

User journeys of language learners navigating Québec's French language training ecosystem

PROVINCIAL EMPLOYMENT ROUNDTABLE



Acknowledgements

We are thankful to the many research participants and subject matter experts who participated in this study.



Special thanks to the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois(es) d'expression anglaise (SRQEA), whose financial support made this work possible.

The views expressed herein are those of the Provincial Employment Roundtable. They do not purport to reflect the views of the SRQEA.

Authors

Cimminnee Holt, Policy Researcher
Sta Kuzviwanza, Director of Policy and Research
Morgan Gagnon, Policy Research Lead

Contributors

Melissa O. Rivera, Policy Research Intern
Conner McLevy, Policy Research Intern

Publication date: November 2024

Dépôt légal, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2024.

ISBN 978-1-0689937-9-4

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	2
Authors	2
Contributors	2
Table of contents	3
Executive Summary	4
Evaluate how technology can be leveraged to improve the tracking of the population's French language proficiency.	6
Introduction	6
Methodology	7
Results	9
Types of language learners	9
Interprovincial migrants	10
International students	11
Québec-born learners	11
Program-user journeys	11
Interprovincial migrants	12
Motivation	12
Experiences with language training	12
Barriers	13
International students	14
Motivation	14
Experiences with language training	15
Barriers	15
Québec-born English speakers	16
Motivation	16
Experiences with language training	17
Barriers	18
Discussion	18
Appreciation of French and Québec	18
Desire to integrate into the labour market	18
Labour market insecurity	19
Linguistic anxiety and linguicism	19
Barriers to participation	20
Limited programming options	20
Bridging programs	20
Work-integrated learning	21
Social integration activities	22
Conclusion	22
References	23

Executive Summary

In recent years, the Québec government has significantly invested in French language training programs to promote greater usage of French in workplaces, schools, and society. Alongside these efforts, public discourse has emerged about the perceptions French-speaking Quebecers hold of English speakers, many of whom believe that English speakers are not committed to learning or using French despite the availability of publicly funded French language training resources.¹ To explore these issues, this study examines the experiences, motivations, and barriers faced by English-speaking individuals in the labour force regarding French language training, particularly following the introduction of new services by Francisation Québec in June 2023. In doing so, we develop a broad typology of different language learners and explore their language-learning journey through interviews regarding their experiences and perceptions of the French language, language training, and navigating Québec's labour market. We also interview subject matter experts to identify types of language learners and key themes. We then discuss the impact that these different experiences have on language learners' outcomes, as well as the types of policy and program approaches that could improve their experiences with adult French language training programs.

Our key findings:

- We identify three key types of English-speaking language learners in the French language training ecosystem: interprovincial migrants, international students, and Québec-born English speakers.
- Language-learning participants in interviews expressed a desire to engage with Québécois culture as a primary motivation to learn French, particularly those who are interprovincial migrants and international students. Participants also indicated that participating in French language training could help facilitate their social and cultural integration in the province.
- Learning French was viewed by some language learners as a necessity for their integration into Québec's labour market. Many indicated they felt they needed to study French to get a job.
- Some participants described how they experienced heightened anxiety when interacting with native speakers and how this had negatively impacted their motivation and experience of learning French.
- Accessibility, findability, and eligibility issues for French language training programs were concerns across all three language learner groups. Most participants and subject matter experts indicated that finding information, determining eligibility, and accessing courses and materials for French language training was often confusing.
- Some participants were unaware of the Québec government's creation of Francisation Québec and the free offer of French language courses for Québec residents. Among

¹ "Building Bridges," Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, Government of Canada, last modified June 2024, <https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-06/building-bridges-perceptions-realities-2024.pdf>

those who were aware of Francisation Québec's courses, they indicated they had faced challenges with accessing and signing up for courses in their region.

- Generally, a lack of awareness of available programs is a primary challenge among language learners interviewed. There is a need for more promotion of French language training programs, including online and offline promotion in community and educational spaces.
- Learners expressed a need for profession-relevant language training given the challenges they faced in the labour market due to French language barriers. Some participants also faced challenges completing French language training while in school or working, highlighting the importance of on-the-job language training.
- Participants also discussed the importance of social integration activities in bridging linguistic communities and providing informal learning opportunities.

Our recommendations are:

Reduce barriers to French language training.

