Core Competencies in Irish-Medium Education:

A Framework for Learning and Professional Development for Practitioners

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Executive Summary

Academics concur that immersion education requires a specific knowledge base and a distinctive set of skills, particularly in teaching academic subjects through an additional language, and that professional values guide immersion education. Nonetheless, few studies have outlined the specific competencies required for immersion education within the context of Irish-medium education (e.g., Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, & Leavy, 2017, 2019). Moreover, there is a dearth of research-based tools for assessing teachers' knowledge of immersion education and their proficiency in implementing these specialised pedagogical skills. A research project funded by SCoTENS, identified essential values, knowledge domains, and pedagogical practices specific to immersion education from the perspective of Irish-medium educators across Ireland, (Nig Uidhir and Ó Ceallaigh 2023). Learning gleaned from the SCoTENS project provided direction for the study presented here with the aim of developing an immersion-specific competencies framework to promote reflection, evaluation, and professional development among teachers. This work was informed by a comprehensive literature review of immersion education (e.g., Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Guerrero & Lachance, 2018; Mac Corraidh, 1998; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017; Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, & Leavy, 2017, 2019; Tedick

& Lyster, 2020; Tedick & Mathieu, 2018). The competencies specific to immersion education are categorised into three overarching themes: vision and values, practitioner knowledge, pedagogical skills and practices, presenting an overview of exemplary teaching competencies. There are 4 domains within each theme that include distinctive elements and examples of professional practice relevant to the immersion classroom.

Socio-cultural theory was utilised as well as an interpretative lens to guide this mixed methods study. A variety of sources were also used (i.e. an online questionnaire, interviews with focus groups, conference workshops), and data were gathered from key stakeholders across the continuum of Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to gain insights during the consultation process. This data was then analysed and used to improve and refine the framework. Feedback was sought from Irish-medium student teachers, practising teachers and principals in Irish-medium primary and post-primary schools (including Irish-medium units and Gaeltacht schools), teacher educators, academics and specialists in immersion education. Additionally, consultation with an international expert in the field provided valuable insights, encouraged further reflection and mitigated against researcher bias. This collaborative effort further validated the results and ensured their reliability.

It is recommended that the framework should be utilised as a diagnostic, reflective, and developmental tool to enhance teachers'
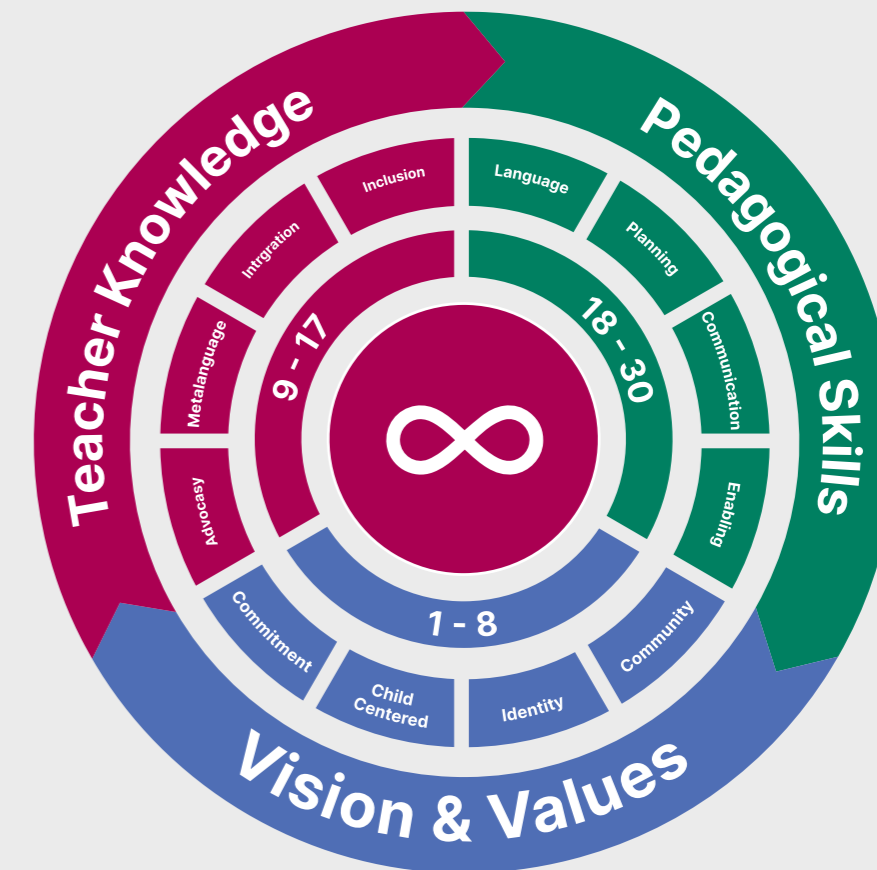
awareness of areas requiring improvement, to recognise areas of strength, and to foster a deeper understanding of contextual and systemic factors that may impede effective immersion teaching and learning. The framework is designed to be applicable and beneficial for both novice and experienced teachers alike

across various disciplines and immersion-specific teaching settings, including Gaelscoileanna, Gaeltacht schools, Gaelcholáistí, and Irish-medium units. The ultimate goal is to enhance student learning outcomes by improving classroom teaching practices.

Introduction

This chapter provides an insight into the context for the work and presents the aims of the project. It also provides an overview of initial teacher education in the Irish-medium sector and explains the research framework on which the self-assessment tool is based.

Context

This project was commissioned following recommendations published in the A Fair Start Report (RO, 2021), a report which analysed underachievement in education in Northern Ireland. A Fair Start provided evidence of persistent underachievement in education and the link with socio-economic background on a widespread basis. Regarding Irish-medium education, the Expert Panel recognised that a high number of Irish-medium schools are located in disadvantaged areas. The Expert Panel also concluded that the sector needs additional support in relation to teaching and learning resources and teacher professional learning opportunities for Irish-medium practitioners. Encouraging Irish speakers to enter Initial Teacher Education in order to meet the needs of children at risk of underachievement within the Irish-medium sector, was also acknowledged as a priority (RO, 2021, 64). Despite significant progress in key areas of Irish-medium education, there remains a diverse range of complex challenges for the Irish-medium educational community, in particular, where the impact of inequalities in society has not yet been adequately addressed. There is much to celebrate among innovative developments already achieved in Irish-medium education. However it is widely acknowledged that immersion programmes are difficult to implement and present specific challenges for teachers, learners and parents alike (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017; Ó Duibhir, 2018).

Following on from the Fair Start findings, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta commissioned a research-based project that would address questions relating to teacher education, recognising that there are close links between pupil progress and professional support for teachers. The goal set out by the authors of this work is to contribute to teacher professional learning with a focus on the critical, positive role that effective teachers can play in the lives of their students (RO, 2016). That basic principle added momentum to this study,

"It has been long established that teachers are the most important school-level factor impacting student achievement" (Tedick and Lyster, 2020, 46).

Aims of the work

The aims of this work are:

- to affirm the core competencies of the Irish-medium immersion teacher and to provide a self-assessment framework for the sector in order to identify, develop and support the professional development of the immersion teacher;
- to promote quality teaching and leadership for all learners across all settings in Irish-medium education;
- to provide a framework to guide teachers' learning and professional development in Irish-medium education;
- to develop the status of the IM teacher's profession in education by setting out in detail the complex nature of teaching in the field.

