

# From Language Learning to Future Pathways: Supporting French Immersion Students Through Career Counselling

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## Research Topic and Question

**Research Topic:** French Immersion (FI) high school students and their career readiness needs as they navigate their linguistic identity and the academic and cultural assets gained through immersion. Addresses the problem that counsellors often lack the training and awareness needed to guide these students toward post-secondary opportunities and to continue using French after graduation.

**Research Question:** What career development needs are unique to French Immersion high school students?

**Significance:**

- There is a disconnect between the cognitive, academic, and economic benefits of FI and students' ability to apply these skills after high school (Bialystok et al., 2014; Lazaruk, 2007; Schafer, 2013).
- Current career counselling approaches overlook how FI students' linguistic identity plays a role in their future decisions (Durepos, 2018; Norton & Toohey, 2011).
- The study emphasizes the importance of career counselling in supporting students transition out of high school, especially students with unique learning experiences, such as FI students (Hutchins et al., 2024; Domene et al., 2007).

**Context and Target Population:** This study focuses on French Immersion high school students in Central Alberta, Canada. It draws on literature from multiple second-language and career counselling contexts to emphasize the foundational learning experiences of FI students and the disconnect between their skills and future pathways.

**Thesis Statement:** This review argues that the disconnect between counsellor preparation and FI students' post-secondary decision-making highlights the need for holistic, linguistically responsive career counselling that intentionally supports the unique academic, cultural, and professional trajectories of FI learners.



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## Theoretical Framework

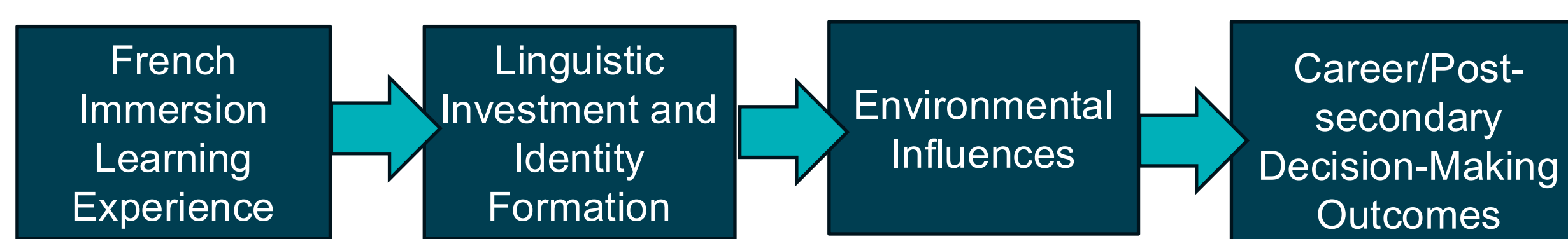
This research is grounded in interpretive theory, developed by Krumboltz. In his work, *A Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making*, Krumboltz (1976) proposes that career decisions are formed by a variety of factors, notably environmental influences and learning experiences.

**Environmental influences:** This can include family background, school environment, social and cultural context, labour market conditions. For FI students, this relates to the opportunities they have to speak French, their awareness of bilingual careers in the labour market, or the quality of career counselling given.

**Learning experiences:** Krumboltz divides these experiences into two categories.

Instrumental learning experiences	Associative learning experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Direct experiences</b></li> <li>Taking FI courses</li> <li>Job or volunteer experience</li> <li>Personal success or failure in the program</li> <li>Participating in French cultural and linguistic events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Indirect or observational</b></li> <li>Hearing messages, either positive or negative, about the usefulness of French</li> <li>Feedback about bilingualism</li> <li>Seeing other experience in FI after high school</li> </ul>

Krumboltz emphasizes that learning is among the most influential factors in career decision-making.



## Literature Review

Across the literature, emerging patterns were identified and organized into four themes that address the systemic and developmental impacts experiences by FI students, and therefore the need for holistic counselling in response.

### Strengths and Assets of FI Education

- Students often have the desire to maintain second-language proficiency and leverage the strengths gained through immersion, such as heightened mental flexibility, sociocultural opportunities, or long-term economic advantages (Lazaruk, 2007).
- FI and learning a second language offers certain economic benefits that exceed those of mainstream education programs, notably increased employability, broader job opportunities, and enhanced career success (Durepos, 2018; Husum & Bryce, 1991; Simonsen, 2022).
- The program enhances skills such as "increased linguistic awareness, greater flexibility in thought, and more internal examination of language" (Lazaruk, 2007, p. 614), positioning French bilingualism not only as a communication tool but also as an indicator of higher-order thinking, leading to higher employability.

### Linguistic Identity and Use of French Post-Secondary

- Language learning will "always imply moments of discomfort, doubt, and uncertainty" (Séror & Weinberg, 2021, p. 172).
- Many students' bilingualism is developed primarily in an academic setting, with limited opportunities to engage in authentic French conversation (Lazaruk, 2007), creating a disconnect from their French identity.
- When students are not taught to apply their language skills outside the classroom and into more 'real-world' settings, they are less likely to continue studying or speaking the language after high school (Harrison, 1973).
- Research with FI high school students suggests that when reflecting on their French-language identity, "they often gravitate back to English and lose their FI identities that would have them consider themselves bilingual" (Schafer, 2013, p. 23).