- Improve the Francisation Québec website by enhancing its usability and comprehensiveness as a one-stop-shop online government platform that provides all resources and information related to adult French language training in Québec.
 - The platform should provide diverse learning resources for all stakeholders, with sections dedicated to different stakeholder groups, including employers, volunteers, employment services providers, language training providers, teachers, and learners.
 - The platform should direct learners toward language assessments and provide real-time information on the status and availability of French language training programs.
 - Information on French language training should be made available in multiple languages to increase accessibility for linguistic minorities.
 - Develop a provincial targeted marketing strategy to raise awareness of existing French language programs among English speakers. Coordinate this promotion of programs with major English language institutions and community organizations to maximize outreach.

Expand the scope of available French language training programs.

- Fund informal language training programs to match language learners with volunteer French speakers.
 - Develop programs to accommodate learners with different levels of French proficiency, including advanced speakers looking to perfect their French.
- Fund formal and informal language-learning programs, including book clubs, mentorship, networking, conversation circles, and cultural events at libraries and community centres.

Invest in on-the-job French language training.

- Leverage the private and public sectors to increase on-the-job French language training.
 - Establish bridging programs for English-speaking post-secondary graduates to help them transition into French language workplaces through combined language training and work experience programs.
 - Fund programs that support linguistic minorities with relevant professional experience to transition directly into their professional field, specifically in professional orders and fields facing labour shortages.
 - Review and update incentives to increase employers' participation in language training within the workplace.

Invest in the education workforce to improve the quality and offer of French language training programs.

- Invest in the recruitment, training and retention of French language teachers and staff.
- Implement rapid training programs to certify new teachers to deliver adult French language training.
- Collaborate with teachers and pedagogical experts on leveraging new language-learning technologies such as artificial intelligence and software for self-directed learning.

Collect detailed data to track the impact and success of French language programs in Québec.

- Regularly collect and publish linguistic data in Québec to track French language competency levels.
 - Data collected should include the population's speaking, listening, writing, and reading competencies.
 - Evaluate how technology can be leveraged to improve the tracking of the population's French language proficiency.

Introduction

In 2023, the Québec government made a bold commitment to support French language learning by allocating \$214 million over five years to Francisation Québec to enhance the usage of French across the province's workplaces, schools, and broader society. Francisation Québec, launched in 2023 as a centralized access point for adult French language learning services, offers a range of in-class, online, and workplace training options to address Quebecers' diverse French language learning needs. However, despite the promising ambition of this initiative, its rollout has faced notable challenges, including reports of bottlenecks and long wait times for courses, which have raised concerns about the program's accessibility and efficacy.²

Beyond these logistical challenges, the initiative has sparked broader conversations about language dynamics in Québec, particularly the perceptions held by French-speaking Quebecers toward their English-speaking counterparts. A prevalent perception is that many French speakers believe English speakers are not genuinely interested in learning or using French.³ This perception, coupled with the structural challenges of accessing language training that have been reported over the years, raises critical questions about the actual motivations, barriers, and experiences of English speakers navigating Québec's French language training ecosystem.

To explore these issues, this study was designed to examine the experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by English speakers in the labour force as they engage with French language learning, especially in light of increasing public investments and discourse on French language training. By focusing on the experiences of these individuals, we aim to understand whether English speakers are, in fact, interested in learning French and what impacts their language acquisition efforts.

To achieve this, we conducted 36 in-depth interviews with adult English speakers in the labour force, alongside 10 interviews with subject matter experts from academia, educational institutions, and French language training programs. Through these conversations, we developed a comprehensive typology of language learners, categorizing them by their motivations, experiences, and barriers encountered throughout their learning journey. This typology not only highlights the diversity of English speakers' engagement with French language training but also offers insight into how their learning experiences influence their success in Québec's labour market. The findings from this study provide crucial perspectives on how policy and program improvements could better support English speakers on their path to bilingualism, and, ultimately, foster greater social and linguistic integration within Québec society.