Initial Teacher Education

A new era in Irish-medium teacher education began in 1996 with the newly established Irish-medium postgraduate programme (PGCE) and the introduction of a bilingual Bachelor of Education pathway in St Mary's University College, Belfast, which emphasises Irish language competence and the pedagogies and theories of immersion education (Nig Uidhir and Ó Ceallaigh, 2023). Just over a decade later, the Irish-Medium and Irish Language Enhancement Course was introduced as an innovative partnership and collaboration between St Mary's University College, Queen's University, Belfast and Ulster University to prepare PGCE beginning teachers for the IM post-primary sector (Farren et al., 2019). In these programmes, the distinctive linguistic and pedagogical competencies of the IM teacher are developed in a nurturing, scaffolded environment that empowers participants. Nevertheless, teacher recruitment continues to present a major challenge in this growing sector. In terms of continuing professional development, a specialist Irish-medium option is also available as part of the Masters in Education programme at St Mary's University College, Belfast.

In the Republic of Ireland, each initial teacher education programme includes specific optional modules focusing on Irish-medium education. One post-primary programme, the Professional Master of Education, is available at Galway University. Another postgraduate course, the Masters in Irish-Medium and Gaeltacht Education, has been offered by Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, since 2012. In addition, a Bachelor of Education through the medium of Irish (fully funded) has commenced in Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. Despite current provision, research consistently highlights that the specific needs of teachers in Irish-medium education are not being met (Ní Thuairisg, 2014; Ó Ceallaigh, 2020; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019; Ó Duibhir, 2018).

A Call for Research-based Immersion-specific Teacher Competencies

Over the past thirty years, there has been a significant increase in the body of research published by researchers and practitioners in the field of Irish-medium education. With the growth in professional understanding among the Irish-speaking community around complex issues that challenge teachers, gaps in the system have been identified where more resources are needed. One of the most basic resources required is the research-based identification of the expectations facing the Irish-medium teacher. The identification of immersion education-specific competencies (i.e. values, knowledge, understanding, skills and professional practices) is essential to stimulate the professional development of teachers and to support pupil achievement.

In a research report investigating the workload of Irish-medium teachers in Northern Ireland, the authors acknowledged the lack of recognition of the additional competencies required by Irish-medium teachers, "Our analysis suggests that there are a number of additional competencies which are essential for the IME practitioners and their current workload is compounded by the lack of substantive support and recognition thereof" (O' Boyle et al., 2023, 4).

The current study builds on preliminary research carried out as part of a project funded by the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS), between 2021-2023 (Nig Uidhir and Ó Ceallaigh, 2023). In consultation with Irish-medium practitioners, an outline framework of the knowledge base of the IM teacher was created i.e. distinctive professional competencies considered essential for teachers in Irish-medium education. Additionally, key values underpinning the work of Irish-medium teachers were identified. That earlier study provided a solid foundation for the further consultation and analysis that was required to produce a comprehensive professional profile of the IM teacher and to create this resource.

Professional Development Framework as a resource for teachers

Irish-medium teachers often rely on their own professional judgement and experience without access to research-based resources such as a comprehensive framework of immersion-specific competencies (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019; Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Laoire, 2021). Academics agree that immersion education requires a knowledge base and a set of specific pedagogical skills – different from what is required in traditional subject or language teaching – and that immersion education is guided by professional values (Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2020; Mac Corraidh, 2008, 2021; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017; Ó Duibhir, 2018). These insights, in the form of a framework of immersion-specific competencies, is a basic resource for driving forward teacher professional growth and enabling pupil progress.

Conclusion

This project was limited in terms of the timescale of the work. However, the focus was clear throughout. Furthermore, the authors were appreciative for the opportunity to build upon research conducted between 2021 and 2023, which focused on identifying the core competencies demonstrated by Irish-medium teachers in their daily work. This project, commissioned by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, enabled the authors to further validate the research findings of 2021-2023, to discuss more widely with stakeholders and to put in place a practical resource for teachers. This self-evaluation framework is intended to be useful for individual teachers who wish to reflect on their own practice and to track progress on specific competencies being developed as an Irish-medium teacher. It is also likely that a small team or group of colleagues may benefit more from using it collectively, or at whole-school level. Most importantly, this is a resource designed to support professional reflection and improvement of practice in Irish-medium education.

Literature Review

Introduction

The immersion education model, a bilingual enrichment approach, is implemented in Irish-medium schools throughout Ireland.

The goal of Irish-medium immersion education is to foster bilingualism and biliteracy, while also promoting the growth and revitalization of minority language and culture both within the community and at a national level. Research consistently claims that learners achieve high standards in academic attainment in Irish-medium immersion settings (Harris et al., 2009; Ó hAinifén, 2007; Ní Longaigh, 2016; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2016; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016). Immersion students attain significantly higher levels in the second language (e.g. the target language, Irish in the general education system in Ireland) than students who are not in the immersion education system who study a second language as a school subject (Harris et al., 2009; Ó hAinifén, 2007). Immersion education learners reach the same levels or higher than those of their peers in mainstream education settings (Ó hAinifén, 2007; Gilleece et al., 2012; Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2020).

Research has consistently shown in recent years that pupils' expressive language skills do not match language norms in areas such as accuracy and complexity of grammar, lexical specificity and sociolinguistic suitability (Maguire, 1990; Ó Duibhir, 2018; Walsh, 2007). As a result, there is growing interest in identifying the essential knowledge base and associated teaching practices for immersion education contexts, which will enable students to achieve a high level of competency in the target language. This review analyses and audits the knowledge base and the set of specific pedagogical skills required to be an effective Irish-medium immersion teacher. Firstly, the core competencies of immersion education are examined with particular emphasis on the importance of leadership. The review analyses the specific needs of the sector and looks at relevant research carried out throughout Ireland to date. Finally, the importance of professional development to the continued success of Irish-medium education is presented

Core Competencies of Immersion Education

Academics argue that immersion is much more than just teaching a language or teaching a subject: It requires a knowledge base and a set of specific pedagogical skills that integrate content, language and literacy into teaching (Cammarata & Haley, 2018; Lyster, 2007; Swain, 1988; Tedick & Lyster, 2020). This knowledge base as well as specific pedagogical skills must also be embedded in the professional values of immersion education and guided by them (Nig Uidhir & Ó Ceallaigh, 2023). Despite widespread agreement that the pedagogy of immersion education is unique, the lack of clarity and consistency that existed until recently in relation to what an effective teacher is in these settings is surprising.

