education, the term Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is often referred in describing the goal of second language education which has been described as a “dual-focused approach” (Mehisto et al., 2008, p.9). This is a pedagogical approach in many second or foreign language educational programs where educators weave curricular content and a second language, with the goal of teaching content and improving student fluency in the target language (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). Although officially CLIL is argued to teach a foreign language, whereas immersion is used to teach a second language present in the students’ local linguistic context (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010), the concept of integrating content and language in the FSL and FI context was apparent. According to Keating Marshall and Bockhorst-Heng’s (2018) qualitative analysis of Francophone teachers’ interviews, educators viewed languages through a “language-as-a-code” lens (i.e., removed from social contexts and lacking culture), and expressed that deep discussions about culture (e.g., local, regional, national historical debates on Francophones’ cultural and linguistic rights) did not belong in Anglophone classrooms, even in the context of FI. Interestingly, Keating Marshall and Bockhorst-Heng (2018) reported that most teachers were not aware of curricular objectives in curriculum documents. When asked about their roles, teachers did not see themselves as intercultural mediators and believed that intercultural discussions were avenues to observe communicative competence (Keating Marshall & Bockhorst-Heng, 2018).

Rivard et al.’s (2012) article explored practical strategies for FI science teachers to integrate the language more effectively during the science block. The author highlights the importance of scaffolding students into the scientific discursive community, and even more so when teaching in a second language. The researchers suggest that FI science teachers should explicitly teach reading strategies geared towards science, and to dissect scientific language. However, researchers cite Simard (2001), noting that both panels of teachers avoid teaching reading strategies for expository texts in their science courses, and that all teachers (including FI) spend little time reading texts. Rivard and colleagues (2012) conclude that FI teachers should integrate language when teaching content, but that they may not have adequate training or have access to evidence that demonstrates benefits for students.

Addressing CLIL, Cammarata and Tedick’s (2012) phenomenological study of three FI teachers explored their experiences and the meanings they attributed to them. The researchers report that the FI teachers included in the study struggled with three components. Firstly, teachers struggled to see themselves as content *and* language teachers. Secondly, FI teachers were still developing an understanding of the extent that language and content are interdependent in FI. Lastly, the teachers were experiencing complications in identification of language prioritization during content-specific teaching (Cammarata and Tedick, 2012).

These findings demonstrate that FSL and FI teachers believe, to varying degrees, that integration of content and language in learning positively affects student learning. This integration requires clear and specific structure and should guide students through messy discussions and texts to benefit from both linguistic and content cognitive aspects of bilingual programs. However, there appears to be an issue in understanding the extent of integration and how FI teachers can facilitate more authentic integration of content and language. Ineffective FI programs may be a result of teachers’ insufficient understanding of the inseparable nature of content and language and a lack of training in evidence-based program implementation.

### Accessibility of FSL/FI

The critical interpretive synthesis by Masson et al. (2021) investigated two research questions: (a) What is the thematic focus in twenty-first century research published on different FSL stakeholders across different programs and panels? and (b) What does this thematic synthesis reveal about the field of FSL education in Canada in terms of enduring concerns and overall contributions of post-millennial research? Masson et al. (2021) found that several areas of FSL and FI teachers and programming needed reinforcement: intercultural competencies, multicultural education, and inclusion practices towards various learners (e.g., English Language Learners, Allophones, students with exceptionalities). However, their research revealed a trend in studies investigating intercultural, multicultural, and pluricultural practices in teacher education programs. Their search also revealed that most studies focused on FI, even though 90% of students in Canada are enrolled in CF programs.

Davis's (2015) thesis focused on immigration trends that are leading to increasingly diverse classrooms, and explored two research questions: (1) What are the perspectives of FI educators and Allophone parents regarding the suitability of FI for Allophone students in Saskatchewan? and (2) What are the experiences of Allophone families in terms of inclusion and exclusion from FI programs in Saskatchewan? Allophones are speakers who's language is neither English nor French (Davis, 2015). Towards accessibility, Davis (2015) noted that Allophone families view learning official bilingualism in Canada as a critical priority. Some findings for teachers' perspectives were positive: most educators agreed that learning English and French were mutually beneficial, most educators would not discourage Allophone families from enrolling in FI, and most teachers felt Allophone parents should be able to select their child's program. However, some findings were perturbing: there was no clear conclusion about teachers' perspectives about advantages and disadvantages for Allophones in FI; some teachers felt prohibited in discouraging Allophone families from enrolling in FI; and some teachers felt that they should have more authority in deciding how families are included in or excluded from FI (Davis, 2015).

These results underline the necessity for FI programs in Canada to evolve with their communities. Increasingly, the world is growing connected, languages are merging and evolving, prompting applied linguists to view language *fluency* as a continuum upon which individuals leverage their linguistic repertoires to interact with their realities. The increasing diversity of classrooms justifies policy adjustments and correlated pre-service teacher education about the dynamic FI classroom and the diversity of students enrolled. Educators must learn to implement alternative pedagogies that address realities of Allophone students and students with exceptionalities within the FI classroom context, as traditional FI may prove insufficient.