² "Évaluation du déploiement de Francisation Québec," Commissaire à la langue française, last modified May 2024, https://www.commissairelanguefrancaise.quebec/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/PA_chap4_evaluation-FQ.pdf

³ "Building Bridges," Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, Government of Canada, last modified June 2024, <https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-06/building-bridges-perceptions-realities-2024.pdf>

Methodology

To address the research questions, we employed a qualitative research approach, conducting both in-depth interviews and focus groups. The methodology is outlined below:

Phase 1: We began with informational interviews with 10 subject matter experts with knowledge in French language acquisition for adults, language competencies, and work-integrated learning in Québec. We found the subject matter experts via internet search, referrals, and their published scholarship on adult French language acquisition. We contacted them via email with a request for an interview. All subject matter experts have experience teaching, interacting with, and/or researching adult linguistic minorities navigating the French language training ecosystem in Québec. The interviews took place in July and August of 2023.

We interviewed:

- 2 French second language professors and researchers
- 2 Pedagogical consultants/guidance counsellors
- 2 Administrators/coordinators of French language training programs in educational institutions
- 1 Educational technology specialist in French language training
- 1 Associate Vice-President of French language programs in a postsecondary educational institution
- 1 Executive Director of a national work-integrated learning organization
- 1 Director of a French language program in a postsecondary educational institution

Subject matter experts were interviewed regarding:

- The types of students registering for French language courses and whether existing programs meet their language-learning needs.
- The motivations, experiences, and barriers that adult learners face when taking French language courses.

Subject matter experts' responses were used to inform Phase 2 of the data collection and provide additional context on the landscape of French language training in Québec.

Phase 2: We conducted focus groups and interviews with 36 English-speaking Quebecers in the labour market. To find participants, we circulated a call for research participants online via our newsletter and offline through network organizations, including educational and vocational institutions, community organizations, and employment service providers for the English-speaking community. We received over 500 participant responses via email. We then narrowed down this number by removing spam responses, conducting an email screening for respondents, and sending a brief questionnaire for participants to complete. Participants who were recent immigrants to Québec and had access to Québec's francization programs for

immigrants were excluded since recent immigrants to Québec qualify under a different stream of targeted francization programs.⁴

The screening criteria for research participants were:

- Identify as an English speaker
- Residing in Québec
- At least 18 years of age
- Have taken (or are interested in taking) French language training in Québec
- Currently employed or seeking employment

Participants who successfully completed the screening process were randomly selected and invited to participate in interviews or focus groups conducted via teleconferencing. All sessions were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. In cases where participants either did not attend their scheduled sessions or failed to meet the screening criteria, they were excluded from the study. Recruitment efforts continued until we reached our target of 36 participants.

We interviewed a total of 36 research participants in the following format:

- 15 people in individual interviews of 45-60 minutes
- 21 people in focus groups (3-5 in each group) of 60-90 minutes

Interviews and focus groups took place between September and November of 2023.

Participants were queried on the following:

- Motivations for learning French
- Experiences with embarking on French language training, including finding relevant information, evaluating eligibility, registering for courses, accessing course materials, French in the workplace, and participation in programs
- Barriers faced in participating in French language training

Responses from subject matter experts and research participants were analyzed and sorted thematically to develop a typology⁵ of French language learners and the related motivations, experiences, and barriers they faced with regard to French language training. All quotations⁶ in this report are from transcripts of the recorded interviews and focus groups with participants.

⁴ Francization Québec offers multiple French course streams, including full time, part-time, and online options. Each of these options is divided into specific courses for immigrants and Canadian born persons. See "Full-time French courses," Government of Québec, accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.quebec.ca/en/education/learn-french/full-time-courses>.

⁵ A typology is "a hierarchical system of categories used to organize objects according to their similarities and dissimilarities." See Jelani Mandara, "The Typological Approach in Child and Family Psychology: A Review of Theory, Methods, and Research," *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 6, no. 2 (2003), 132. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023734627624>

⁶ Quotes may have been lightly edited for clarity without changing the meaning or intent of the speaker. Examples of editing are removing repeated words, omitting filler words, removing identifying information, and shortening long quotes.

Results

Types of language learners

In this section, we propose a broad typology of English-speaking Quebecers who engage in French language training and provide a profile of these learners. Organizing learners by types distinguishes the unique characteristics of groups of learners, particularly their life situation and language-learning needs.