Immersion teachers have a professional responsibility to provide the academic material in a way that is easy to understand for students learning through a new language. At the same time, it is necessary to develop proficiency and literacy in that language and to facilitate cross-cultural and cross-language links. To achieve this, they must cultivate specific knowledge and skills, including expertise in second language acquisition, educational linguistics, and the development of biliteracy. (Tedick & Lyster, 2020). It is recognised that teachers' language proficiency influences pupils' immersion language in many ways, "as role models, language intermediaries, language assessors and as language providers in the classroom" (Ó Domagáin, 2023, 17). As a result, proficiency in the target language is one of the top priorities among the specialized skills required of an immersion teacher. In addition to the skill set and knowledge base described above, the core of immersion education itself, is in having the skills and knowledge necessary to integrate language, content and literacy into curriculum planning, teaching and assessment (Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2020; Cammarata & Cavanagh, 2018). Immersion teachers must intentionally draw students' attention to the language when teaching meaningful material (Cammarata & Cavanagh, 2018; Morton, 2018; Ó Ceallaigh, 2013). In addition to mastering the theoretical and pedagogical background knowledge specific to the disciplines they teach, immersion teachers must develop the linguistic knowledge and skills necessary to effectively teach these disciplines in the immersion language (Tedick & Fortune, 2013; Steffen 2013). As the cognitive demands of the academic subject or curricular area increase, the demands for language also increase. If students do not have a good language proficiency in the target language, they will not be able to access or engage with the subject area as they progress from class to class. Language awareness in immersion education is vital and, therefore, it is essential that language awareness in the target language underpins the teaching practices of the teacher (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Chathasaigh, 2021). Teachers' language awareness in immersion education encompasses three key areas: language use, knowledge of the language, and pedagogical expertise related to the target language within the subject-based context. (Lyster, 2007). It can be argued that language awareness allows subject teachers to effectively support students' learning by integrating the language with the subject matter in immersion education.

Additionally, numerous studies have shown that school leadership is one of the most important aspects of effective immersion schools (Hunt, 2011; Scanlan & López, 2012). Rocque et al. (2016) identified a number of skills, attributes and roles associated with successful leadership in immersion education. These include knowledge of the curriculum, teaching and assessment, knowledge of the language and culture, and the ability to create a sense of belonging (Rocque et al., 2016). The principals are the primary representatives of the programme, and they provide guidance for quality education depending on support from the school (Howard et al., 2017; Rocque et al., 2016). In Ireland, it is also acknowledged that strong visionary leadership, based on the values, knowledge and skills of Irish-medium education is a key enabler in ensuring the quality and success of immersion education (Nig Uidhir & Ó Ceallaigh, 2023).

Sector-Specific Needs

The demand for content-based language programmes and models is increasing internationally (i.e. Mehisto & Genesee 2015; Pérez-Cañado 2016). Teachers in these contexts face the dual challenge of not only teaching the subject but also addressing students' language learning needs as they study the subject through a new, minority, or additional language. (Cammarata & Haley 2018; Fielding & Harbon 2017; Morton 2016; Ó Ceallaigh et al. 2017; Ó Ceallaigh et al. 2018; Tedick & Lyster 2020).

Research consistently highlights specific challenges in effectively implementing Irish-medium and Gaeltacht education, especially those related to acquiring the immersion language and pedagogical practices.(Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017; Ó Duibhir 2018; Flynn, 2022). In recent years, it has become clear that the knowledge base and pedagogical skills needed for Irish-medium and Gaeltacht education are both unique and complex. (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Chathasaigh 2020; Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Laoire, 2015, 2018, 2021). Challenges pertaining specifically to the pedagogical practice of immersion education in Ireland are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Distinctive Pedagogical Challenges of the Irish-medium Teacher

Teacher declarative knowledge of the immersion language	
Significant gaps are reported in the declarative knowledge of Irish-medium immersion teachers' Irish language proficiency	Ní Chathasaigh, 2020; Nic Réamoinn 2017; Ní Thuairisg 2014; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2020
Range and accuracy of disciplinary language	
A knowledge deficit is reported in relation to discipline-specific vocabulary	Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2020; Ní Chathasaigh, 2020; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2020; Ó Treasaigh 2019
Form-focused Instruction	
Language deficiencies hinder immersion teachers from integrating the language (i.e., form-focused instruction) in systematic ways across the immersion curriculum	Ní Dhiorbháin et al., 2020; Ó Ceallaigh, 2013; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019
Corrective Feedback	
Immersion teachers also express that systematic attention needs to be given to the development of the immersion language using corrective feedback techniques. However, they are unsure when and how corrective feedback should be provided in the context of subject teaching in immersion education	Ní Aogáin & Ó Duibhir, 2021; Ní Chathasaigh, 2020; Ó Ceallaigh, 2013
Language and Content Integration	
Although immersion teachers believe they are always teaching the language, they do not consistently or systematically succeed in ensuring a balance between language and content in their teaching	Ní Aogáin et al. 2021; Ní Chathasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh 2021; Ní Dhiorbháin et al. 2020; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha 2017; Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Laoire 2021; Ó Ceallaigh et al. 2019
Facilitation of Linguistic Output	
Immersion teachers also struggle to design effective tasks that are content-based and specifically language-focused, in order to enhance students' linguistic output; which stimulates the learners' metalinguistic awareness	*Ó Ceallaigh, 2013, Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2019*
L1 Management	
Although immersion teachers view the use of L1 (first language), "as a medium of instruction, communication and socialisation, as conflicting with the fundamental principles of Irish-medium immersion and Gaeltacht education, they indicate that they are unsure how to appropriately and sensitively manage L1 in teaching and learning within immersion education	Ní Chathasaigh, 2020; Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Brolcháin 2019; Ní Chlochasaigh, Shiel & Ó Duibhir 2020
Differentiated instruction	
Teachers have difficulty implementing differentiated instruction in the immersion classroom	Ní Iongaigh, 2016; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017
Integrated Assessment	
Teachers have difficulty finding ways to systematically assess both subject knowledge acquisition and related language acquisition	Ó Ceallaigh, 2013; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Shéaghdha, 2017; Uí Mhurchú, 2021

Importance of professional development in Immersion Education

Teacher preparation and professional development are shown to play a vital role in the continued success of immersion education programmes (for example Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2018; Lyster & Ballinger, 2011). There is agreement within effective professional development research on the key principles in the design of learning experiences that can influence teachers' knowledge and practices (Desimone, 2009). Effective professional development for teachers is structured professional learning. This leads to evolving teachers' knowledge and practices and improving pupils' learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Such professional learning is content-oriented, encompasses active learning, supports collaboration between teachers, uses models of effective practice, provides training and specialist support, provides feedback and reflection points, and takes place on a sustained basis (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Typically, some of these features appear simultaneously in successful professional development models.

Professional development essentially plays a vital role in equipping immersion educators with the knowledge, skills and support to navigate through the unique challenges and opportunities of teaching content through the medium of a second language. Research-based tools support the identification, evaluation and enrichment of teachers' knowledge of immersion education and their pedagogical skills (Tedick & Matheiu, 2021). Investing in professional growth, immersion programmes can improve the quality of teaching, promote student achievement, and foster a thriving learning community.

Conclusion

The current literature on the immersion education profession provides insight into teachers' creativity, resilience, innovation and commitment as they respond to common challenges.

"Research shows immersion teachers to be adaptable, reflective and aware of social inequalities" (O'Boyle et al., 2023, 16).

O'Boyle et al. extends this argument to the solution of other challenges, for example, the creation of teaching materials to address a lack of resources. Academic literature and research on immersion education have certainly flourished for four decades. Researchers have recently been exploring more focused questions on the specific skills and core competencies of the immersion teacher. Research-based professional development is acknowledged as essential to empowering the teaching profession (Roinn Oideachais, 2016, Roinn Oideachais, 2021). As illustrated by Nig Uidhir and Ó Ceallaigh (2023), exemplary teaching practices and pupil learning are inextricable within the child-centered context of Irish-medium immersion education.