### Educator Roles

The role educators adopt and embody was a recurring concept throughout results from the search. Cormier (2020) found that students who had positive experiences in their teacher education program sought to replicate those experiences for their own students during practicums. Cormier's paper was a reflection on her development from a teacher to a professor and sharing her desire to engage students holistically with content while learning the language. Through A/R/Tographie (i.e., the interconnection between one's role as an artist, researcher, and teacher), Cormier implemented "mercredis en musique" (i.e., "Music Wednesdays" in French) to showcase French linguistic variations, culture, and the ways target languages are used beyond the classroom. She reports that students never questioned the inclusion of the French music in class, but asked questions about sourcing the music.

While conducting their critical interpretive synthesis, Masson et al. (2021) found that administrators expressed concern about French proficiency with teacher candidates, and the difficulty to appoint candidates ultimately affects the quality and reputation of FSL programs in Canada. This article also reported that FI and CF teachers are living "complex realities" relating to the chronic FSL teacher shortage in Canada, as they face difficult working conditions and minimal financial, social, and emotional support. Concerningly, FSL, FI, and CF teachers expressed that they feel like "second-class citizens" in their schools.

Taylor's (2015) exploratory case study, seeking to understand a secondary school FI teacher's commitment to pedagogical change, found the educator's efforts to draw on out-of-school interests did not guarantee in-school enjoyment of those interests. The educator was leading a mandatory course in religion taught in FI, attempting to implement innovative pedagogy around plurilingualism. However, Taylor reported that the mandatory course led to student (mis-) behaviour, which consequently led to the teacher's abandonment of implementing innovative pedagogy, returning to conventional pedagogy (2015).

Masson et al.'s (2021) article buttressed Cammarata and Teddick's (2012) findings relating to FI and FSL teacher challenges. Cammarata and Teddick (2012) found that FI teachers are experiencing a growing sense of isolation, lack of time, district pressures, lack of resources, and suffering due to factors beyond the teachers' control.

These findings highlight the dynamic environment in which FI educators are professionally situated. FI teachers attempt to model master French language skills while offering a dynamic learning environment. Ambitious feats of this magnitude are only possible with proper support and resource accessibility, of which FSL and FI teachers seem to lack. The FSL and FI systems are in critical short supply of qualified teachers in Canada, yet working conditions for these educators appears to be abysmal. Perplexingly, FI enrollment numbers continue to increase in certain provinces such as Ontario (Massie & Gormely, 2021), while FI teacher supply is minimal. To address the shortage and effectively educate students in bilingual programs, it would be wise to consult FI teachers in program bolstering, and resource and support procurement.

### **Authenticity**

The final theme pertained to FSL and FI teachers and the authenticity of their linguistic abilities. Roy and Schaefer (2015) investigated how students use French and their discussions around the language, and observation of teaching practices in a content-based program. The study found that several teachers teach to the test to ensure higher academic success, and that teachers expect students' French speaking competencies to be high as "it gives a better impression" (Roy & Schaefer, 2015). Teachers in the study were native French speakers and held high expectations for their students to learn "real" culture from them. The study found that a power dynamic was present between native and second-language French speakers as some teachers believed students learn more effectively from French speakers who wield cultural and linguistic competencies that non-native speakers do not possess. Finally, Roy and Schaefer (2015) reported that FI teachers often do not engage students to critically analyze texts or discussions in class that are produced or reproduced based on Canadian linguistic ideologies.

Wernicke's (2016) study examining how teachers negotiate discourses in language subordination from the Canadian French to French from France focused on French speaking teachers that traveled to Vichy, France on a two-week sojourn. Wernicke collected data via site observations, journals, and field notes and conducted two series of analyses: (a) a thematic analysis on the prominence of language subordination and linguistic purism discourses from Canadian teachers' interactions with non-Canadians, and (b) analysis on discursive process of authentication and de-authentication in narratives of other teachers. Wernicke (2016) reported that certain notions of linguistic authenticity associated with European French created a disaffiliation from Canadian French among Canadian teachers due to a perceived inauthenticity, thus, inappropriate for FSL classrooms. Secondly, the study found that among Canadian teachers and study abroad learners, there was a resolute preoccupation about speaker norms and monocentric views of language in general.

These sources call attention to monolingualistic and bilingual ideologies held by FI educators and reproduced in bilingual programs. As education researchers grow their understanding about bilingual ideologies, educators deserve the same. Purist notions of language appear to restrict opportunities to explore cultures and linguistic development, while simultaneously concluding belonging in French bilingualism. By increasing flexibility in the classroom, students would gain a more realistic perspective on how languages exist and evolve. Teachers must stray from prioritizing Eurocentric views of authenticity to more practical views of authentic language use; French is not about status, but a tool to communicate meaning and understanding in the cultures and communities it is situated.

