

RESEARCH REPORT
for
SCoTENS
JUNE 2023

DEVELOPING TEACHER AND
LEADERSHIP CAPACITY IN IRISH-
MEDIUM EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF
IMMERSION-SPECIFIC COMPETENCES
(TLC-IME)

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Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Standing Committee on Teacher Education North and South and the researchers wish to express sincere gratitude for that support.

The authors are very grateful to the classroom teachers, school principals, teacher educators and student teachers, who shared their insights and expertise during the process of gathering data. The authors acknowledge the valuable contribution made to the Literature Review by newly qualified teachers Eimear Nic Oitir and Laura Lukasik. A special word of thanks is also conveyed to Chris McDowell for his highly professional service as a translator and proof reader.

The researchers are indebted to Gaeloideas, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and to Library and administrative staff at St Mary's University College Belfast, Mary Immaculate College Limerick and the University of Cork, as well as to academic colleagues across institutions who were helpful and encouraging throughout the study.

Abbreviations

CLIL	Content-Language Integrated Learning
CoP	Community of Practice
IM	Irish-Medium
IME	Irish-Medium Education
NI	Northern Ireland
ROI	Republic of Ireland
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning

Executive Summary

Irish-medium education (IME) is a form of bilingual education in which students receive subject matter instruction through the medium of a minority language, which they are learning at school. This type of education has grown significantly since the 1970s and in 2023-23 caters for 66477 pupils (i.e. 5%) in primary and post-primary schools throughout Ireland: 60,059 pupils in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and 6,418 students in Northern Ireland (NI) (<https://gaeloideachas.ie>; <https://www.comhairle.org/>). In addition, the extensive network of Irish-medium (IM) feeder nurseries throughout the island provides an important foundation for IM primary education and is the access route for most families who chose IME. Notwithstanding their increased popularity and success, IME programmes remain complex to implement. Teachers are often challenged to rely on their own professional judgement and experience in the absence of research-informed resources like a language framework for pupils or a comprehensive inventory of immersion-specific competences for teachers (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019; Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Laoire, 2021). The need to improve some aspects of IME provision becomes more critical as the sector grows (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017; Ó Duibhir, 2018). Scholars agree that immersion teaching – distinct from traditional content or language teaching – is driven by professional values and requires a particular knowledge base and pedagogical skill set (e.g. Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2020; Mac Corraidh, 2008, 2021; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017; Ó Duibhir, 2018). Despite the extensive corpus of research into multilingualism, no studies nor curriculum guidelines have explicitly identified the immersion-specific competences demanded by the IME setting. There is a growing recognition that IME teaching makes higher demands in terms of disciplinary expertise and knowledge (Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2020). However, what constitutes an ideal IME immersion knowledge base has yet to be well understood or clearly described. In addition, the values which underpin, guide and shape the work of IME teachers are yet to be defined.

The aim of this study is to firstly identify this ideal knowledge base, i.e. distinctive professional competences that are considered essential to teachers in IME, and secondly to provide examples of these distinctive professional competences in practice. Utilising an online questionnaire, a student teacher symposium, interviews and focus groups, data were collected from key stakeholders (n=78) across the continuum of IM education in Northern Ireland (NI) and in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) e.g. student teachers, practising teachers, principals, initial teacher education providers.

Three broad themes emerged for data analysis – vision and values, teacher knowledge for immersion, and pedagogical skills and practices. A range of essential competences are set out under each theme in this report.

Findings from this SCoTENS study have potential to inform the design of an immersion-specific TPL framework in Ireland. Such a framework would enable IME teachers to engage in ongoing, in-depth, systematic and reflective examinations of their practice. The researchers wish to highlight the fact that the core competences of the immersion teacher are not presented as a static, complete set of descriptors. Rather, they are integral to the reflective, evolving, generative identity of the IME teacher and should be re-visited, reviewed and further developed, as appropriate. Progress towards that goal will depend significantly on a commitment by policy-makers to anchor core immersion competences in

qualification frameworks and adopt TPL standards that guide design, evaluation and funding of IME TPL initiatives, enabling IME teachers to manifest and develop these core immersion competencies.

Introduction

Immersion education in contemporary Ireland

Language immersion education is a form of bilingual education in which students receive subject matter instruction through the medium of a second, foreign, heritage or indigenous language (Tedick, 2014). The origins of this approach to second language (L2) instruction, arguably, date from the mid-1960s with the inauguration of the Canadian immersion programmes (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Many countries around the world today implement language immersion programmes. These programmes can take many forms and have many variations, each influenced by the sociolinguistic and cultural context in which it occurs. Programmes have different languages, different goals, and different learner audiences.

The model of immersion education practised in Ireland in IME schools is an enrichment bilingual model, i.e. the goal is additive bilingualism and biliteracy, as well as the extension and revitalization of the minority language and culture into the community and nationally. Research on language immersion education consistently proclaims immersion to be a reliable method for teaching languages, for teaching content and for achieving success in these without jeopardising the first language of learners (Genesee et al., 2006; Hunt, 2011; Tedick & Lyster, 2020; Thomas & Collier, 2017). Our knowledge base in relation to immersion is growing constantly and there continues to be a core base of support for immersion education among parents, educators, and policymakers at all levels. Although much international research on immersion programmes has been carried out, a number of issues remain unresolved.

Research rationale and research question

While the strong development of students' receptive skills in listening and reading in the target language has been noted, much of the research into pupils' productive skills in speaking and writing has consistently highlighted linguistic inaccuracy in the target language (Harley, 1984, 1992; Hoare & Kong, 2008; Nig Uidhir et al., 2020; Ó Duibhir, 2009, 2018). Exposure to content on its own is not sufficient to produce fluent, competent bilinguals. Therefore, to truly succeed in its mission, immersion programmes must engender the concurrent study of language and subject matter. As cognitive demands of academic content grow, so, too, do the linguistic demands on pupils in immersion programmes. Therefore, whether in an early years setting or in a post-primary class, teachers' professional competences, specific to the immersion setting, and including language proficiency, will be pivotal to pupil progress and to the success of the programme (Mac Corraidh, 2021; Mhic Aoidh, 2021). Meeting the challenges of IME demands a knowledge base and pedagogical skills which are unique and complex (e.g. Lyster, 2007; Lyster & Tedick, 2014). Yet, to date, few studies identify the immersion-specific competences demanded by the immersion setting. In addition, research which

explores how these immersion-specific competences manifest in practice is even more scant. This study responds to this gap in the literature by exploring two related research questions:

- What are the distinctive professional competences that are considered essential for Irish-medium teachers?
- How are these immersion-specific competences manifested in practice?

By addressing these questions, the researchers aim to capture an understanding of IME-specific competences and their associated values, knowledge, understandings, skills and practices and to contribute to the development of the IM sector in Ireland. If we are to respond appropriately to IME teachers' discipline-specific needs and professional growth and thus enhance IME student achievement, a professional framework that recognises specialist competences is essential. This study is therefore important to pursue at this time because it proposes to present a strand of research that has not to date received the academic attention it deserves in Ireland.

Format of report

The report begins by providing a definition of IME in the Irish context, outlining its growth and development as an educational model. Some key supports, issues and controversies in relation to IME policy are considered. Following on from this, a synthesis of the literature which explores immersion teacher competences is presented, paying particular attention to four main themes that emerged: vision and values; teacher knowledge; pedagogical skills and practices; and leadership and capacity. The research design and methodology used in this study are presented before finally turning to an analysis of the results and a discussion on findings and recommendations.