> *Research shows immersion teachers to be adaptable, reflective and aware of social inequalities. For minoritised language teachers, skills associated with navigating cultural, social and political complexities are a necessary part of a practitioner's repertoire.*
>
> O'Boyle et al. 2023, 16

Methodology

Introduction

Construct validity is the extent to which an assessment tool measures what it is intended to measure. In the case of the framework, the 'core competencies of immersion education' are the construct. Our goal was to determine how well and comprehensively the framework describes the core competencies of immersion education required by the Irish-medium sector both north and south. This chapter outlines the approach, processes and techniques used to collect data, analyse information, and gain insights during the consultation process.

Research Design

Socio-cultural theory was used as well as an interpretative lens to guide this mixed methods study. A variety of sources were also used (i.e. an extensive online questionnaire, interviews with focus groups, conference workshops), and data was gathered from key stakeholders across the continuum of Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to gain insights during the consultation process.

Selection of participants

Representative sampling was used to ensure that participants were representative of the professional community of Irish-medium education, north and south. Groups of participants included:

- Irish-medium student teachers who had completed at least one placement in an Irish-medium school;

- Teachers and principals from Irish-medium primary and post-primary schools, including Irish-medium units as well as schools in the Gaeltacht;
- Teacher educators from Irish-medium undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education programmes;
- Academics and specialists in immersion education who attended workshops held during academic conferences; these included, teacher educators, researchers, and curriculum specialists;

Data collection procedures

A comprehensive online questionnaire was developed with three distinct sections aligned with the overarching themes of the framework – vision and values, IME Teacher Knowledge, and pedagogical skills and practices. Relevant elements were developed in each section and additional information was provided on related elements. Participants were invited to complete the questionnaire, consider each element carefully and provide their evaluation via a drop-down menu by choosing either developed, in development or to be developed. They were also encouraged to give feedback and suggestions to improve all elements. The questionnaire was distributed to all Irish-medium schools on the island of Ireland. Furthermore, the online questionnaire was circulated to Irish-medium teacher educators in four initial teacher education institutions, and feedback was gathered through an interview with a focus group. The framework was also presented at two conference workshops where Irish-medium teacher educators participated in group discussions and provided comments and feedback. A summary of the methods of data collection and participants is contained in Table 2.

Data collection method	Student Teachers	Working Teachers	Principals	Initial teacher education providers
Online questionnaire		75		
Interview with a focus group				4
Workshop at Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta conference	6	45		
Workshop at Education and Training Boards Ireland conference			62	

Ethical approval was sought and awarded by the Research Ethics Committee at St. Mary's University College, Belfast. The researchers adhered to BERA's code of ethics.

Approach to Data Analysis

Our goal was to integrate feedback, where applicable, to ensure that the framework was valid, relevant, useful, authentic and clear for the Irish-medium sector. Above all, we have made every effort to ensure that the framework is based on research and is focused on practical use, which will enrich the professional development of Irish-medium teachers.

Qualitative analysis techniques were used to analyse the data collected with the online questionnaire and from the focus groups. Firstly, the answers from the questionnaire were compiled and categorised based on recurring themes and patterns. The feedback from educators in Irish-medium education was compiled to do this, and common views, concerns, and recommendations were identified. This process identified key themes and concepts that emerged from educators' discussions on the framework. Through iterative review and discussion among the researchers, agreement was reached on the main themes and findings.

Overall, the analysis aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the feedback received and to highlight consensus and areas where participants did not agree. This enabled the researchers to gain meaningful insights and to make informed decisions about refining and improving the framework based on the feedback received from teachers and teacher educators alike in the Irish-medium sector.

Quality Assurance Measures

The framework was presented at both national and international conferences. This provided further opportunities for applying scrutiny of the research methodology and findings and enhancing the validation of the tool. Feedback from conference attendees was requested in a proactive way to fine-tune and strengthen the tool's effectiveness. Attendees included academics and specialists competent in bilingual education/immersion education, including teacher educators, researchers, and curriculum specialists. The presentations delivered at the conferences are summarised below.

- Ó Ceallaigh, T.J. agus Nig Uidhir G. (2024). Illuminating and nurturing teacher knowledge for immersion education: A sociocultural perspective. INTED 2024 – An 8ú Comhdháil Bhliantúil Idirnáisiúnta ar Chúrsaí Teicneolaíochta, Oideachais agus Forbartha, València na Spáinne, 4-6 Márta 2024.
- Ó Ceallaigh, T.J. agus Nig Uidhir, G. (2023).Irish-medium teacher competencies: The spectrum of change. An Chomhdháil Idirnáisiúnta um Éifeachtacht agus Feabhsú Scoileanna (Comhdháil ISCEI 2024), Oideachas Gairmiúil Ardchaighdeáin le haghaidh Éifeachtacht Fheabhsaithe Scoileanna: Peirspictíochtaí agus Cuir Chuige Idirnáisiúnta. Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath, 8-12 Eanáir 2024.
- Ó Ceallaigh, T.J. agus Nig Uidhir, G. (2023). Immersion-specific teacher competencies: A self- reflection tool to support teacher professional learning. Comhdháil Bhliantúil an Chumainn Oideoirí Múinteoirí san Eoraip (ATEE), 2023- Oideachas Múinteoirí i mbun Éabhlóide, Búdaipeist na hUngáire, 28-30 Lúnasa 2023.

- Ó Ceallaigh, T.J. agus Nig Uidhir, G. (2023). Immersion-specific teacher competencies: A roadmap for sustainable change. An 15ú Comhdháil Idirnáisiúnta Bhliantúil um an Oideachas agus Teicneolaíochtaí Foghlama Nua – EDULEARN, Mallarca na Spáinne, 3-5 Iúil 2023.

The validity and reliability of the results was ensured by a number of different measures. Firstly, in-depth research methodologies were used, including careful collection of data and careful analysis procedures. Secondly, multiple data sources were used to triangulate the results and improve their credibility. Thirdly, the research process was transparent and an accurate record was kept, allowing peers to investigate and confirm the process. Additionally, a consultation with an international expert working in the field, Professor Diane J. Tedick of the University of Minnesota in the United States, allowed for valuable insights and perspectives, prompting reflection and mitigating researcher bias. This collaborative effort further validated the results and ensured their reliability.

Limitations and Challenges
Solutions were found for a number of different limitations and challenges during the consultation process in order to develop the framework, including time constraints, access to different participants, ensuring data quality, and effective integration of feedback. These challenges were addressed by prioritising key stakeholders, establishing collaborative partnerships, implementing validation measures, maintaining transparency and documentation, and taking an iterative approach to the refinement of the framework based on ongoing feedback. Notwithstanding these constraints, the aim of the research team was to gain comprehensive insights from a range of stakeholders within the Irish-medium sector and ultimately to seek to develop a valid and valuable framework that demonstrates the core competencies required in immersion education in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland..