### Implications for Career Counsellors and School Personnel

- Structural limitations, especially shortfalls in school staffing, funding, and counsellor preparation related to post-secondary planning are a common concern and reduce the ability of counsellors to provide individualized support (Amundson, 2006; Hutchins et al., 2024; Novakovic & Patrikakou, 2025; Smith-Adcock et al., 2006).
- Counsellor preparation programs that focus on minority populations within schools are highlighted as vital to student success, yet counselling and guidance services are among the most commonly under-resourced supports in schools (Smith-Adcock et al., 2006).
- Counsellors and educators are not adequately equipped to advise all students on post-secondary planning, which diminishes the advantages that FI students may possess because their "academic, social, and career concerns" are not being met (Smith-Adcock et al., 2006, p. 99).

### Culturally Aware and Holistic Counselling

- FI students experience both the benefits of bilingualism and the pressures tied to their linguistic identity, which may intensify the complexity of future decision-making (Bialystok et al., 2014; Durepos, 2018; Lazaruk, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Schafer, 2013).
- Career counselling must move towards more culturally aware and holistic practice, emphasizing that future or vocational development cannot be separated from personal influences (Krumboltz, 1993).
- For counsellors working with FI students, this means they must understand the social, linguistic, and cultural context and education that has developed over students' time in the immersion program (Amundson, 2006).
- Counselling that considered the student's life in its entirety rather than isolating career decisions from personal development were found to be highly effective (Mathiesen & Gunnarsdottir, 2021).
- The lack of targeted guidance for FI students contributes to a gap between their linguistic investment and their perceived future opportunities, with research demonstrating that they are less likely to continue their studies or careers in French following high school (Harrison, 1973; Foster, 1998; Schafer, 2013).

The intersect of FI programming and career counselling is extremely limited throughout the research, highlighting significant gaps and areas for future research. While the literature offers a solid foundation on the subject, future studies should examine how career counselling practices can better address the unique linguistic, cultural, and identity-based needs of FI students, particularly within the Alberta context.

## Recommendations

### Increase Awareness of French-Language Opportunities

- Students need to be explicitly made aware of the opportunities they may have to continue their bilingualism into life after high school.
- In my experience, students believe they need to leave the province to do so. When they are made aware of more local opportunities, they are surprised at how accessible they are.

**How do we do this?**

- Develop a bilingual resource package specifically for FI students to be used by career counsellors.
- Research indicates that counselling is less effective when counsellors lack knowledge of students' interests (Hutchins et al., 2024).
- Key components of this resource package should include:
  - Career pathways that utilize or require French
  - Scholarships and financial support for bilingual students
  - A directory of French and bilingual post-secondary programs
  - Opportunities for French-language exchange, internships, and volunteer experiences

### Integrate Holistic Counselling Practices

- Standardized counselling often overlooks and disregards the broader life circumstances in a students' life, and as such, holistic counselling should be more highly integrated (Krumboltz, 1993; Amundson, 2006; Mathiesen & Gunnarsdottir, 2021).
- By failing to engage with these factors, career counselling risks overlooking a key component of FI students' decision-making.

**How do we do this?**

- School divisions must implement long-term, targeted professional development (PD) for career counsellors, especially emphasizing bilingualism as a form of linguistic capital and a part of FI students' identity.
- Supported by the resource suggested in my first recommendation, this PD will equip counsellors with the knowledge and practical tools needed to support FI students.

## Barriers and Limitations

**- Workload constraints:** While these recommendations will support FI students on their post-secondary decisions, counsellors and teachers are already faced with limited time and energy. While Amundson (2006) highlights the importance of specialized training in career counselling, he also notes that expectations placed on counsellors continue to increase, while available time and funding often decrease.

**- Resource updating:** Once again, time and funding remain challenges. The creation, implementation, and upkeep of this resource would require significant investment. The resource needs to be regularly updated to reflect current postsecondary programs, career opportunities, and community connections. If this responsibility falls to FI counsellors, it may further contribute to existing workload pressures of doing more with less.

## Conclusion

- FI high school students have unique career development needs that require better support from their schools' counsellors through linguistically responsive and holistic career counselling.
- Although research highlights the cognitive, academic, and economic benefits of bilingualism, many FI students remain unaware of how to translate their skills into postsecondary pathways and careers (Lazaruk, 2007; McGregor, 2016; Schafer, 2013).
- My findings suggest that FI students require more than general guidance; they benefit from counselling that acknowledges their linguistic identity, connects their experiences to real-world opportunities, and provides explicit awareness of bilingual pathways.
- By incorporating holistic counselling with FI students, we can sustain bilingualism beyond secondary education.



References