SCoTENS as a platform for collaboration

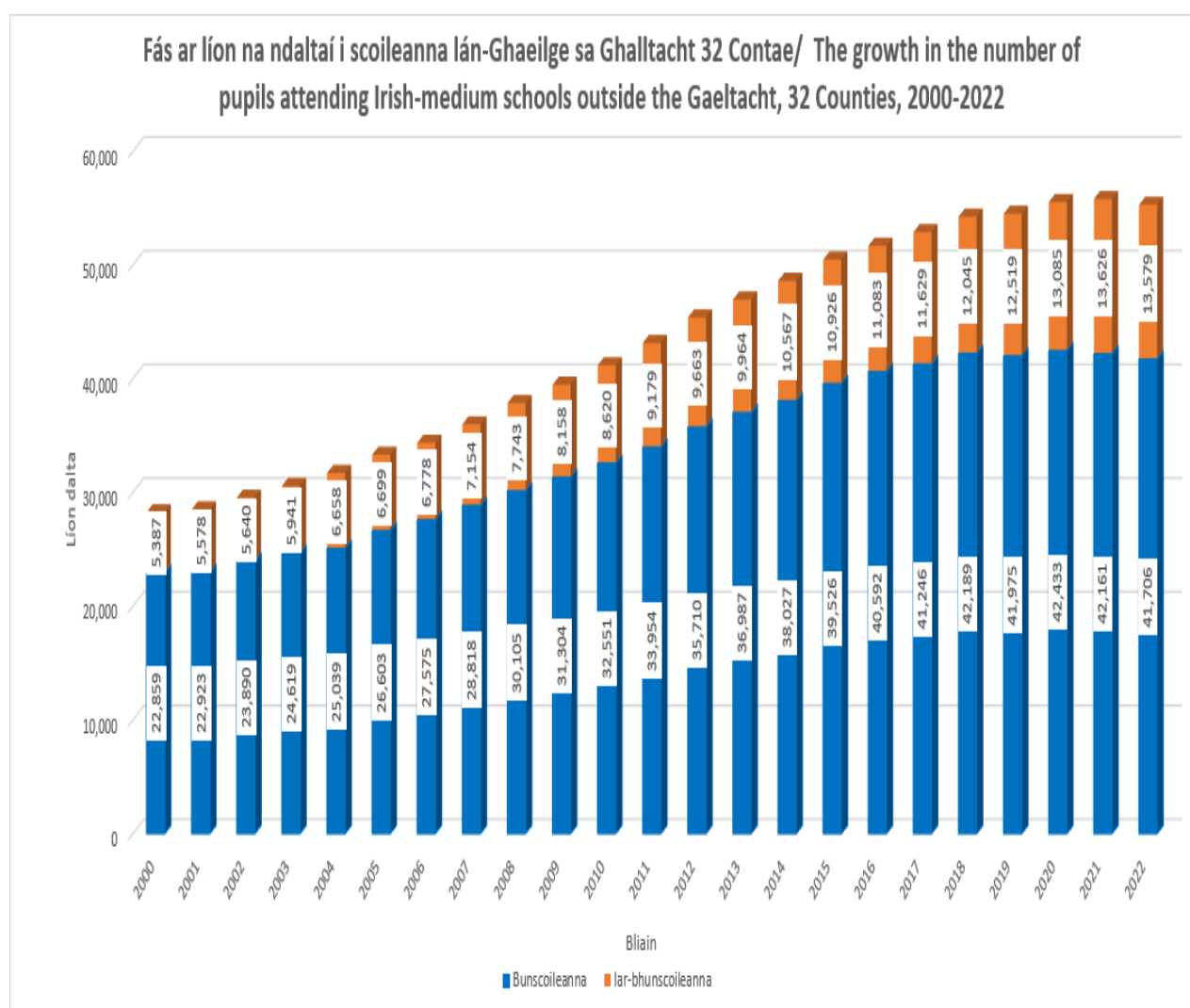
This study aimed to contribute to a shared understanding of the professional competencies of the IM teacher. The research process created a reflective space for IM practitioners to engage with peers from other institutions about their own identity as IM teachers. That opportunity in itself is quite rare in our busy professional lives and participants commented on it as a professional development exercise in its own right. Ultimately, it was the generous, insightful, professional engagement of participants, all learning leaders in IME, that informed this work. Inclusivity remained a priority throughout, limited only by the scope of the project. At each level of planning, data collection and critical reflection, new positive relationships were forged. Student teachers from four institutions enjoyed the opportunity to share their lesson plans with one another at the Student Symposium and to applaud the insights and efforts of their peers. Teachers from schools and Irish-medium units throughout Ireland were interviewed individually. School principals had the opportunity to meet on-line and engage in discussion with colleagues from other IM schools throughout the island, including Gaeltacht areas. Teacher educators from IM teacher education programmes in four institutions tapped into their rich and deep reserves of expertise to present both common and different perspectives on teacher preparation and the competences that are distinctive in the immersion teaching profession. This was a unique opportunity for shared reflections on an area of educational provision that has expanded in recent years.

Strategic Context: Outline of current IME provision

Introduction and development of teacher education for the IME sector

Irish-medium education (IME) is a form of bilingual education in which students receive subject matter instruction through the medium of a minority language, which they are learning at school. Some IME schools are located in Irish-language speech communities or *Gaeltachtaí*. This IME model strives for the rejuvenation of the indigenous language (i.e. Irish) through the education system and continues to grow in strength as Figure 1 below illustrates.

Figure 1: The increase in the number of pupils attending Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht, 32 counties, 2000-2022.



(www.gaeloideachas.ie)

Understanding the challenge

Notwithstanding developments in IM provision at all levels, IM programmes remain complex to implement and they present distinctive challenges for teachers, learners and parents (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghda, 2017; Ó Duibhir, 2018). For decades, research has consistently shown that Immersion students' productive language skills diverge from language norms in areas such as grammatical accuracy and complexity, lexical specificity, phonological patterns and sociolinguistic appropriateness (Maguire, 1990; Ó Duibhir, 2009, 2018; Walsh, 2007), and there is also evidence that young native speakers are not achieving native speaker norms or full acquisition or enrichment of the language (Péterváry, 2014). As a result, there is growing interest in identifying the essential knowledge base and associated instructional practices for immersion contexts that will allow students to achieve high levels of proficiency in the immersion language. Teacher preparation and teacher professional learning (TPL), therefore, play a critical role in the continued success of IME programmes (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghda, 2017; Ó Duibhir, 2018). TPL is an important strategy for ensuring that IME teachers are equipped to support deep and complex student learning in their classrooms. Implementing effective TPL well requires responsiveness to the needs of IME teachers and learners and to the immersion contexts in which teaching and learning takes place, i.e. the identification of IME-specific competences. Aligning policies toward a coherent set of practices for IME teacher development is fundamental. Some key policies and government initiatives, which impact on teacher development for immersion, will now be reviewed.

IM teacher education provision in Northern Ireland

The expansion of IME in Northern Ireland has been underway for 25 years. 1996 was the start of a new era in IM teacher education, with the commencement of enrolments into a new Irish-medium postgraduate programme (PGCE) and a bilingual Bachelor of Education programme with an Irish-medium focus (Maguire, 2006; Mhic Aoidh et al., 2012; Nig Uidhir, 2006). It was more than a decade later when the Department of Education introduced a partnership initiative between three higher education institutions in NI to provide a specialist course for IM post-primary student teachers (Farren et al., 2019). Nevertheless, teacher recruitment remains a significant challenge for this growing sector.