Conclusion
Overall, the views and feedback strongly affirmed the importance of each theme, area and aspect of core competencies in immersion education. In this way, the validity of the contents of the framework is strong, as it is perceived by practitioners and experts in the immersion setting. By taking into account additional adjustments based on feedback, we are confident that the framework will be an effective validation resource and a tool that will benefit the Irish-medium education sector.

Framework for Professional Development

Core Irish-medium education (IME) competencies – domains, elements and indicators.

The immersion-specific competencies consist of three overarching themes: vision and values, IME teacher knowledge, and pedagogical skills and practices. These themes offer comprehensive depictions of exemplary teaching practices and what it means to be an immersion teacher in Ireland. Within each theme lie various domains, each composed of several elements. Indicators add further insight and context to these elements, enriching their understanding. Suggested readings are also provided.

Figure 1: Immersion-specific competencies of the Irish-medium teacher
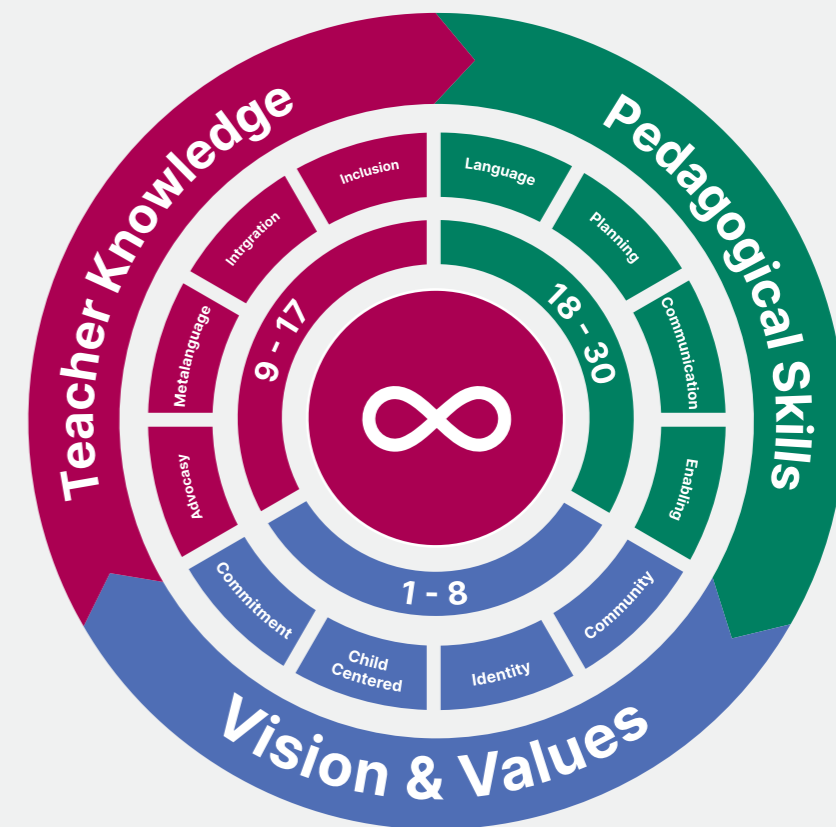
The purposes of this extensive rubric for the Irish-medium immersion teaching profession are to:

- describe the essential values, professional knowledge, and pedagogical practices required for effective IME teaching;
- promote high-quality teaching and leadership for all learners across all IME education contexts;
- provide a framework to guide IME teacher professional learning and development;
- promote the status of the IME teaching profession through making explicit the complex nature of IME teaching.

Core competencies in Irish-medium education – An assessment tool for professional practice

Theme	Distinctive IME professional competence – Domain	Distinctive IME professional competences – Element	Distinctive IME professional competences – Indicator	Further reading
Vision and values	Commitment to language	1. Passion for Irish language revitalisation	The IME teacher consistently demonstrates a deep appreciation for the significance of Irish-medium education (IME) in the revitalization of the Irish language. They exhibit a profound understanding of the interconnectedness between their dedication to the Irish language and the multifaceted responsibilities inherent in the role of an IME educator.	Ó Ceallaigh, T.J. agus Ní Chathasaigh, C. (2021). Feasacht teanga an mhúinteora tumoideachais: Préamh agus guairne an chleachtais. Léann Teanga:An Réiviú 9, lgh. 89-102. Ar fáil ag: http://leannteangaan-reiviu.com/sites/default/files/08-%C3%93%20Ceallaigh%20%26%20N%C3%AD%20Chathasaigh.pdf
		2. Advanced language proficiency and ongoing language enrichment	The IME teacher consistently acknowledges the correlation between their own proficiency in Irish and the progress of their students. They grasp that continually refining their linguistic skills, striving for accuracy, and enriching their language capabilities are ongoing pursuits indicative of IME professionalism.	Ó Ceallaigh, T.J. agus Ní Chathasaigh, C. (2021). Feasacht teanga an mhúinteora tumoideachais: Préamh agus guairne an chleachtais. Léann Teanga: An Réiviú 9, lgh. 89-102. Le fáil ar: http://leannteangaan-reiviu.com/sites/default/files/08-%C3%93%20Ceallaigh%20%26%20N%C3%AD%20Chathasaigh.pdf
	Child-centred focus	3. Holistic wellbeing of child	The IME teacher competently actively empowers students' voices, ensuring they are heard and valued in all instructional decisions. They regularly prioritize student wellbeing in every aspect of their role, including interactions with parents, assessment methods, teaching strategies, and resource allocation.	Archard, D. (2020). Hearing the child's voice: a philosophical account. Journal of the British Academy, 8, 7-15. https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/008s4.007
		4. An inclusive culture	The IME teacher consistently demonstrates deep understanding and appreciation for the diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and practices of their students. They seamlessly integrate culturally relevant content, materials, and examples into their lessons, fostering connections with students' lived experiences.	Ní Chlochasaigh K, Shiel G and Ó Duibhir P (2020) An Investigation of Immersion Education for Students in Irish-medium Schools in Area of Disadvantage. Dublin: An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta.
	Identity	5. IME teacher identity	The IME teacher capably and confidently cultivates immersion teacher identity by embodying programme values, enhancing language proficiency, and integrating culture into teaching, inspiring students and colleagues.	Ó Ceallaigh, T.J., Ó Laoire, M. agus Uí Chonghaile, M. (2024) Triggering teacher identity reconfiguration in secondary immersion in S. Ballinger, R. Fielding & D. Tedick (Eds.), International Perspectives on Teacher Development for Content and Language Integration, Multilingual Matters
		6. IME pupil identity	The IME teacher consistently cultivates immersion student identity by integrating language and culture, promoting pride in language skills and heritage, and fostering belonging and confidence.	Ní Dhonnabháin, A. (2014). An Dátheangachas agus an tAitheantas. PhD san Oideachas neamhfhoilsithe, Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh. Ar fáil ag: https://www.cogg.ie/wp-content/uploads/An-Dateanga-chas-an-tAitheantas.pdf
	Community	7. Strategic development of IME sector	The IME teacher effectively strengthens the IME community by fostering network growth, encouraging parental/guardian involvement, valuing classroom assistants, and recognising community connections.	An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna. (2018). Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022. Ar fáil ag: https://assets.gov.ie/24606/0e2fca7d-b7ca434d92f97360c1197845.pdf
		8. The Gaeltacht as a resource for language enhancement	The IME teacher capably utilises the Gaeltacht to enhance both student language skills and their own language development. They consistently integrate authentic materials into the curriculum, facilitate immersive experiences, and engage in ongoing language enhancement.	Mac Cormaic, B. (2011). Féiniúlacht, Cultúr agus Teanga i Ré an Dom-handaithe. Baile Átha Cliath: Coiscéim.

