

# Differences in Reading Ability of Canadian Children Instructed in French Immersion and Primarily in English



Lynette R. Kivisto, Amanda M. O'Brien,  
Robin J. Richardson & Joseph E. Casey  
Department of Psychology, University of Windsor



## Introduction

- Enrollment in French Immersion (FI) school programs has been steadily rising in Canada since 2011, with over 400,000 students enrolled in 2016.
- Few studies have examined the differences in reading ability in English between FI students and students in primarily English schools (PE).
- Studies have typically found a lag in English reading for FI children prior to Grade 3.
- One study found that FI students had equivalent performance by Grade 3 and outperformed PE students by Grade 6.
- Given the large numbers of Canadian children in FI, it is crucial to determine whether mean differences in English reading ability are present and how these may influence psychological and neuropsychological test results.
- The aim of the study was to examine the role of language instruction on English measures of reading rate, accuracy, and comprehension.

**HYPOTHESIS:** FI children will outperform PE children on English reading measures.

## Participants & Methods

- Archival data from 78 school-aged children (aged 7-13 years,  $M_{age} = 10.03$ ) enrolled in FI ( $n = 35$ ) and PE ( $n = 43$ ) schools was analyzed for this study.
- Participants were administered the GORT-5 individually at their school as part of a larger study.

## Results

- MANCOVA revealed that FI students performed lower compared to PE students on measures of reading rate, accuracy, and comprehension when controlling for estimated FSIQ, age, and learning disorder diagnosis.

GORT-5 scores	FI $M(SD)$	PE $M(SD)$	$R^2_{adjusted}$	$p$
Reading Rate	9.7 (2.8)	10.8 (2.4)	.319	<.001
Accuracy	7.8 (2.8)	8.6 (2.2)	.186	.001
Comprehension	8.9 (2.0)	9.8 (2.0)	.343	<.001

## Conclusions

- Contrary to the hypothesis, the results suggest that children instructed in FI do not perform as well as their PE peers on measures of English reading fluency (rate & accuracy) and reading comprehension.
- This has implications for the neuropsychological assessment of FI students given that existing normative data consist of students primarily taught in English.
- Thus, further research is needed to determine the differences in English reading development between FI and PE students.