We identified the types of language learners in this report based on an analysis of the responses provided by subject matter experts and an analysis of the data collected from the 36 English speakers who were interviewed. When subject matter experts were asked to identify the types of French language learners they had encountered in their work, they all sorted learners by their place of origin, whether they were international students, immigrants, interprovincial migrants, or born in Québec. This is an important categorization since individuals' migrant status or origin is typically used to determine their eligibility for publicly funded French language training programs. We sorted learners, excluding immigrants, into the three broad categories of interprovincial migrants, international students, and Québec-born English speakers.

Table 1 - Types of French language learners by migration status/place of origin

Type	Number of research participants	Description
Interprovincial migrants	16	This program user is typically Canadian-born from outside Québec or immigrated to the rest of Canada first, then to Québec.
International students	8	This program user migrated to Québec as an international student to obtain postsecondary education in Québec. Many students in this category pursue graduate degrees and/or degrees in technical-professional domains such as business, engineering, and computer science. They tend to be multilingual.
Québec-born English speakers	12	Program users in this category were born in Québec and typically have had previous French language training

Interprovincial migrants

This program user is Canadian-born from outside Québec or immigrated initially to the rest of Canada, then eventually moved to Québec for various reasons, including career, education, quality of life, and family.⁷ Interprovincial migrants in Québec tend to have a broad range of French language competencies, from beginner to fluent.⁸ The interprovincial migrant may have a history of taking French language courses in their prior province of residence. The amount of previous exposure to French in elementary, high school, or postsecondary education differed among our participants. For example, a few participants interviewed had received a French immersion education during childhood and adolescence in the rest of Canada. Participation in immersion programs varied from a few hours a week to 50% of their school instruction in French. Some participants described not being eligible or not having access to French immersion in youth despite their parents seeking it out. This is in line with research that has shown that access to French immersion in the rest of Canada tends to be inconsistent.⁹ Others in this category described taking French language courses in university or a private language school as adults. Some participants had been raised by at least one francophone parent, providing them with exposure to the language. A few had no exposure to French language training and spoke little French before moving to Québec. Many participants in this category reported having personal and social ties to Québec and being motivated to remain in the province. Their careers tend to vary, but some are talent hires¹⁰ who moved to Québec to work in professional fields, including engineering, information technology, finance, business services, education, and community services.

International students

International students migrated to Québec from either out-of-country or via another province to obtain postsecondary education in Québec. A few international students we interviewed in this category had attended a French language educational institution and had a working knowledge of French.

This type of language learner tends to be multilingual, with English being a second or third language and English language instruction being part of their educational experience in their country of origin. Some participants indicated that their knowledge of English was due to its prominence in popular culture and its position as the global lingua franca. Most research participants in this category had a low level of French proficiency when they first moved to Québec. The degrees and diplomas they had pursued at English language postsecondary schools did not always require French language courses, leading to a variation in participants'

⁷ The immigration process is different for newcomers migrating directly to Québec compared to the the rest of Canada. Québec requires a French language test and approval from the province, though migrants still undergo federal security vetting and other select processes. See "Immigration," Government of Québec, last modified February 23, 2023, <https://www.quebec.ca/en/immigration>

⁸ Statistics Canada reports that bilingualism outside of Québec is 9.5%. See: "Census in Brief English–French bilingualism in Canada: Recent trends after five decades of official bilingualism Census of Population, 2021," Catalogue no. 98-200-X, is. 2021013, *Statistics Canada*, last modified June 21, 2023, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-x/2021013/98-200-x2021013-eng.pdf>

⁹ Julie-Anne Lapointe and Laurence Martin, "Les programmes d'immersion mènent-ils au bilinguisme?" Radio-Canada, last modified June 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1799635/ecoles-programme-immersion-bilinguisme-francais>

¹⁰ Talent hires are individuals who are typically recruited from out-of-province by an employer owing to their skillset or experience. By definition, they are employed. They tend to therefore have professional ties to Québec and are likely to be invested in remaining in the province. The French language training they are likely to seek out tends to be focused on perfecting their French and professional communications for career advancement.

exposure to French language training within postsecondary educational settings. Several research participants in this category described facing both linguistic and cultural integration challenges after moving to Québec, though they expressed a continued desire to live and work in Québec.