Theme	Distinctive IME professional competence – Domain	Distinctive IME professional competences – Element	Distinctive IME professional competences – Indicator	Further reading
IME teacher knowledge	Knowledge for immersion advocacy	9. Theoretical principles, specific features, and the goals of immersion education	The IME teacher has a deep understanding of the theoretical principles, distinctive features, and goals of immersion education and capably uses this knowledge in a creative way to share information with others and proactively support the school in other communities.	Baker, C. agus Wright, W. E. (2021). Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism (Eagrán 7). Briostol: Multilingualism Matters.
		10. Language mediation	The IME teacher consistently demonstrates adeptness in crafting an immersive learning atmosphere that systematically encourages linguistic learning, usage, and advancement. They regularly engage students in promoting language use both within and beyond the classroom, while also offering strong support for parents/guardians.	Nig Uidhir, G., Ó Duibhir, P., & Ó Cathalláin, S. (2016). Tuismitheoirí ina ngníomhairí in earnáil an Ghaeloideachais. COMHARtaighde (2). https://doi.org/10.18669/ct.2016.06
		11. Cultural architects	The IME teacher frequently emphasises promoting sociocultural competence among learners, providing engaging and culturally responsive contexts to enhance their understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures.	Feinauer, E. & Howard, E. R. (2014). Attending to the third goal: Cross-cultural competence and identity development in two-way immersion programs. Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education, 2(2), 257-272.
	Teacher knowledge about the language	12. Teacher communicative competence	The IME teacher demonstrates advanced proficiency in communicative language competence, excelling in linguistic (e.g., extensive vocabulary and discipline-specific terminology, grammatical accuracy), sociolinguistic (e.g., culturally appropriate language use, effective discourse strategies), and pragmatic (e.g., adaptability, coherence, fluency) skills.	Zwiers, J. (2014) Building Academic Language: Meeting Common Core Standards Across Disciplines, Grades 5–12, Second Edition. Jossey-Bass.https://jeffzwiers.org/publications
	Knowledge for pedagogical integration	13. Content and language integration	The IME teacher demonstrates an adept understanding of theory and research that guide integration of content and language in immersion education, i.e. effectively focusing on language (e.g. grammar, syntax, discourse features) in a contextualised manner within content instruction while habitually and seamlessly shifting students' attention between language and content.	Morton, T. (2016). Conceptualizing and investigating teachers' knowledge for integrating content and language in content-based instruction. JICB 4(2), 144-167.
		14. Integrated assessment	The IME teacher exhibits a nuanced grasp of the design and implementation of multiple assessments, both formative and summative, to assess both content learning and language development.	Uí Mhurchú, A. (2021). Éifeacht an chúltionchair: Iniúchadh ar an tionchar a bhíonn ag critéir mheasúnaithe le béim chomhuaineach ar ábhar agus ar theanga ar ghnóthachtáil agus ar mheon aigne scoláirí i rang staire na chéad bhliana. An M. Oid. san Oideachas Lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta, Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál, Luimneach.
	Knowledge for inclusion	15. Differentiation	The IME teacher knowledgeably employs consistent and effective differentiation strategies based on students' language proficiency levels, readiness, interests, and individual needs, adjusting language objectives, content, instructional methods, grouping arrangements and student outputs accordingly.	Tomlinson, C.A. (2014). The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
		16. Special educational needs	The IME teacher illustrates a deep understanding of children's holistic development and the unique requirements of students with special educational needs. This includes knowledge of relevant legislation, conducting thorough assessments, implementing effective interventions, monitoring progress, and documenting outcomes.	Nic Aindriú, S., Connaughton-Crean, L., Ó Duibhir, P., & Travers, J. (2022). Ag tacú le daltaí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus lán-Ghaeilge. Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath: Sealbhú. https://www.cogg.ie/taighde-cogg/
		17. Diverse learners in multicultural immersion settings	The IME teacher consistently demonstrates mastery in overseeing multicultural classrooms and establishing inclusive environments that embrace language, culture, ethnic and learning diversity within IME.	Ní Dhiorbháin, A., Connaughton-Crean, L. & Ó Duibhir, P. (2023). Soláthar san oideachas lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta do pháistí a bhfuil Béarla mar theanga bhreise acu. Baile Átha Cliath: Sealbhú, Lárionad Taighde Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath um Fhoghlaim agus Teagasc na Gaeilge, agus an Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta. Le fáil ar: www.cogg.ie

Core competencies in Irish-medium education – An assessment tool for professional practice

Theme	Distinctive IME professional competence – Domain	Distinctive IME professional competences – Element	Distinctive IME professional competences – Indicator	Further reading
Pedagogical skills and practices	Language skills	18. Language agility (verbal and non-verbal scaffolding)	The IME teacher accurately translates educational materials from English to Irish, ensuring they are tailored to the intended audience, such as students and parents/guardians, at an appropriate level of comprehension.	Lyster, R. (2007). Learning and teaching languages through content: A counterbalanced approach. Amstardam: John Benjamins.
		19. Translation skills	The IME teacher accurately translates educational materials from English to Irish, ensuring they are tailored to the intended audience, such as students and parents/guardians, at an appropriate level of comprehension.	Mac Lochlainn, A. (2015). In ord is in Eagar. Baile Átha Cliath: Cois Life.
		20. Cross-lingual connections	The IME teacher consistently and efficiently highlights cross-linguistic connections, emphasising metalinguistic awareness to bolster vocabulary and biliteracy skills across Irish and English.	Ballinger, S., Lyster, R., Sterzuk, A., & Genesee, F. (2017). Context-appropriate crosslinguistic pedagogy: Considering the role of language status in immersion. Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education, 5, 30–57.
		21. Language-rich environment	The IME teacher effectively creates and sustains a language-rich learning environment, utilizing strategies such as modelling and instructional language displays. They leverage this environment to enrich students' content learning and language development forbairt na teanga a sháibhriú i measc na ndaltaí.	Gibbons, P. (2014). Scaffolding language, Scaffolding learning: Teaching English language learners in mainstream classrooms. Heinemann.
	Enabling skills	22. Language use and enhanced output	The IME teacher consistently, strategically and competently utilises a range of instructional strategies to promote extended student discourse and support student language use and development (e.g. questioning techniques, wait time, grouping strategies, classroom activities and routines, print and multimedia) .	Creese, A. (2006). Supporting talk? Partnership teachers in classroom interaction. International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 9, 434-453.
		23. Procedural scaffolding	The IME teacher systematically and effectively uses instructional activities, routines, and interactive groupings to promote comprehension, production and peer interaction among students.	Tedick, D.J. & Lyster, R. (2020). Scaffolding language development in immersion and dual language classrooms. Nua-Eabhrac: Routledge.
		24. Corrective feedback	The IME teacher strategically and competently provides corrective feedback on student language use in the form of both reformulations (the teacher provides the correct form) and prompts (the teacher doesn't provide the correct form but gives hints to bring students' attention to errors e.g. metalinguistic cues, clarification requests) in a sensitive and effective manner. They address the need for corrective feedback across all aspects of the target language, including lexical, phonological, and syntactical aspects.	Ní Mhurchú, C., Ní Aogáin, S. agus Ó Ceallaigh, T.J. (2023). Aiseolas ceartaitheach mar réiteach ar easnaimh theangeolaíocha sa tumoideachas lán-Ghaeilge.TEANGA, the Journal of the Irish Association for Applied Linguistics
		25. Instructional scaffolding	The IME teacher consistently and proficiently integrates diverse instructional resources, such as graphic organizers, word walls, and manipulatives, to enhance comprehension. Additionally, they frequently offer scaffolds like writing frames and graphic organizers to encourage continued development of academic oral and written language skills.	Tedick, D.J. & Lyster, R. (2020). Scaffolding language development in immersion and dual language classrooms. Nua-Eabhrac: Routledge.

