

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE MINORITY LANGUAGE

An Overview and Analysis of the Issues

SUMMARY

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Analysis and Report

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Introduction

This study provides an overview of postsecondary education in the minority language, as well as the issues related to postsecondary education in French in a minority context. To do so, this report sketches a quantitative portrait of postsecondary education in English in Quebec and in French outside Quebec by drawing on various Statistics Canada sources – Population Census (2016), National Graduates Survey (NGS) (2018), Post-Secondary Student Information System (PSIS) (2018-2019) – and administrative databases. Based on the literature and interviews with more than 25 people involved in the administration of postsecondary education, this report provides an analysis of the dynamics and characteristics of French-language postsecondary education outside Quebec.

English postsecondary education in Quebec

The 2018 NGS, which focused on degrees earned in 2015, revealed that:

- ✧ Pursuing a university education in English was the preferred option for a large majority of those who had English as their first language (76.8%) or English as the language most often spoken at home (79.6%).
- ✧ Those who studied only in English at university relied twice as much on the reputation of the institution (42.2%) to guide their choice than did those who studied in French (21.9%).
- ✧ A strong link between program of study and employment was less prevalent among those studying in English at university or college compared to those studying in French – 11 to 18 percentage points less.
- ✧ Postsecondary student debt was lower in Quebec than in other provinces; however, the average university debt in Quebec was higher for those who studied in English (\$24,000) compared to those who studied in French (\$17,700). Similar, although smaller, gaps also existed for college education.

University studies in 2018-2019

Provincial enrolment data for 2018-2019 indicates that 76,602 individuals were studying in English at three English-language institutions in Quebec: McGill University, Concordia University and Bishop's University.

- ✧ 24.9% of all Quebec university students were studying in English.
- ✧ The expenditures of English-language universities represented 32.2% of the total expenditures of Quebec universities.
- ✧ The international university student population was more than twice as high among students enrolled in English (24.8%) compared to students enrolled in French (10.8%).

- ✧ English-language students in universities were more likely to be women (54.6%), and this proportion was higher for French-language students (59,0 %).
- ✧ The three fields of study with the highest enrolment in English were humanities (22.2%), applied sciences (21.9%) and administrative sciences (17.2%).

College studies in 2018-2019

In 2018-2019, there were 39,937 English-language college students enrolled at 13 English-language institutions and 22 bilingual institutions.

- ✧ 19.5% of the total college enrolment was studying in English.
- ✧ The foreign student population was almost four times larger in English-language programs (13.4%) than in French-language programs (3.4%).
- ✧ Humanities (33.2%), business administration (19.4%) and sciences (15.5%) were the program families with the highest enrolment in English.

Postsecondary education in French in Canada outside Quebec

This research identified 25 institutions that offer university and/or college studies in French outside Quebec. The governance of the programs offered, as well as the integration of French and English in the governance or in the training, vary greatly from one environment to another.

The 2018 NGS revealed that:

- ✧ 36.5% of those whose first language was French studied in French only, while this proportion was 2.6 times higher (96.7%) for those for whom English was both their first language and language of study.
- ✧ Students who studied in French only prioritized proximity to home (35.2%) when choosing their academic institution, while for English-only students, the institution's reputation was the most important criterion (28.0%).
- ✧ A strong link was observed between the university's program of study and employment in 59.2% of cases for those who studied in English only, while this link was less important for those who studied at the college level in French only (48.5%).

University studies in 2018-2019

In 2018-2019, there were 21,825 people enrolled in a postsecondary program in French at 14/17 of the institutions surveyed. More than half of these individuals were enrolled at the University of Ottawa (11,766) and almost a quarter at the Université de Moncton (4,610).

- ✧ The governance modes of university studies are worth differentiating: six universities offered a French-only administrative and learning environment; five universities offered a bilingual administrative and learning environment; three academic units offered a

predominantly French administrative and learning environment within English universities; one academic unit offered a bilingual administrative and learning environment within an English university; two English universities offered a predominantly English administrative environment and a bilingual learning environment in French education.

- ✧ The proportion of the foreign student population studying in French was 15.6%, compared to 16.3% for the total university student population in Canada outside Quebec. However, this similarity masked significant inter-institutional disparities. For example, while the student population of some universities was over 30% for foreign students, they represented less than 5% of the student population in Western academic units.
- ✧ Women made up the majority of the university student population enrolled in French (63.6%), especially in the West (74.1%); these proportions were significantly higher than the Canadian average outside Quebec (56.2%).
- ✧ The variety of programs offered in French was not as wide as that of majority-language universities. The importance of the social sciences field illustrates this dynamic, considering that this field of study is 1.6 times higher in French-language education (27.8%) than the average for Canada, outside Quebec (17.1%). Similarly, the field of education covers almost three times as many French-language registrations (13.7%) as those for Canada as a whole, excluding Quebec (4.8%). Conversely, the field of mathematics, computer sciences and information sciences is 2.5 times less represented in French enrolments (2.1%), when compared to the total population (5.3%).