In NI, while *Teaching: The Reflective Profession* (GTCNI, 2007) outlines twenty-seven teaching competences, only one identifies specific knowledge and skills characteristic of the IM teacher. The other competences are generic without specific context that addresses the significant degree to which some of them must be adapted, in order to be relevant to the IM teacher. In 2019, The GTCNI convened a working group to review the 27 competences articulated in *Teaching: The Reflective Profession* (2007), and to make them more practical for users (DE, 2016). Although not as yet published, the revised professional learning framework is presented graphically as a lens, identifying four broad competence areas: applying knowledge and understanding; working with others; solving problems; and communicating effectively. Competence statements within each area are set out as essential minimum expectations and may be enhanced by teachers, depending on the specific context of their school (SMUCB, 2021). The challenge for the IME sector remains in place, therefore, to identify distinctive IM competences and to ensure alignment with guidelines for professional learning.

IM teacher education provision in the Republic of Ireland

In the ROI, all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes incorporate specific optional modules which focus on IME and bilingual pedagogy and theory. In relation to post-primary IME ITE provision, one programme, a Professional Master of Education, is offered by the University of Galway. An additional postgraduate offering, Master of Education in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht Education, is available at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and caters for the professional needs of practising IM primary and post-primary teachers since 2012. Recent policy developments (e.g. Policy on Gaeltacht Education, 2016-2022) has positively impacted on the provision of IM teacher education. Since 2018, the Master of Education in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht Education at Mary Immaculate College has been fully funded by the DE. In addition, a fully funded Bachelor of Education through the Medium of Irish was launched at Marino Institute of Education, Dublin, and is aimed at students who wish to teach through the medium of Irish in the IME sector at primary level. Despite current provision, research constantly highlights how the specific needs of teachers in IME contexts are not being met (Ní Thuairisg, 2014; Ó Ceallaigh, 2020; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019; Ó Duibhir, 2018).

However, the Policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht, which is due to be launched in 2023, offers some promising potential. It is set to examine how the supply of teachers with the required linguistic competence and pedagogical knowledge base can be increased to meet demand in the IM sector. *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* (2020) sets out the requirements which all programmes of qualification for teaching in Ireland must meet in order to gain accreditation from the Teaching Council. It is also a benchmark for anybody seeking to register as a teacher in Ireland. While an emphasis is placed on the cultivation of teacher identity and agency, elements which are fundamental to high-quality instruction in immersion (e.g. Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019), the graduate teacher standards lack specificity for the IM sector. In addition, *Looking at Our Schools 2022* (Department of Education, 2022) provides a comprehensive overview of quality standards for both teaching and school leadership. While IME school leaders use this framework to reflect on and refine educational provision in their schools, arguably, the framework lacks the specificity required for formative and continued IME school development. Therefore, the identification of a profession-specific body of knowledge, i.e. immersion-specific competences, that informs practice and accreditation of IME teacher education programmes, is critical to advance and complement this work.

Baseline framework of professional competences for immersion teachers

The identification of immersion-specific competences (i.e. professional values, knowledge, understanding, skills and practices) is essential to drive teacher professional growth and student achievement. Research on the critical components of immersion teacher knowledge is still evolving.

Over the last two decades, scholars have identified defining characteristics, practices and standards for immersion (Cloud, Genesee & Hamayan, 2000; Guerrero & Lachance, 2018; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghda, 2017; Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan & Leavy, 2017, 2019; Tedick & Mathieu, 2018).

Cloud, Genesee and Hamayan (2000) identify critical features of enriched education. These critical features of effective enriched education programmes include: parental involvement; high standards;

strong leadership; developmental in nature; student-centred instruction; instruction is integrated with challenging academic instruction; reflective teachers; programmes are integrated with other school programmes and schools; programmes aim for additive bilingualism.

Guerrero and Lachance (2018) propose a set of National Dual Language Education Teacher Preparation Standards (NDLETPS). Buttressed by empirical studies, the six standards provide guidance while allowing for the flexibility to address myriad local contextual realities and language groups. The standards' domains include bilingualism and biliteracy; sociocultural competence; instruction and pedagogies; authentic assessment; professionalism, advocacy and agency; programme design; and curricular leadership.

Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Shéaghdha (2017) extrapolated IME practitioner-informed indicators of good practice in immersion. The ten categories include comprehensiveness of immersion model; programme structure, integration and planning; responsibility, leadership and evaluation; curriculum; pedagogy; tailored professional development; systematic teaching of L2/L1; strong community links; maximising language use and socialization; government support; and resources.

In a study which explored the demands on pre-service elementary teachers as learners of language immersion teaching, Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan and Leavy (2017) identified the following essential practices for practical application: proactive planning; input (comprehensible and form-focused); emphasis on output; meaning-focused processing and interaction; form-focused instruction; teacher language awareness; reflective practice; assessment.

Tedick and Mathieu (2018) designed a research-informed rubric which describes effective dual language teaching practices. The rubric includes eight strands and each of them is divided into specific sub-strands. The goal is to articulate the skills and knowledge that are uniquely related to the immersion context and that are necessary for promoting high levels of academic achievement and bilingual/biliteracy development.

While defining characteristics, practices and standards for diverse immersion contexts have been identified (c/f Appendix 1 for an overview), research on immersion teacher education does not transfer smoothly across borders. There is still a notable lack of research on a wide variety of topics relating to immersion teacher preparation and development, e.g. the connection between teacher education and policy in immersion programmes. This dearth is particularly cogent in the Irish context.

Key Findings from the Literature Review

Introduction

Some key themes gleaned from the aforementioned frameworks and the existing literature will now be considered. An in-depth discussion of the identified themes is outside the scope of this report. The condensed review signals that our insights into immersion education are still evolving just as the system itself is expanding and diversifying.

Immersion teacher values

Researchers agree that the principles and practices of the immersion teacher require competence in a complex range of specialist knowledge, strategies, and dispositions that are interdependent and intersect in dynamic ways (Cammarata & Cavanagh, 2018; Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2020; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017). One corollary to this fundamental principle is the fact that the immersion teacher faces distinctive, additional demands and challenges in the professional setting (Mhic Aoidh, 2020; Ní Thuairisg, 2020; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017). Academic literature does not adequately explore the drivers and motivating factors that lead a teacher to choose the tougher immersion option. However, woven through the literature are insights and references that point to a distinctive set of values and a strong sense of identity as an immersion teacher that merits further attention (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019; Tedick & Zilmer, 2020). Specific values that underpin core immersion competencies appear in academic literature as principles that define, inspire and guide practice. Values imbue the corpus of research that examines teacher language awareness and proficiency (Mhic Aoidh, 2021; Ó Ceallaigh, 2020), teachers' commitment to professional learning (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019), and the importance of partnerships with parents (Mhic Mhathúna & Nic Fhionnlaioich, 2021; Nig Uidhir et al., 2018; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017).

Immersion teacher knowledge

In immersion, successful content learning is particularly dependent on language. Scholars speculate that challenges linked to immersion students' language development can be partly attributed to a lack of teacher knowledge about language, i.e. insufficient attention being paid to the teaching of language and literacy skills as well as insufficient knowledge on how to effectively target these dimensions all at once at the curricular or instructional level (Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2018; Lyster, 2007). Although immersion teachers perceive that they are always teaching language, immersion-specific knowledge is required to consistently balance language and content in instruction (Ó Ceallaigh, 2013; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019). Discipline-specific vocabulary knowledge is noted as a persistent challenge (Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2020; Ní Chathasaigh, 2020; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2020; Ó Treasaigh 2019). Significant gaps in immersion teachers' declarative knowledge¹ about, and competence in, the immersion language have been reported (Ní Chathasaigh, 2020; Nic Réamoinn 2017; Ní Thuairisg 2014; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2020). These linguistic deficiencies also constrain immersion teachers from integrating a focus on language (i.e. form-focused instruction) in systematic and contextualised ways across the immersion curriculum (Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2020; Ó Ceallaigh, 2013; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019).