Theme	Distinctive IME professional competence – Domain	Distinctive IME professional competences – Element	Distinctive IME professional competences – Indicator	Further reading
		26. Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	The IME teacher effectively implements Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to create inclusive and accessible learning environments. They strategically and proactively design and manipulate instructional materials and resources, activities, and assessments that accommodate diverse learner needs, preferences, and abilities. Additionally, they frequently provide multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement to optimize learning outcomes for all students.	Nic Aindriú, S., Connaughton-Crean, L., Travers, J. & an tOllamh Ó Duibhir, P. (2022). Ag Tacú le daltaí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta acu i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus lán-Ghaeilge. Baile Átha Cliath: Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath, Sealbhú,lgh 49-55 Le fáil ar: https://www.cogg.ie/wp-content/uploads/Ag-tac%C3%BA-le-dalta%C3%AD-a-bhfuil-RSO-acu-sa-ch%C3%B3ras-l%C3%A1n-Ghaeilge-.pdf
	Communication skills	27. Communication with parents and other professionals	The IME teacher adeptly communicates vital information regarding immersion education to parents/guardians and other professionals, empowering them to engage fully in their children's educational progression.	Nic Íomhair, A. (2020). Ról na dtuismitheoirí san oideachas lán-Ghaeilge. In G. Nig Uidhir, S. Mac Corraidh, & C. Ó Pronntaigh (Eds.), Taighde agus Teagasc 7 (pp. 98–114). St. Mary's University College, Belfast. https://www.stmarys-belfast.ac.uk/downloads/research/TandTVolume7.pdf.
		28. Collaboration with classroom assistants	The IME teacher effectively collaborates with classroom assistants to devise innovative and cooperative strategies and assessments to support students' language growth and content learning.	Rogan, Thomas (2021). The role of classroom assistants: a case study in the context of an immersion school. Tráchtas Ed.D. Le fáil ar: https://theses.gla.ac.uk/82222/7/2020RoganEdD.pdf Léite 30/03/24.
	Planning skills	29. Planning language integration across the curriculum	The IME teacher regularly and competently integrates language-oriented and content-oriented teaching in curricular planning, incorporating varied language-focused activities within and across different disciplines (i.e. form-focused instruction).	Rogan, Thomas (2021) The role of classroom assistants: a case study in the context of an immersion school. Ed.D thesis. Available at https://theses.gla.ac.uk/82222/7/2020RoganEdD.pdf Accessed 30/3/24.
		30. Biliteracy development	The IME teacher consistently and effectively plans, prioritises, and allocates instructional time for biliteracy development.	De Brún, J. (2023) The teaching and learning of reading in Irish of 9-11-year-olds in immersion settings in Ireland: A mixed methods case study. DCU: PhD thesis. Ar fáil ag: https://www.cogg.ie/wp-content/uploads/Thesis-J.-de-Br%C3%BAn-HARD-COPY-14.07.22-16213971-2022-with-refs-appendices.pdf

Utilising the framework as a tool for professional growth

The framework should be utilised as a diagnostic, reflective, and developmental tool to enhance teachers' awareness of areas requiring improvement, recognise areas of strength, and foster a deeper understanding of contextual and systemic factors that may impede effective immersion teaching and learning.

Its application should involve intentional and explicit discussions about formative assessment, aiming to create a supportive environment where teachers can openly discuss their practices, the challenges they encounter in adopting new methodologies, and their successes in optimising their knowledge and skills. The ultimate goal is to enhance student learning outcomes by improving classroom teaching practices.

This framework is designed to demonstrate how Irish-medium teachers implement practices within specific Irish-medium contexts and/or Irish language class levels. It is formative by design, intended to be applied over time with input and evidence from various sources. The goal is that it should provide specific and detailed feedback to guide teachers' ongoing professional growth.

Irish-medium teacher competencies specific to immersion education: Assessment tool for professional practice

This reflective resource may be used by an individual teacher for the purpose of tracking professional development and identifying areas for improvement, or it may be used as a tool to promote discussion and evaluation within a team or at whole school level.

The three levels represent stages along the professional competences continuum where a teacher, a team or a whole school may consider themselves to be at the time of reflection and completion.

Level: 1 = Emerging 2 = Demonstrating 3 = Excelling

1. At this stage, teachers have achieved a level of awareness about the described practice. They seek to make the practice a part of their own teaching repertoire although attempts are typically not effective.

2. At this stage, teachers not only understand the importance of the practice for effective Irish-medium teaching, but also make frequent attempts to make it a part of their own teaching repertoire. Many, although not all, attempts are effective.

3. At this stage, the practice has become a part of the teacher's daily repertoire. It is in action, live, and at play in the classroom or wider school on a consistent basis. The teacher is adept and confident in implementing the practice.

Core competencies in all-Irish education – An assessment tool for professional practice

School: Date(s):

Whole school evaluation   Y / N

Individual teacher or group of teachers:

Vision and Values

Commitment to language

The IME teacher consistently demonstrates a deep appreciation for the significance of Irish-medium education (IME) in the revitalization of the Irish language.

The IME teacher consistently acknowledges the correlation between their own proficiency in Irish and the progress of their students.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?

Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore?

What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Child centred focus

The IME teacher competently actively empowers students' voices, ensuring they are heard and valued in all instructional decisions.

The IME teacher consistently demonstrates deep understanding and appreciation for the diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and practices of their students.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?

Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore?

What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Vision and Values

Identity

The IME teacher capably and confidently cultivates immersion teacher identity by embodying programme values, enhancing language proficiency, and integrating culture into teaching, inspiring students and colleagues.

The IME teacher consistently cultivates immersion student identity by integrating language and culture, promoting pride in language skills and heritage, and fostering belonging and confidence.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?

Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore?

What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Community

The IME teacher effectively strengthens the IME community by fostering network growth, encouraging parental/guardian involvement, valuing classroom assistants, and recognising community connections.

The IME teacher capably utilises the Gaeltacht to enhance both student language skills and their own language development.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?

Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore?

What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

School: Date(s):

Whole school evaluation   Y / N

Individual teacher or group of teachers:

Teacher Knowledge

Knowledge for immersion advocacy

The IME teacher has a deep understanding of the theoretical principles, distinctive features, and goals of immersion education.