College studies in 2018-2019

The student population at 9/10 institutions was 10,528, with a large concentration in Ontario (73.1%).

- ✧ College education was always offered in an administrative and learning environment where French was exclusive (9/10) or the majority (1/10);
- ✧ The proportion of the international student population studying in French was 12.2%, the highest proportion being in Atlantic Canada (20.2%);
- ✧ The student population enrolled in a French-language college program was more likely to be female (55.0%), especially in the West (68.8%); these proportions were higher than the proportion of females in the total college student population (53.3%).

Findings and avenues for reflection

The data presented and the content analyzed in this study make it possible to outline general findings related to postsecondary education in English in Quebec and in French outside Quebec.

Avenues for reflection are also proposed with a view to developing knowledge and improving the offer of postsecondary studies in French outside Quebec. These ideas are based on an analysis that considers how to implement an education that emphasizes the autonomy of French on the one hand and the blending of languages on the other, and that is intended as a starting point for considering the vulnerability and protection factors of postsecondary education in French.

Findings on enrolment and postsecondary programs in English in Quebec in 2018-2019

Overall, access to postsecondary education in English in Quebec is significant, in terms of the number of institutions, the diversity of programs offered and the reputation of the institutions.

Significant opportunities for postsecondary education in English. In Quebec, 1,097,920 people speak English as their first official language spoken (FOLS) according to the 2016 Census, which represents 13.8% of the total population. This proportion is well below the number of students studying in English at universities (24.9%) and colleges (19.5%).

Significant incentives to study in English. Those who studied only in English at university relied twice as much on the reputation of the institution to guide their choice than did those who studied in French. This gap can be related to the greater prestige of English-language institutions, both for university and college studies. Additionally, the number of institutions, the number of programs offered, and the diversity of these programs contribute to the interest in studying in English.

Higher average debt for English studies. With respect to student debt, although it is lower on average in Quebec than in the rest of Canada, Quebec university and college graduates who studied in English have a higher average debt than graduates who studied in French.

Findings on enrolment and postsecondary programs in French in Canada outside Quebec in 2018-2019

In general, access to postsecondary education in French in Canada outside Quebec is limited in terms of the number of institutions, the diversity of programs offered and the reputation of the institutions.

Limited access to postsecondary education in French. A variety of data indicate that there are limited postsecondary education opportunities in French outside Quebec. In fact, just over one third of 2015 graduates whose mother tongue is French only studied in French at university, while this proportion was about 2.6 times higher for those whose mother tongue is English. Similarly, for this same cohort, those studying in French migrated to another province almost three times more often than those studying in English only. Furthermore, in 2018-2019, approximately 2% of the students enrolled in colleges and universities were studying in French, while the population with French as a FOLS represented 3.8% of the population, according to the 2016 Census.

Diversification of postsecondary education audiences in French. The target audiences for postsecondary programs offered in French are people whose FOLS is French, but also Francophiles and the Francophone foreign student population. Similarly, more and more Francophiles want to study in French at the elementary and secondary levels, as evidenced by an increase of approximately 50% in immersion students between 2008 and 2018. While the foreign student population makes up an average of 15.6% of the student population enrolled in French, this proportion is growing. These audiences are attracting increasing interest from postsecondary institutions. That being said, for most institutions, real strategies for recruiting Francophile and foreign students have yet to be developed.

Less incentive to study in French. The lesser reputation of French-language postsecondary institutions and the higher average student debt associated with French-language studies may be deterrents to choosing a French-language program.

Limited variety of programs offered in French. The STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics and computer science) fields of study are underrepresented in the supply of postsecondary education in French and the overall variety of programs offered is smaller.

Student population less likely to be male and international students. Given the overrepresentation of women in non-STEM programs, it is not surprising to see an overrepresentation of women in French-language university or college studies, compared to the Canadian average outside Quebec. At the same time, the complexity and cost of recruiting foreign students, especially for western academic units, may account for a lower proportion of the foreign student population studying in French at universities and colleges.

Benefits in terms of sense of belonging, language security and professional life. Scientific literature recognizes that, for Francophones, pursuing postsecondary education in French is directly related to the development of a sense of language proficiency, cultural and linguistic identity building, life satisfaction, career preparation, and economic opportunities (Jean-Pierre, 2017; Mougeon and Nadasdi, 2010; Pilote and Joncas, 2016; Pilote and Magnan, 2012; Samson, 2021; Villeneuve, 2018).