¹ Information and knowledge regarding language items and subsystems, such as word definitions and rules.

Pedagogical skills and practices

It is universally agreed that teacher proficiency in the target language, involving a wide range of advanced linguistic skills, is needed as a vehicle for pedagogical competences (Mhic Aoidh, et al., 2016; Ó Ceallaigh, et al., 2018; Kirk & Ó Baoill, 2002; Ó Duibhir, 2018). The skilful application of immersion strategies, like the examples below, will make demands on IM teachers' language agility as well as their pedagogical competence. Immersion teachers avail of creative strategies to provide pupils with comprehensible input (Baker, 2014; Fortune, 2000), for example, using linguistic contextual cues (Nig Uidhir, 2013), non-linguistic cues and other scaffolding techniques to improve access to meaning. Effective modelling and scaffolding (Tedick & Lyster, 2020) enable pupils to engage with more cognitively challenging tasks (Cummins, 2000). Significant advances have been made in research into corrective feedback as a strategy that can empower pupils to take ownership of the target language (Llinares & Lyster, 2014; Ó Duibhir, 2018; Tedick & Lyster, 2020). A complimentary approach to content-based, meaning-orientated strategies and the more explicit, analytical instruction of language form is now more frequently recommended for IME (Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2020; Nig Uidhir, et al., 2020; Ó Duibhir, 2018) aiming for pupils' improved grammatical accuracy and metalinguistic understanding. Research into translanguaging also questions the traditional view of languages as requiring exclusive, protected spaces and introduces a teaching strategy that systematically uses both languages to create meaning (Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Brolcháin, 2020; Tedick & Lyster, 2020). Insights into early years immersion strategies and what constitutes good practices at IM pre-school and foundation stages have also become a focus of enquiry (Andrews, 2006; Mhic Aoidh, 2020; Ní Chearnaigh, 2016).

Leadership and capacity

Research that points to the benefits of immersion education is typically based on outcomes associated with effective leadership and management processes (Genesee et al., 2006; Hunt, 2011). However, sustained improvement in the educational outcomes for language immersion students depends on the quality of leadership at a number of levels in the immersion context. IME leaders need to have a clear vision anchored in an immersion-specific knowledge base and believe in the value of immersion-specific research, have an awareness of existing research findings and draw on that solid knowledge base regularly in their leadership work (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghda, 2021). In addition, IME leaders are required to cultivate contexts on inclusivity and generate 'professional development experiences for IME educators, including themselves, to craft, share and effectively use immersion-specific knowledge in relation to an integrated school-wide approach of content and language planning, implementation, assessment and evaluation' (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghda, 2021).

Conclusion

The theme of immersion-specific teacher competencies bears more exploration, both for improvement of IME programmes in general and for the potential to contribute to the larger discussion about teacher preparation and accreditation for immersion in Ireland. Yet, to date, few studies consult with the teaching profession to identify the immersion-specific competences demanded by the immersion educational setting. What constitutes an ideal immersion knowledge base has yet to be well understood or clearly described (Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2020; Tedick & Lyster, 2020). Informed by sociocultural theory and guided by the work of Shulman (1987) on teacher knowledge, this study aimed to firstly identify this ideal knowledge base and secondly to provide examples of these distinctive professional competences in practice.

Methodology

The study set out to address the following research questions:

- What are the distinctive professional competences that are considered essential for Irish-medium teachers?
- How are these immersion-specific competences manifested in practice?

Informed by sociocultural theory and the work of Shulman (1987), an interpretative lens was used to guide this mixed methods study. Data was collected from individual semi-structured interviews, a student teacher symposium, focus groups and from an online questionnaire.

Participant selection

Purposive sampling was utilised to ensure that participants were representative of the IME professional community, north and south. The range of participant groups included the following:

IM student teachers who had completed at least one placement in an IM school;

Teachers and principals from IM primary and post-primary schools, including 3 IM units as well as 2 Gaeltacht-based schools;

Teacher educators from undergraduate and postgraduate IM teacher education programmes.

Data Collection

Table 1: Overview of data collection methods and participants

Data collection method	Student teachers	Practising teachers	Principals	ITE providers
focus groups	8		8	4
individual semi-structured interviews		8		
a student teacher symposium	4			
an online questionnaire	46			

(Total = 78)

The data collection sequence is detailed below:

- Two focus groups were conducted with ITE students from two different ITE institutions in June 2021 (1 in NI and 1 in ROI). These interviews enabled the researchers to tap into the lived experiences of ITE students and explore immersion-specific competences from an ITE student-informed perspective.
- Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with primary and post-primary teachers from a variety of immersion contexts (four from NI – two primary and two post-primary, four from ROI – two primary and two post-primary) to gain a practising immersion teacher-informed perspective.
- Two focus groups were conducted with principals. One focus group comprised two NI and two ROI primary immersion principals while the other comprised two NI and two ROI post-primary immersion principals. Focus groups were used strategically to saturate understandings and to provide insight on issues of central concern.

- A student teacher symposium was conducted during an IME conference on 11 June 2022 – *An Tríú Comhdháil Taighde Uile-Oileánda ar an Tumoideachas* – to generate additional data on ITE student perspectives, experiences and IME learning.
- One focus group was conducted with ITE immersion providers (one representative from four higher education institutions) to unpack the emerging themes related to immersion-specific competences. This focus group interaction was used to generate data that would be less accessible without the group interaction and to fill in gaps in understanding derived primarily from the other sources.
- A short questionnaire was utilised to generate information on ITE students' opinions, attitudes, beliefs on the emerging themes as aligned with immersion-specific competences. ITE students from three IM academic programmes in two Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were invited to complete the questionnaire.

During the weeks prior to scheduled interviews, participants received a short guide to the interview and focus group questions. Some closed questions about professional experience in IM settings were followed by prompts to open-ended questions that related to four broad themes. These broad areas of enquiry connect with the research questions and arose from the academic literature. This approach promoted consistency in the data and provided opportunities for participants to draw upon their own experiences and to share insights and views. The question guide for each category of participants was adapted as appropriate to their roles, but the template and thematic content was similar. All interviews were conducted by the researchers, with some conducted jointly to ensure consistency and strengthen collaboration on the project.

Data Analysis

Initially, recorded content from interviews and focus groups was transcribed. A rigorous, iterative thematic analysis was conducted on each set of transcribed data. The researchers followed the seven steps outlined by Norton (2009), beginning with immersion in reading the transcribed material and looking for general themes, through the processes of generating categories, deleting, checking, linking themes and presenting findings. Both researchers shared in this work in order to consult on decisions as the key themes emerged. The systematic coding of participants' input allowed the researchers to present the data set as a synthesis of participants' views while still being able to identify different backgrounds (e.g. primary teacher, post-primary principal, student, etc.). Work began with thematic analysis of individual teacher interviews and progressed to group transcriptions. Two open-ended questions within the student survey were analysed using a content analytic approach, using key words in the responses as the unit of analysis.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was sought and secured from the Research Ethics Committee at St. Mary's University College, Belfast, for this study. The researchers also adhered to the BERA's *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2018*.

Key findings from data analysis and discussion

Three broad themes emerged from the analysis – vision and values, teacher knowledge for immersion, and pedagogical skills and practices. Findings associated with each identified theme will now be discussed in turn.