The IME teacher consistently demonstrates adeptness in crafting an immersive learning atmosphere that systematically encourages linguistic learning, usage, and advancement.

The IME teacher frequently emphasises promoting sociocultural competence among learners, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?

Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore?

What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Teacher knowledge about the language

The IME teacher demonstrates advanced proficiency in communicative language competence, excelling in linguistic (e.g., extensive vocabulary and discipline-specific terminology, grammatical accuracy), sociolinguistic (e.g., culturally appropriate language use, effective discourse strategies), and pragmatic (e.g., adaptability, coherence, fluency) skills.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?

Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore?

What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Teacher Knowledge

Knowledge for pedagogical integration

The IME teacher demonstrates an adept understanding of theory and research that guide integration of content and language in immersion education.

The IME teacher exhibits a nuanced grasp of the design and implementation of multiple assessments, both formative and summative, to assess both content learning and language development.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?

Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore?

What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Knowledge for inclusion

The IME teacher knowledgeably employs consistent and effective differentiation strategies based on students' language proficiency levels, readiness, interests, and individual needs, adjusting language objectives, content, instructional methods, grouping arrangements and student outputs accordingly.

The IME teacher illustrates a deep understanding of children's holistic development and the unique requirements of students with special educational needs. This includes knowledge of relevant legislation, conducting thorough assessments, implementing effective interventions, monitoring progress, and documenting outcomes.

The IME teacher consistently demonstrates mastery in overseeing multicultural classrooms and establishing inclusive environments that embrace language, culture, ethnic and learning diversity within IME.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?

Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore?

What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Core competencies in all-Irish education – An assessment tool for professional practice

School: Date(s):

Whole school evaluation   Y / N

Individual teacher or group of teachers:

Pedagogical Skills and Practices
Language skills
The IME teacher masterfully and consistently modifies teacher talk, ensuring comprehensible input, (e.g. speed, intonation, repetition, paraphrasing, cognates) as appropriate
The IME teacher accurately translates educational materials from English to Irish, ensuring they are tailored to the intended audience (e.g. pupils/parents/guardians).
The IME teacher consistently and efficiently highlights cross-linguistic connections, emphasising metalinguistic awareness to bolster vocabulary and biliteracy skills across Irish and English.
The IME teacher effectively creates and sustains a language-rich learning environment, utilizing strategies such as modelling and instructional language displays. They leverage this environment to enrich students' content learning and language development forbairt na teanga a shaibhriú i measc na ndaltaí.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?	Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore? What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Communication skills
The IME teacher adeptly communicates vital information regarding immersion education to parents/guardians and other professionals.
The IME teacher effectively collaborates with classroom assistants to devise innovative and cooperative strategies and assessments to support students' language growth and content learning.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?	Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore? What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Pedagogical Skills and Practices
Enabling skills
The IME teacher consistently, strategically and competently utilises a range of instructional strategies to promote extended student discourse
The IME teacher systematically and effectively uses instructional activities, routines, and interactive groupings to promote comprehension, production and peer interaction among students.
The IME teacher strategically and competently provides corrective feedback on student language use in the form of both reformulations (the teacher provides the correct form) and prompts (the teacher doesn't provide the correct form but gives hints to bring students' attention to errors) in a sensitive and effective manner.
The IME teacher consistently and proficiently integrates diverse instructional resources, such as graphic organizers, word walls, and manipulatives, to enhance comprehension. Additionally, they frequently offer scaffolds like writing frames and graphic organizers to encourage continued development of academic oral and written language skills.
The IME teacher effectively implements Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to create inclusive and accessible learning environments. They strategically and proactively design and manipulate instructional materials and resources, activities, and assessments that accommodate diverse learner needs, preferences, and abilities. Additionally, they frequently provide multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement to optimize learning outcomes for all students.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?	Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore? What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Planning skills
The IME teacher regularly and competently integrates language-oriented and content-oriented teaching in curricular planning, incorporating varied language-focused activities within and across different disciplines (i.e. form-focused instruction).
The IME teacher consistently and effectively plans, prioritises, and allocates instructional time for biliteracy development.

Emerging	Demonstrating	Excelling

What evidence supports your assessment?	Are there areas of further enquiry that you wish to explore? What goals for improvement do you wish to pursue?

Conclusion: Looking Forward

The findings of this study clearly illustrate the multifaceted nature of teachers' roles within Irish-medium education. The essential competencies, core values and the requisite skills and knowledge specific to immersion education are highlighted within this work. The study not only underscores the significant potential for advancing the teaching profession but also emphasises the importance of serving all learners more effectively within the Irish-medium context. These findings present a holistic description of what quality teaching practice is and what it means to be a teacher in Irish-medium education. It provides depth and contextual understanding across various aspects of effective teaching, thereby enabling immersion educators to identify and develop best-practices within their own educational settings. A framework is provided to guide teachers' learning and professional development in Irish-medium settings and to promote the status of the teacher's profession within Irish-medium education sector.

Immersion education is a complex task, and can only be mastered by a skilled and knowledgeable workforce.

(Nig Uidhir & Ó Ceallaigh, 2023, pg. 28)

The aim of this framework is to enable teachers in Irish-medium education to continuously and systematically reflect on and evaluate their teaching. The framework also guides and supports leadership and immersion practices at whole school level. Furthermore, this framework supports researchers to explore and map the diverse areas of knowledge that teachers have in Irish-medium education, illustrating how this knowledge-based influences best practice and outcomes for students. Moreover, policy makers are encouraged to identify areas of development, particularly those that can be addressed through tailored teacher education and targeted teacher professional learning initiatives.

Exploring teacher competencies specific to Irish-medium education would be valuable not only for enhancing immersion education programmes but also for contributing to the broader conversation on teacher preparation and accreditation for immersion education in Ireland. Notably, to date, only a limited number of studies have been carried out in partnership with teachers to identify immersion education specific competencies that are required in a bilingual setting (Nig Uidhir & Ó Ceallaigh, 2023). This field is constantly changing thus encouraging teachers in Irish-medium education to take advantage of educational transformations to innovate

their own teaching. It is vital, therefore, to continually renew their core competencies, grounded in both research and practical experience for the development and professionalism of teachers in Irish-medium education, and in order to master adaptive and transformative changes.

The purpose of this research is to provide a framework to support learning and professional development of teachers within Irish-medium education. i.e. a framework that enables the Irish-medium immersion teacher to enhance their awareness of areas requiring improvement, recognise areas of strength, and foster a deeper understanding of contextual and systemic factors that may impede effective immersion teaching and learning.

The consultation process involved in this research strongly indicated the merits in further examining those teacher competencies specific to immersion education.Such an examination has the potential to enhance immersion education programmes and contribute to the broader discourse on teacher preparation and accreditation within the Irish-medium context.

It is acknowledged that the 30 elements aligned with pedagogical values, knowledge, and skills presented in this self-assessment framework are not intended to be exhaustive. However, when implemented effectively, this framework is expected to encourage

professional reflection, critical discussion, and dynamic engagement in classrooms and staff rooms across Irish-medium immersion schools nationwide. As the sector continues to evolve,

it is anticipated that reforms will be proposed, driven by the changing factors and priorities that inevitably influence the roles of teachers in Irish-medium schools.

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