Findings on institutions offering postsecondary education opportunities in French

Difficult funding environment. The greatest challenge to the sustainability of postsecondary education in French in a minority context is funding. For some, the precariousness experienced is such that the short-term viability of the institution, its programs of study and its student services is compromised. For others, this precariousness compromises the opportunities for development and innovation. The small size of the vast majority of institutions and their staff deprives them of significant economies of scale and sources of additional revenue. Similarly, the growing share of postsecondary institutions' revenues related to tuition fees, particularly those from foreign students, makes some programs or institutions more vulnerable – particularly those

that have lower enrolments or cannot deploy a foreign student recruitment strategy. In addition, it is important for institutions that provincial governments and federal departments recognize the financial requirements of providing a safe learning environment and student experience in French, as well as the development of FMCs. That being said, this recognition varies from government to government and from department to department.

Need for measures to protect French and to recognize the dynamics of language interaction. Depending on the governance model, different measures are taken, or need to be taken, to protect French with respect to student and learning experiences. Within bilingual governance, these measures may include the translation of administrative resources, the development of programs tailored to the needs of Francophones, the requirement of bilingualism for all staff, etc. In addition, given the varying English and French language skills of student populations, a variety of measures and resources are available, or could be made available, to ensure language security and to develop the skills of the student population for their academic and professional careers. It is also important to guarantee places and activities where French is protected.

Distinctive mission for FMCs. Institutions that offer postsecondary education in French in a minority context all seek to contribute explicitly to the development and vitality of the FMCs they serve and to the vitality of the French language and bilingualism. These institutions also make an important contribution to institutional completeness. The factors that seem to help protect and enhance this mission of service to the Francophone community are many: an institutional mission statement that specifies its commitment to FMCs; official representation of FMCs and Francophones in governance; formal and diversified links between postsecondary institutions and FMC organizations; research resources, including knowledge mobilization, directed toward FMCs; the use of postsecondary institution space for FMC organizations and events; the presence of campuses in the regions; the provision of services to FMCs; economic partnerships; collaborative agreements between institutions offering postsecondary studies in French that promote program development and student mobility, etc.

Distinct and challenging recruitment. Universities and colleges offering French-language studies face additional recruitment challenges compared to English-language institutions, especially considering that the target populations are smaller, more dispersed and less visible. In addition, Francophone units and some bilingual institutions cannot rely on the central administration of their host institution to implement a promotion strategy – in Canada and internationally – that fully meets their needs. For example, while recruiting foreign students has become an essential link in the funding of postsecondary institutions in Canada, a challenge for Francophone or bilingual academic units is that their home institution does not have an international recruitment strategy in Francophonie countries.

Avenues of reflection to protect and develop postsecondary education in French

Finally, the study's analyses show that actions can be taken to protect postsecondary education in French in a minority context and ensure its development.

Examine the possibilities for improving the funding arrangements and the amounts dedicated to French language studies. An examination of the funding contexts of postsecondary institutions in Canada revealed two dynamics that create particular challenges for institutions offering French-language education. On the one hand, the funding model for postsecondary education has evolved in such a way that it favours institutions with large enrolments and significant numbers of foreign students. On the other hand, additional investments are required to: provide postsecondary education in French, enable the expansion of opportunities to study in French (particularly in the STEM fields) and make up for historical gaps. In this context, the federal support programs for postsecondary education in French could also be reviewed, both in terms of the amounts allocated and the funding arrangements.

Pursue research on postsecondary education in French. Our review of the literature and the data collected in this study provide information about how French postsecondary education unfolds, as well as clues about its characterization factors, such as vulnerability, protection, and development. However, several questions remain unanswered and merit further investigation in subsequent work. For example, it might be useful to conduct:

- ✧ a comparative study on the protection and vulnerability factors of the student experience and of learning in French in the different governance settings of postsecondary education in French.
- ✧ a longitudinal study of postsecondary education in French, which would make it possible to better target variations in clientele and programs, as well as the effects of various contexts (demographics, public policy, funding, etc.) on this sector.
- ✧ a comparative study of the impact of English and French language education on career paths in different provinces and territories.
- ✧ a study which provides an overview of the state of research conducted in French outside Quebec and in FMCs with a view to ensuring its development, particularly in small institutions and especially with regard to knowledge mobilization.

Examine the possibility of a recruitment strategy for the foreign student population aligned with a strategy to support this population on the pathway to permanent residency. The Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023 counts on immigration to strengthen the vitality of FMCs, and the foreign student population constitutes a pathway to beneficial immigration. At the same time, the funding model for postsecondary institutions in Canada requires significant enrolment revenues, and those of the foreign student population are generally higher than those of the Canadian student population. In this context, while the foreign student population at some postsecondary institutions offering French-language studies was significant, Western academic units consisted of less than 4% of foreign students. A consistent and collaborative approach among institutions, where permanent residency appears as a possible and planned goal, could benefit both FMCs and postsecondary institutions.