Vision and values

Conceptual context

As the participants drew upon observations and experiences that impacted on their self-awareness as IM practitioners, certain core values emerged as a constant point of reference in the debate. The interaction of specific IM values with identity, beliefs and aspirations is set within a sociocultural context. Context is integral in sociocultural theory (Ó Duibhir, 2018) and teachers' values are embedded in that context. Participants' values were integrated into multiple sociocultural aspects of their roles as IM teachers. Values expressed by participants were simultaneously positioned as a constant and also as being integral to a socially constructed process of interactions with other Irish-speakers, learners and their families.

The four ethical values that underpin the role of every teacher – respect, care, integrity and trust, as outlined in the *Code of Conduct for Teachers* (Teaching Council, 2016) – are in synergy with values expressed by IM teachers in this study. Immersion-specific values are inter-related with generic core professional values, and they add new dimensions to them.

The voice of IM professionals

Commitment to the Irish language

Having a vision for IME and a belief in its intrinsic value were considered important distinctive characteristics of the IME teacher.

Perhaps it relates to a vision... That we believe in immersion education, we believe in its value and giving this experience to the children in your class. So as teachers we feel, this is the place that I love, because I love to help promote the Irish language and to offer learning through the language. (Interview#6: Post-primary teacher)

Student teachers' use of the word 'grá' (love) in relation to the language, was among the top key words used in their questionnaire responses. A love for Irish was also a value that linked to wider observations about teaching.

She loved the Irish language. She was proud of the language and she didn't criticise us for making mistakes. She helped us to solve them. (Questionnaire: Student teacher)

A range of perspectives on teacher competence in Irish emerged. A high degree of language proficiency may be required as a non-negotiable standard or the applicants' openness to professional development may override a more limited degree of mastery at the point of recruitment, according to principals.

Inclusion

Teachers referred to pupils' confidence in their cultural identity as a goal that was worth sharing with other schools that serve multi-ethnic communities. In this context, one of the teachers emphasised the Irish word 'muintearas' that engenders a sense of community, togetherness and belonging and 'fáilteachas' which conveys openness and inclusion:

For me, community (muintearas) is really important in Irish-medium education. That the pupils feel good and know they are valued... Sometimes people disagree with that and don't understand that basically everyone, whatever their background, can have the opportunity to experience education through the medium of Irish. It is all about being welcoming, I would say. (Interview#8: Post-primary teacher)

Teacher educators too commended the respect for other cultures that teachers promote in immersion settings (Nic Aindriú et al., 2022).

Professional attitudes

IM principals discussed the importance of considering teachers' professional attitudes and values, at the interview stage of the selection process. It was argued that particular IM values empowered IM teachers to be effective and ultimately impacted on pupil progress and on their holistic wellbeing. This topic began with a distinction drawn between teacher mindset and skillset, emphasising the importance of the former.

Sometimes people are highly competent in the language and yet they don't have that passion for it. (Focus group#4: Primary principal)

Teachers' commitment to reflective practice, professional enquiry, continuing learning, and sharing best practice were strands of a common theme among participants, inextricably linked to improving the learning experience of pupils.

How are these values and principles manifested in practice?

Child-centred

Participants' deliberations about professional competences tended to explicitly reference pupil wellbeing.

They (teachers) have high expectations for the children. They cultivate self-confidence in them, they cultivate respect and a sense of self-worth in them. They contribute to a learning environment that is diverse, comprehensive, inquiring... And that comes through on the playing fields also, or in music groups. An all-rounded person. Heart and passion. (Focus group#2: Primary principal)

Cultural identity

Teacher self-awareness was also imbued by a sense of belonging to a wider cultural and language community. Participants were explicit about the aim of IM teachers to transmit a sense of belonging to a rich culture and heritage to pupils.

(The teacher) needs to understand that this is not an ordinary classroom and that you also focus on heritage and culture and try to communicate that to the children, through the language and the curriculum. (Interview#4: Primary teacher)

Irish beyond the classroom

Participants reported that a commitment to instil in pupils a love for the Irish language linked to pedagogical approaches in class as well as whole school ethos. Teachers used proactive strategies to encourage pupils' use of Irish outside the classroom also. This aspect of their role demands the consistent and constant attention of the IM teacher.

Student teachers discussed the importance of a connection between the Irish-medium school and the wider community. They put this principle into practice through their contribution to extra-curricular activities and extending the pupils' opportunities for using Irish outside the classroom. IM principals agreed with the importance of a rounded cultural set of values that is used to enrich the pupil experience. One example of how this value-set is manifested is in the provision of extra-curricular activities, promoting Irish culture as an integral part of the Irish-medium experience.

Community

The concept of community was discussed from multiple perspectives by participants, for example within the classroom, at school level, sectoral level and regional and wider levels. Awareness of the unique role of parents as members of the IM community was contextualised as an important value in the interest of children's progress. IM Classroom Assistants also play a distinctive, highly valued role in the IM community. In the IM unit, separate accommodation on the school campus was a factor that helped facilitate a more cohesive IM school community.

So, we got a separate building on campus. We have our own little Gaeltacht and, for immersion education, that is probably one of the things that is important to develop. (Focus group#5: Post-primary principal)

Gaeltacht areas: a fragile resource

The participants' relationship with the Gaeltacht regions and Gaeltacht colleges reflected multiple perspectives on the Gaeltacht as a cultural and linguistic resource that was relevant to them in their roles as IM professionals. One teacher discussed it in the context of his own professional development, i.e. attending summer courses to improve his command of Irish. Teacher educators outlined requirements for the IM students to attend Gaeltacht courses. Other participants spoke passionately about the collective responsibility to preserve the native language in Gaeltacht communities.

Conclusion

It is widely accepted that there is an additional dimension to the professional demands placed on the immersion teacher. Why would a teacher choose the harder route? The answer to that question lies in the values espoused by the Irish-medium community itself, and represented in this study by student teachers, teachers and school principals or senior leaders. Participants' provided perceptive insights into the motivations, dispositions and belief systems that infused the cognitive understandings and pedagogical practices of the Irish-medium teacher. The spirit of professional service assumes a new layer of meaning for immersion teachers.

Teacher knowledge for immersion

Conceptual context

There is wide agreement that a common body of specialised and systematised knowledge exists that should inform teaching and should form part of teacher education and professional learning. With regards to immersion education, research and theorizing in this area are still in their infancy (Cammarata & Cavanagh, 2018; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2021; Morton, 2017). In this study, participants demonstrated a commitment to developing high-quality practices in their immersion settings fuelled by immersion-specific knowledge. Domains of immersion-specific knowledge required for programme advocacy, language teaching, pedagogical integration, and inclusion, as reported by participants, will now be considered. While these domains are discussed as distinct categories, they are interwoven and blended together in practice and thus should be perceived as an integrated knowledge base for immersion.

The voice of IM professionals

Knowledge for immersion advocacy

It is essential that immersion teachers have knowledge and understand the theoretical principles and research-based rationale that underlie the defining features, goals and benefits of multiple immersion models. It is equally important that immersion teachers demonstrate an understanding of key characteristics and concepts associated with these models and can use this information creatively to inform others and to advocate proactively on behalf of the school to a variety of audiences, as participants highlight below.

As an immersion teacher, you must be knowledgeable about language and pedagogy, and beyond that, you understand and can explain the advantages to learning through Irish. (Interview#8: Primary teacher)

Our psychologist tells us that any child with a disability, especially if it relates to language, should not be in an IM school... I disagree with that. (Interview#2: Primary teacher)

Other participants referred to the lack of appropriate assessment tools in Irish which is a constraint for both teachers and educational psychologists (Murthagh & Seoighe, 2020).

Participants viewed knowledge for communication and relationship building, underpinned by immersion teacher identity and agency, as key drivers in the cultivation of community and educational success in immersion.

