

# So They Want Us To Learn French: An Exploration of France's Language Policy and Its Impact on French Immersion Programs in Canada



## So They Want Us to Learn French: Promoting and Opposing Bilingualism in English-Speaking Canada

by Michael W. Spicer

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The relationship between France and Canada is a unique one, forged over centuries of shared history and cultural exchange. One of the most enduring aspects of this relationship is the prominence of the French language in both countries.

In France, the protection and promotion of the French language has long been a cornerstone of national identity and cultural heritage. This

commitment is enshrined in the French constitution, which declares French to be the official language of the Republic.

As a result, France has pursued a vigorous language policy that aims to maintain the dominance of French in all spheres of public life. This policy has had a significant impact on French immersion programs in Canada, which provide students with the opportunity to learn French as a second language.

## **The History and Evolution of France's Language Policy**

The origins of France's language policy can be traced back to the French Revolution in the late 18th century. During this period, the French government sought to establish a unified national identity by promoting the use of French as the common language of the Republic.

In the years that followed, the French government continued to enact policies aimed at strengthening the position of French. These policies included measures to suppress the use of regional languages and dialects, and to promote the teaching of French in schools.

In the 20th century, France's language policy became increasingly focused on protecting the French language from the perceived threat of Anglo-American influence. This led to the adoption of policies such as the Loi Toubon in 1994, which sought to limit the use of English in advertising and other public contexts.

## **The Impact of France's Language Policy on French Immersion Programs in Canada**

France's language policy has had a significant impact on French immersion programs in Canada. These programs, which provide students with the opportunity to learn French in a fully immersive environment, have been operating in Canada for over 50 years.

Initially, French immersion programs were met with resistance from some quarters in Canada, who saw them as a threat to English-language education. However, over time, the programs have gained widespread acceptance and are now seen as an important part of the Canadian education system.

France's language policy has played a role in supporting the development of French immersion programs in Canada. The French government has provided financial and technical assistance to these programs, and has also worked to promote French language learning in Canada through cultural exchange initiatives.

However, France's language policy has also created challenges for French immersion programs in Canada. The insistence on using French as the sole language of instruction in these programs has made it difficult for some students to succeed. Additionally, the focus on promoting French in all spheres of public life has led to concerns about the marginalization of other languages, including indigenous languages.

## **Challenges and Opportunities for French Immersion Programs in Canada**

French immersion programs in Canada face a number of challenges in the years ahead. These challenges include the need to improve student outcomes, to increase access to these programs for all students, and to

address the concerns of those who believe that these programs are creating a divide between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians.

Despite these challenges, French immersion programs also present a number of opportunities for Canada. These programs can help to promote linguistic diversity, foster cultural exchange, and strengthen the relationship between Canada and France.

The future of French immersion programs in Canada will depend on the ability of stakeholders to find creative solutions to these challenges. By working together, the Canadian government, the French government, educators, and parents can ensure that these programs continue to play a valuable role in the Canadian education system.

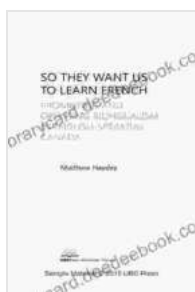
The relationship between France's language policy and French immersion programs in Canada is a complex one. France's commitment to promoting the French language has both supported and challenged these programs, and the future of these programs will depend on the ability of stakeholders to find creative solutions to the challenges they face.

Ultimately, the strength of French immersion programs in Canada is a testament to the enduring connection between France and Canada, and to the importance of cultural exchange and linguistic diversity in our globalized world.

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## References

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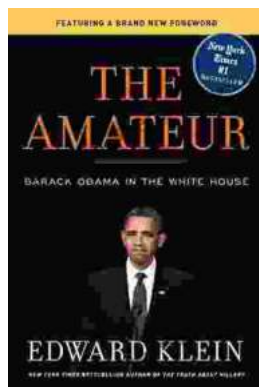


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