Québec-born learners

Québec-born English speakers tend to have high rates of bilingualism, with data from the 2021 Census indicating most English mother tongue Quebecers (approximately 70%) can speak French, and most use it at work, school, and home.¹¹ Among the research participants, most attended English language schools in their primary and secondary education, with a diverse range of French immersion experiences. Their exposure to French outside of school differs; some lived in primarily francophone communities or had one francophone parent, and their oral French language proficiency is high. Among those with advanced levels of oral French language competency, some noted that although they had advanced oral proficiency, their writing proficiency was lower, and they had less confidence in their written French. A few noted that they had advanced levels of French proficiency in all categories but still wanted to participate in language training to perfect their French and learn French language skills specific to their profession.

Program-user journeys

This section summarizes the responses from research participants who were interviewed on the key motivations, experiences, and barriers language learners face in pursuing French language training. Responses are sorted according to the three types of language learners previously identified: interprovincial migrants, international students, and Québec-born learners.

- **Motivations:** French language learners' impetus for learning French
- **Experiences:** first-person experiences navigating the French language training ecosystem
- **Barriers:** the obstacles and challenges faced during their language learning journey

At times, motivations, experiences, and barriers overlap when, for example, participants describe instances where barriers negatively affected their motivation. These intersections are discussed further in the discussion section that follows.

¹¹ "Building Bridges," Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, Government of Canada, last modified June 2024, <https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-06/building-bridges-perceptions-realities-2024.pdf>

Interprovincial migrants

Motivation

Participants were asked to identify their motivations for pursuing adult French language training. Most participants indicated that proximity to or immersion within French was an important part of their decision when moving to Québec, and they were excited to learn French. Participants shared other reasons for moving to Québec, including their career, education, spouse, wanting a new experience, and being close to family. Many had received some French language training in their province of origin and felt motivated to continue learning French. Participants also expressed an interest in learning about and participating in Québécois culture, which they described as unique compared to the rest of Canada. Some participants additionally indicated that learning French was an important part of their Canadian identity and that they viewed English-French bilingualism as a social and professional asset.

Interprovincial migrants also discussed more recent motivations to pursue French language training that developed after moving to Québec. They disclosed experiencing anxiety related to negative social or professional experiences while attempting to speak French in public. Some were motivated to study French owing to experiences where French speakers had been curt when they struggled or hesitated while speaking French. Several participants stated that they had less access to job opportunities because their French language proficiency was not high enough, despite having the relevant qualifications and work experience.

Career-oriented interprovincial migrants tended to focus on learning professional nomenclature and communications for career advancement.

Experiences with language training

Participants discussed facing low access to adult French language training in their home province, including not being sure whether publicly funded French language training was available. While many interprovincial migrants had received some French language education in their province of origin, most had minimal experience with the adult French language training ecosystem in Québec despite the rollout of Francisation Québec's free French courses in 2023. Most had some awareness that government-funded courses existed, but they were unsure how to access them and whether they qualified because they were not immigrants. For those individuals who had studied French in Québec, they had taken government-funded French courses in community organizations, taken private courses, or hired a tutor to provide a personalized learning experience. Among those who already had intermediate levels of French, they discussed the difficulties of finding specific courses that were workplace-oriented or career-specific to help them navigate the labour market. Participants also described looking for career-specific vocabulary and terminology banks online and not knowing where to find them. Some participants also described searching for more advanced courses in French but finding few options for courses beyond the beginner level.

When asked about their experiences in the labour market, participants described challenges navigating the labour market due to their level of French proficiency. One participant with beginner French competency described the cumulative frustration from these negative experiences:

"When I first came here two years ago, I was so excited to learn and so excited to integrate. And the sheer number of barriers that I have faced has completely destroyed my motivation to learn. I find it extremely frustrating that I am here, I want to learn, I understand the importance of learning and speaking French in this province, retaining the culture, and making sure French does not fade away. And I want to integrate so badly."



Participants who had come to Québec to work as talent hires described the challenges of learning French while working. They described how they were usually mentally tired after an entire workday and could not remain committed to evening courses. Others found that the courses available were not advanced enough for them to learn new content or, depending on the course type, did not meet their learning needs, such as increased focus on written French or academic French. When asked if they had access to French language training at work, most participants did not have French language training provided or subsidized by their employer:

"At the end of the day, there is no training by the company whatsoever. I really wish they could offer some workplace training and encouragement at all levels too. I mean, yes, not just for personal growth, but also to help the employee."