It is the school community that inspires the pupils to learn... (Consider) what does the pupil need, and then, what would it take to get that pupil ready for learning, before focusing on facts, knowledge and textbooks. (Focus group#7: Post-primary principal)

Participants, as cultural architects, also strived to promote sociocultural competence among immersion learners and to positively shape their students' identities or how they perceived themselves as members of the language community, i.e. providing culturally responsive and engaging contexts for learners.

Teacher knowledge about language

Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Chathasaigh (2021, p. 90) claim that it is the "responsibility of immersion teachers to maintain high levels of communicative linguistic competence in the language(s) of instruction so as to enable them to provide the necessary input and feedback to develop student proficiency in the immersion language(s)". This was also noted by participants.

(Teachers) need to develop their own Irish so that the pupils can also have good Irish. (Interview#8: Post-primary teacher)

An understanding about linguistic systems demanded by discipline-specific terminology and discursive practices was perceived as critical for sustained success. Participants viewed a knowledge of variation in immersion language registers needed to engage in different classroom tasks as essential to cultivate subject-specific literacies and language practices.

... The first thing (to ask) is do you know the terminology. For example, maths, you need all the maths terminology and the language to teach it. (Interview#1: Primary teacher)

The specific knowledge to enable teachers to identify and focus learners' attention on particular aspects of the immersion language form during disciplinary instruction (i.e. form-focused instruction) was also acknowledged as salient. However, having meaningful metalanguage to talk about language was also reported as being instrumental to such an endeavour.

You require an understanding of what knowledge the pupil has, or does not yet have, and you must draw the language that is within their range from them, in some other way that is suitable for them, and you need to know how to correct their errors positively. (Interview#4: Primary teacher)

A knowledge of the process by which immersion students acquire languages, a comprehension of how to design instructional strategies that push language development forward and a capacity to create a meaningful and relevant context which promotes language learning, use and development was regarded as critical.

... Especially the pupils' metacognitive skills and how they learn effectively through Irish, especially coming from a district like this. (Interview#8: Post-primary teacher)

However, management of language-use behaviour was noted as a persistent struggle. A knowledge of crafting a pedagogy that establishes a high-quality immersion language environment, an environment shaped by explicit quality criteria, high expectations, social support and student self-regulation was perceived as fundamental to success. Knowing how to enlist student engagement and participation in the promotion and use of the immersion language inside and outside the classroom context was also viewed as a critical domain of an immersion teacher's knowledge base.

Knowledge for pedagogical integration in immersion

A coherent pedagogy for content and language integration was considered a keystone practice of immersion.

We're talking about another level of responsibility in immersion education. We're talking about pedagogy and language – vocabulary, grammar, accuracy all interwoven through the pedagogy. While teaching in class, whatever class, or subject, both language and subject are to be taught. (Interview#5: Post-primary teacher)

Participants had high expectations in relation to language use, however, scaffolding for accurate and sustained language production in content classes challenged teachers. While the development of high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy and content learning was important for participants, they expressed concern in relation to the use of translanguaging in immersion.

There is no role for English in the teaching of (modern) languages in the Gaeltacht school. Teachers in the Gaeltacht school are so proud of their Irish. If English was to become a necessary part of the teaching and learning, the teachers would feel that the battle was lost.

There is no place for English in teaching (modern) languages in a Gaeltacht school... French and Irish are used together... Teachers in the Gaeltacht school are so proud of their Irish. If English became a necessary part of teaching, teachers would feel they had failed. (Interview#5: Post-primary teacher)

Immersion teachers assess in ways that attend to both content and language. However, participants reported that the design and implementation of such integrated assessments presented challenges as the quotation below illustrates.

How do you assess SESE (Social, Environmental and Scientific Education) if you are dealing with pressure of time and a lack of language? It is really difficult to assess those things. (Interview#2: Primary teacher)

Knowledge for inclusion

High quality professional judgement is a critically important tool for the IM teacher, particularly in light of the shortage of appropriate diagnostic tools. Participants highlighted the importance of acquiring practical, empirically-motivated advice on how to best address the needs of immersion students with diverse abilities. Support was needed to manage multicultural classrooms and to generate contexts of inclusivity in relation to language, literacy, culture and learning.

[Teachers need to] ... be knowledgeable about cultivating a learning environment that is diverse, all-embracing and enquiry-based. (Focus group#2 with primary principals)

Participants also reported on the challenging nature of differentiation in immersion – differentiating for language and for content.

We must differentiate everything. At the moment, we have differentiated because of covid also... (Interview#3: Primary teacher)

How is immersion-specific teacher knowledge cultivated?

Immersion teachers need to be learning professionals who base their everyday practice on an updated, coherent and integrated knowledge base. Therefore, effective TPL for immersion teachers needs to be delicately calibrated to the myriad of knowledge bases required.

Table 2 below outlines the particular contexts, as reported by participants, which support immersion-specific knowledge development. The additional detail contained in the elaborations provides depth and context to the identified professional learning context.

Table 2: Contexts that support immersion-specific teacher knowledge development

Professional Learning Context	Elaboration
Teaching	Teachers applied, tested, adapted and developed their knowledge through practice and as a consequence, generated new teacher knowledge.
Informal learning from colleagues	Joint discussions and reflections about immersion-specific pedagogical dilemmas and experiences through various means prompted professional growth, e.g. staffroom and schoolyard discussions, shared commutes to and from work.
Collaborative planning with colleagues	Participants viewed teacher collaboration as an important feature of well-designed TPL.

Team teaching	Participants availed of practical team-teaching experiences and expert guidance to learn about the context-appropriate use of immersion knowledge.
Mentoring	Through mentoring efforts, teachers were enabled to experiment and probe knowledge in practice and discuss and analyse outcomes.
Cross-sectoral partnerships	Cross-sectoral partnerships, excursions and knowledge exchange were viewed as a means of enhancing educational provision and capacity.
Leadership opportunities	Participants reported that leadership opportunities supported knowledge exchange and co-construction, collective reflection and growth.
Whole-school initiatives	Whole-school initiatives developed common understandings of immersion pedagogy and boosted teacher knowledge growth.
Facilitating professional learning sessions/workshops	Participants sought and responded to feedback from learners, colleagues and other education professionals, and engaged in collaborative problem solving and learning-focused collegial discussions.
Reflective practice	This systematic inquiry enabled teachers to actively shape their own professional learning and validate, affirm and improve their practice.
North/South partnerships	North/South partnerships were noted as being especially valuable to share, cultivate and learn about the context-adequate use of immersion-specific knowledge.
Community of practice (CoP)	CoPs, e.g. Area Learning Communities, were perceived as powerful means of TPL to jointly reflect on immersion pedagogy and co-construct knowledge.
Research and scholarship	Engagement with postgraduate studies, in particular action research projects, generated knowledge growth.
Social media	Social media engagement, e.g. Facebook, Instagram, enriched immersion teacher knowledge.

Immersive experiences in the Gaeltacht	Immersive educational experiences in the Gaeltacht provided worthwhile opportunities to enhance knowledge about the immersion language.
Immersion-specific webinars, courses, symposia and conferences	Webinars, courses, symposia and conferences were utilised for identifying and pursuing relevant immersion-specific TPL opportunities.