## Discussion and Limitations

The results of the scoping review provided a relatively small number of published articles relating to the review question about the influence of teachers' beliefs and teaching in FI. The search revealed diverse studies, including reviews, case studies, argument papers, reflection papers, longitudinal studies, quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods studies, a post-qualitative inquiry. The variety of studies exemplified the multiple perspectives and approaches towards understanding this topic. Interestingly, the reviewed sources had diverse populations relevant to the objective of this paper and emphasized that research impact on this topic would affect more Canadian communities that take interest or engage in FSL education in the country.

The key terms drawn from Canadian bilingual educational concepts enabled a conceptual exploration of larger themes about English-French Canadian bilingual education. While the definitions for FSL were drawn from the Ontario context, the emerging themes connect to the Canadian context more broadly. Conceptually, the search revealed opportunities to explore linguistic identity, understanding content and language integration in teaching, accessibility of FSL/FI, educator roles, and authenticity. For example, research about CLIL referenced FSL and FI pedagogy in Canada, even though Canadian educational research may not consistently refer to it. Key terms such as FSL and teacher were connected to emerging insights about accessibility in Canadian FSL contexts. Other key terms around bilingual and teachers led to the exploration of language authenticity and identity, and the different perceptions concerning the roles educators hold and perform.

Thematically, broader themes emerged about language ideologies, interest-holders, teacher education, and complexity of FSL teaching. Concepts and themes suggest answers to the review question about various factors that shape FI teachers' beliefs of Canadian official bilingualism affect FI programs in Canada. Furthermore, the results from this scoping review provide researchers with a stronger understanding about the general nature and approaches of relatively recent literature in this field. Thus, future studies can be more specific and can address identified research gaps, and in turn contribute more diverse perspectives relating to identity construction and FI teaching.

It is important to note that while this search was able to examine emerging insights about FSL and FI in Canada, it does not provide comprehensive coverage of the full extent of beliefs about Canadian FSL education. For example, exclusionary practices such as filtering students out of FSL programs like FI and EF have accessibility and policy implications and have been well-documented (see Cobb, 2015; Lisowski, 2014; Muhling & Mady, 2017). While examining equity issues in FI, Wise (2011) notes a personal communication to parents of exceptional students were advised that they are not allowed "double-dipping" (i.e., enrichment programs like FI cannot be offered concurrently with special education supports). In relation to language authenticity, standardization of language proficiency and cultural competency through frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001; 2020) or the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2015), can offer structure to language pedagogical approaches. The adoption of European-centred pedagogical supports such as the CEFR may lead to linguistic hierarchies where Europeanization of language in Canada may threaten Canadian linguistic diversity (Bournot-Trites et al., 2020).

The two largest limitations faced included co-researcher availability and scope. After receiving feedback from master's and doctoral students experienced in various literature reviews, the search protocol was finalized and ready for piloting by examining preliminary sources. However, a consensus of unavailability among potential co-researchers resulted in a sole-researcher effort with a minimized capacity to screen sources, extract data, and interpret findings. Although great care was taken by the researcher in explicitly adhering to the search protocol, this review may have a selection bias due to lack of inter-rater reliability. Secondly, while every possible effort was made to rigorously fulfill the search protocol, additional financial resources could have allowed for the researcher to examine and integrate a broader inclusion of sources, ensure inter-rater agreement, and provide a more varied range of interpretations.

## Conclusion

This scoping review had the objective of assessing the extent of the literature available in FI teaching and identity construction within the last decade. Through implementation of the attached protocol (Appendix 1), the scoping review determined that there is currently a relatively small body of literature relating to this topic, but the body is growing. The findings accentuate several implications for future research. There is a critical need to diversify research in this area, focusing on peripheral interest-holders such as parents and administrators to capture a range of perspectives (Masson et al., 2021). Additionally, the perspectives must range across more FSL programs in Canada as there appears to be a disproportionate amount of research focusing uniquely on FI (Masson et al., 2021), which further perpetuates monocentric ideologies about language and identity construction (Wernicke, 2016). More attention to pre-service FSL teacher education around linguistic identity (Wernicke, 2016), and alternative linguistic ideologies need to be explored to bolster the body of literature in FI programming and identity construction (Cummins, 2014).

Implications for practice emerged, primarily to accessibility and the integration of content and language in FI classrooms. FSL and FI teachers are feeling isolated and are dealing with complex challenges (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Masson et al., 2021; Rivard et al., 2012;), which may be addressed through increased funding, increased FSL and FI teacher supply, language and content expert support to FI educators, and emotional support. There is a need to increase teacher self-efficacy in understanding the connections between culture and language (Keating Marshall and Bockhorst-Heng, 2018) and implement innovative pedagogies such as plurilingual practices (Taylor, 2015) or critical thinking opportunities in literacy and classroom discourses (Roy & Schaefer, 2015).

By addressing these areas within the field, educational researchers, practitioners, administrators, and policy makers will be positioned to understand the unique challenges, benefits, and consequences of FI programming in Canada. With interest-holders making evidence-based decisions, FI programming may become more efficient, effective. In turn, educators and educational institutions may change approaches to second language education in the context of an increasingly globalized world. With a larger team and adequate funding, further reviews relation to complex realities of FI and FSL teaching in Canada, and language ideologies may provide a firm understanding of the climate of FSL education in Canada

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