Conclusion

Immersion teachers strive to craft and enact an integrated pedagogy that promotes high levels of intellectual quality, establishes a high-quality learning environment and generates significance by connecting immersion students with the intellectual demands of their work. To fulfil these roles, immersion teachers need to be learning experts who base their everyday practice on a regularly updated and integrated knowledge base, informed by research and practice. Particular domains of that immersion-specific knowledge base are identified above, namely, knowledge for programme advocacy, language teaching, pedagogical integration, and inclusion. However, expert immersion teachers are not simply owners of deep professional knowledge, they must also know how to apply knowledge adequately in different pedagogical contexts and situations. The challenge of generating a solid and updated immersion-specific knowledge base remains a concern for the profession. However, the multiple, diverse and innovative TPL contexts, as described by participants above, offer promising potential for immersion-specific knowledge renewal.

Pedagogical skills and practices

Conceptual context

Shulman (1987) claims that a focus on teaching strategies and skills, although relevant, is inadequate as an understanding of pedagogy. Participants in this research demonstrated that their insights into pedagogical strategies and skills were informed and shaped by conceptual understanding as well as by their own experience and professional learning. Participants' analysis of immersion pedagogy, in this study, is embedded in a sociocultural framework. The challenges associated with developing pupils' communicative and academic proficiency in the target language are critically discussed by participants, along with strategies for addressing them.

The voice of IM professionals

The developmental continuum, along which the participants' pedagogical understanding and skillset progress, was highlighted in some of the responses and themes that emerged. More experienced teachers recognized that newly qualified teachers today begin their careers, already equipped with a basic understanding of immersion education.

For some years now, it is clear that new teachers have an understanding of immersion education... They are not experts but they have some understanding. (Interview#5: Post-primary teacher)

Principal teachers referred to the newly qualified teachers' introduction to IME as immersive, in terms of building the skills necessary for the job. Presentations made by students at the Student Symposium highlighted specific strategies, activities and teaching resources in their lesson plans, integrating language objectives with curricular content objectives. Immersion principles underpinned their lessons. In the student survey, participants were asked to describe an effective IM teacher. Their evaluation of outstanding qualities of teachers demonstrated a fusion of teaching skills, interpersonal strengths and both pedagogical and subject knowledge.

She was a native speaker. She had lovely oral expressions. Always supportive and she gave us appropriate feedback to help us improve in the subject. (Questionnaire: Student teacher)

All groups of participants emphasised the importance of knowledge and skills required for Content and Language Integrated Learning. Teacher educators developed this observation further by identifying the importance of flexible, smooth application of these skills so that they are integrated naturally into classroom practice:

It is important to be able to apply CLIL skills and strategies consistently, and to weave them into teaching in a natural way and in a meticulous way. (Focus group: Teacher educator)

Teachers also differentiated between the pedagogical skills that helped pupils to acquire the target language in the first instance and to build proficiency and strategies related to fostering use of Irish among pupils. In an interview, a post-primary teacher expressed a degree of uncertainty about subject teachers' awareness of their role as language teachers "... to help children take ownership of the language, synthesising (subject) knowledge and vocabulary." She also defined 'vocabulary' to encompass verbs and the wider language needed to discuss scientific concepts. This teacher recommended more emphasis on CLIL as part of initial teacher education, reducing the staff development required in school.

All participants cast out a wide net when the conversation turned to examples of immersion-specific skills and diverse ways to scaffold learning in the target language. Exploration of pedagogical skills links back to teacher language awareness, including teacher competence in Irish, linguistic knowledge, translation skills, the ability to 'play' with the language – lower and raise the level of complexity as appropriate, to deconstruct and reconstruct messages as highlighted below.

A high standard of Irish, confident in your own language, the ability to say something in many different ways, being able to manipulate the language. (Interview#7: Post-primary teacher)

Teachers also discussed the practice of blending language teaching through content with a more explicit form-focused approach to language teaching:

... The children analyse the verbs and identify patterns and they do the working out. I say to them, 'We are going to construct a guide for someone who has no understanding of the past tense. What will we write for them?' (Interview#4: Primary teacher)

How are these pedagogical skills and strategies manifested in practice?

The following examples of strategies were considered integral to the immersion approach. They all relate to the teacher's communicative competence, involving a multifaceted skill set that is used to enrich the immersion pupils' learning experience, guide them towards language proficiency and open the door to understanding of curricular content. Teacher educators explicated the requirement for language objectives in all lessons and for teacher's critical reflection on the language forms in use. A focus on language form as well as exposure to language embedded in content delivery was recommended.

Language modelling

The immersion teacher provides language input for the class and is often the primary language source. Student teachers in a focus group discussed 'teacher talk' in the context of modelling target language structures, understanding that it goes beyond key vocabulary. Structured interactions between the teacher and the classroom assistant were perceived as an invaluable teaching resource and a model for critical teaching points. All participants agreed that modelling the target language for pupils demands a high level of professional competence in the language. Teacher proficiency in oral Irish is a pre-requisite for providing rich comprehensible input. The same point was made with regards to modelling written language:

The IM teacher has to be creative and be able to produce resources, especially in maths and other areas of the curriculum. If teachers are going to create resources, they have to be accurate (in Irish). (Focus group: Primary principal)

Teacher talk

Participants reported that this skill requires linguistic agility and flexibility and is applied in various formats:

- Simplify and change the language as appropriate, for example recognising where the teacher needs to adapt the language in some printed resources, usually simplifying the language of the textbook.
- Employ reciprocity in oral interactions with pupils, with the teacher facilitating and eliciting progressively more advanced use of pupil language. A post-primary teacher described the teaching of maths, reflecting critically on her own use of language 'on the run', monitoring the pupils' level of comprehension, paraphrasing or incorporating alternative expressions to augment comprehension and building on what the pupil already holds in his or her linguistic repertoire.
- Adjust pace of language used in teacher talk as appropriate, e.g. participants emphasised the importance of slow, clear communication especially during the early months in post-primary. Participants also stressed the importance of using voice effectively to "emphasise key words" when talking to pupils.
- Repetition is a familiar tool for the immersion teacher. Again, it is used creatively, sometimes emphatically, supported by concrete resources and sometimes more subtly.

Effective Questioning

In the immersion setting, teacher questioning goes beyond assessment and enquiry and is used to draw the pupil towards a more satisfactory oral communication of a message. This requires sensitivity and at times levity and adjustment of questioning style to avoid pressure on pupils. Below, a primary teacher discusses how he helps a child to describe a concept by involving other pupils in the process.

If you are asking for an answer or looking for evidence that a problem is understood, and you realise that they understand the problem but can't (explain it clearly) because they don't have the language, that is where effective questioning come in, so you can turn things around. You don't want to pressurize them... So perhaps other people (pupils) can help them to start the response and then you can return to the first pupil to complete the response. (Interview#4: Primary teacher)

Corrective feedback

In addition to multiple exposures to the target language, and strategies to encourage endeavours that approximate standard forms, as part of the language acquisition process, all participants posited the need for corrective feedback.

Language planning

Immersion teachers plan systematically for integration of language with other content learning intentions. This involves careful attention to the suitability and adaptation of resources.

I couldn't just take out the OSIE book and teach a history lesson, as I know it (the Irish) would be too difficult in it. You have to be prepared for everything. Every lesson is a vocabulary lesson. (Interview#2: Post-primary teacher)

Language planning requires thinking beyond the actual lesson to anticipate possible questions that might be asked or unexpected directions that the lesson might take. Participants reported that this level of planning challenges teachers to consider their own linguistic range and to prepare accordingly.

Assessment

Integrated assessment of content and language requires close critical observation and attention to language form as well as subject content. Student teachers and teachers stressed the importance of continuous assessment of the pupils' progress in the target language.

Continuous assessment of pupils' language was needed. (Focus group#5: Student teacher)

You, are constantly assessing orally – vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, in every lesson. (Interview#3: Primary teacher)

At a more strategic level, one primary principal discussed her resistance to allowing assessment to drive practice and policy (for example, at the start of formal teaching of English) where it could undermine the immersion model, urging a careful response to assessment data.

Language use

Teachers described an extensive range of positive strategies for motivating pupils to speak Irish, both in class and outside class. This was perceived as an intrinsic aspect of their role.

Early years immersion education

Teachers acknowledged the distinctive competences required to establish a solid foundation for the immersion experience in the early years. A strong focus on building the foundations of language underpinned the strategies used by teachers in the early years.

Inclusion and differentiation

Participants showed sensitivity to differentiated needs of pupils. In the immersion-specific context, teachers identified a spectrum of language profiles among families that influenced the level of challenge and scaffolding required. Differentiation for newcomer children in the IM setting was raised as a challenge by student teachers. Teachers identified further competences needed to provide support for pupils with additional needs, including responding to interactions with non-Irish-speaking external services.

There is support available from speech therapists and occupational therapists. That isn't available in Irish. It involves a lot of English, but the onus is on us to take what we learn from these specialists who use mostly English and transfer that to Irish. (Interview#1: Primary teacher)

Conclusion

In this section, we have seen that immersion teachers are required to be masterful integrators. They integrate their own professional content knowledge with pedagogical knowledge; their assessment of content with assessment of language; their corrective feedback on language as well as content, shifting the pupil's attention from one to the other without losing track of the focus of the lesson. The management of these skills involves a choreography that is both carefully managed and creative.

Limitations to the research

The authors appreciate that there must be limitations to a study of this scale. The quality of engagement by participants during interviews and focus groups, in particular, led to a rich corpus of data. Student contributions to the symposium and views expressed in the survey were also insightful. However, the scale of the project and attention to wordcount made it impossible to present a full analysis of all data gleaned in this report. The researchers are planning further consultation on the draft framework of competences that emerged from this study with wider range of stakeholders. It is also noted that the voice of pupils should be included in that process and we hope to address that.

Conclusion

A shared island vision for empowering teachers

Immersion teaching is a complex task only mastered by a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. The findings from this study make explicit the multifaceted nature of IME teachers' work by identifying and describing the essential immersion-specific competences, core values, skills, and knowledge, which have formidable potential for moving the profession forward and better serving all IME learners.

Key enablers of identified core competences were also unearthed from the data. These include:

- A cohesive, coordinated, context-appropriate approach to high-quality TPL across the continuum;
- Lifelong, lifewide IME teacher learning;
- Strong, visionary leadership, underpinned by IME values, knowledge and skills, which strategically engages stakeholders in diverse IME contexts in creative and innovative ways;
- Immersion-specific curricular materials, resources and pedagogical guidelines, aligned with IME-specific criteria, which identify specific linguistic outcomes in diverse subject domains and take stock of the complexities of linguistically diverse IME classrooms;
- Collaborative relationships and accountability partnerships with parents/guardians which stimulate, support and extend teacher professional growth;
- Time for collaboration, planning, innovation, reflection and capacity building;
- Internal school review and self-evaluation processes which enable IME professionals to address TPL areas in need of development, celebrate strengths and generate cultures of inquiry;
- A legislative and regulatory framework which shapes, directs and guides IME TPL;
- Acknowledgement of the additional workload of IME teachers through appropriate incentives and rewards;
- An IME research agenda which nurtures high-quality TPL, authentic IME contexts and practices.

Findings from this SCoTENS study have potential to inform the design of an immersion-specific TPL framework in Ireland. This framework is promising as:

- it enables IME teachers to engage in ongoing, in-depth, systematic and reflective examinations of their practice, i.e. build awareness of areas that need development, acknowledge areas in which a teacher's performance excels, and promote deeper understanding of contextual and possibly systemic elements that inhibit the enactment of effective IME teaching and learning;
- it informs immersion leadership and practice at the levels of curriculum development, materials design, classroom teaching, learning and assessment;
- it enables researchers to probe and then map different domains of IME teacher knowledge and examine how IME knowledge base shapes practice and student outcomes;
- it prompts policymakers to identify areas for development in particular domains to be consequently addressed through bespoke IME teacher education and targeted TPL initiatives

Implications for policy, practice and research

It is essential that policymakers:

- acknowledge immersion teachers as experts of learning and teaching;
- anchor core immersion competences in qualification frameworks and professional standards to signal what is expected from IME teachers and how they can improve at different stages of their professional careers;
- ensure a sufficient coverage of core immersion competences in ITE programmes;
- adopt TPL standards to guide design, evaluation and funding of IME teacher professional learning initiatives to enable IME teachers to manifest and develop these core immersion competencies;
- evaluate and redesign the use of time in IME schools to increase opportunities for TPL and collaboration;
- integrate the framework for IME professional learning into school improvement initiatives;
- provide flexible funding and TPL opportunities that include sustained engagement in collaboration, mentoring and coaching.

Research findings will empower and enable IME professionals to:

- engage in deep and challenging conversations about their craft
- reflect on current and desired values, knowledge, and pedagogical skills and practices
- make TPL goals, plans and success indicators transparent
- review and refine long-established beliefs and patterns of practice
- craft a TPL whole-school plan to address identified TPL needs of staff.

Further research is essential to:

- investigate how this framework for IME teacher professional learning could serve as a basis to derive guidelines in terms of professional competencies and support systems for IME teacher education and professional development in Ireland;
- establish what type of support is most effective to develop IME teacher knowledge base and advance IME teacher preparation and development;
- explore the role of immersion teacher knowledge for teaching quality and student outcomes;
- probe the evolution of immersion-specific teacher knowledge and the effectiveness of TPL opportunities;
- examine the role of teacher educators as gatekeepers of immersion teachers' competences;
- build support for a shared vision for IME in Ireland.

Ever-accelerating changes prompt IME teachers to use educational transformations to innovate their teaching. A continuous renewal of their core competences, informed by research and practice, is therefore critical to IME teacher development, professionalism and the mastery of adaptive and transformative change. This research has potential to inform IME teacher education policy, strengthen professional IM exchange and provide a stimulus for curriculum reform and extension in IME

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Appendix 1: An overview of characteristics, practices and standards for immersion

Critical features of enriched education <i>(Cloud, Genesee & Hamayan, 2000)</i>	National Dual Language Education Teacher Preparation Standards <i>(Guerrero & Lachance, 2018)</i>	Indicators of good practice in IME <i>(Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017)</i>	Effective dual language teaching practices <i>(Tedick & Mathieu, 2018)</i>	Essential practices for practical application <i>(Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan & Leavy, 2017, 2019)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● parental involvement ● high standards ● strong leadership ● programmes are developmental in nature ● student-centred instruction ● instruction is integrated with challenging academic instruction ● reflective teachers ● programmes are integrated with other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● bilingualism and biliteracy ● sociocultural competence ● instruction and pedagogies ● authentic assessment ● professionalism, advocacy and agency ● programme design and curricular leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● comprehensiveness of immersion model ● programme structure ● integration and planning ● responsibility, leadership and evaluation ● curriculum ● pedagogy ● tailored professional development ● systematic teaching of L2/L1 ● strong community links ● maximising language use and socialization ● government support and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● planning for the integration of language, content and culture ● teaching for biliteracy development ● maintaining a linguistically-rich learning environment ● scaffolding for student comprehension ● scaffolding for student production ● teaching for language and content integration ● supporting diverse learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● proactive planning ● input (comprehensible and form-focused) ● emphasis on output ● meaning-focused processing and interaction ● form-focused instruction ● teacher language awareness ● reflective practice ● assessment

<p>school programmes and schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• programmes aim for additive bilingualism			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• serving as an advocate for students and programmes	
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