For the talent hires that had French language training subsidized by their workplace, the resources available to them varied greatly. They described how their employers encouraged

French language training but had no incentives or accommodations to support learners. In some cases, employers provided resources for self-learning outside of work or encouraged participants to take courses over their lunch hour. Several participants had compulsory French language training on the job during paid work hours. Others took courses at private language schools outside of work hours, where the employer paid the fees.

Barriers

Among those participants who had attempted to enroll in courses, most described challenges related to accessing information and registering. Despite most participants in this group describing themselves as having a basic comprehension of French, all experienced challenges navigating government websites to find information on French language training since the registration information was only available in French when they were searching. When they tried to find specific information about course availability, course descriptions, and eligibility, they could not find it in English.

When asked what was their primary barrier to participating in French language training, most participants cited eligibility. Up until recently,¹² many Canadian-born interprovincial migrants were not eligible for free or low-cost government French language courses.

“It was disastrous. At the time that I moved here, I was on unemployment...so I contacted Emploi Québec to enroll in their French language program. And I met nothing but roadblocks because I was a Canadian moving from one province to another... had I immigrated from a different country, I would have been prioritized in the list. The other struggle I had [in interacting with government employees] was I didn't speak French fluently.”



Lack of awareness is another barrier for participants; some were not aware of the expanded eligibility criteria and that they were now able to register for free courses in their region as of 2023.

¹² The new eligibility rules are part of the changes to the Charter of the French Language through Bill 96 in 2022. Adults in Québec are now eligible for French language learning services. See: “Francisation Québec,” Ministère de l’Immigration, de la Francisation et de l’Intégration, Government of Québec, last modified June 6, 2023, [*https://www.quebec.ca/gouvernement/ministere/immigration/francisation-quebec](https://www.quebec.ca/gouvernement/ministere/immigration/francisation-quebec)

"They told me that I wasn't eligible because I wasn't new to Canada. And I came from another province in Canada. And so, unfortunately, I've done a lot of research, and I've yet to find any sort of government program for which I'm eligible just because of the fact that I lived in Canada previously... Other than that, I know there are some private courses that are being offered, but it's not something that's in my budget right now. So I have yet to take a French language course."



Among those who had encountered a French language barrier in registering for courses, all described feeling discouraged about finishing their registration since translated documents were not available at the time.

International students

Motivation

Participants who were previously or currently international students described being interested in French language training as part of their commitment to living and working in Québec post-graduation. To align with that goal, they described seeking out career-specific French terminology and professional communication courses to increase their chances for labour market integration after graduation. Some also discussed the importance of gaining work experience in Québec to fulfill the requirements to gain permanent residency status in Québec. For those participants, French language training is not only connected to finding work but also to the immigration process and settling in Québec.

"I'm still open to moving out of Québec, I won't lie...getting a permanent residency while living in Québec is so hard because not only do I need French – I now have more than the required French proficiency – but I need two years of work experience in Québec"



Other participants in this category described being motivated to learn French and participate in French language training in order to improve their integration in Québec linguistically and culturally. Participants also described forming social connections in Québec while undergoing their studies, which increased their desire to learn French and live and work in Québec.

Experiences with language training

Several participants discussed registering for French language courses offered by their English language postsecondary educational institution. They described enrolling in various French language courses, including those that lead to micro-certificates in French as a second language and enrolling in multi-year courses.

Some participants in this category had enrolled in publicly funded French language courses. Participants indicated that registering for Francisation Québec courses was a long process with long wait times and minimal notice before classes were set to begin. This presented a challenge for students since their university coursework schedule had already been chosen. When scheduling conflicts with classes occurred, they were forced to withdraw from French courses even though they wanted to participate and would have been able to accommodate the French course with enough notice.

Most international students who participated in publicly funded French courses indicated they had found the courses valuable in improving their proficiency and had benefited from learning about the Franco-Québécois culture. Participants also appreciated the flexibility of the program delivery, which included part-time and hybrid courses.

One participant shared their concern that they had not received enough French language training to successfully integrate into the labour market in their area of expertise. Another international student indicated that since the formal French they learned in class sometimes differed from how French is spoken in everyday contexts, they were interested in more immersive learning experiences to learn colloquial French and professional French in workplace settings.

Barriers

One of the barriers to French language training for international students is time constraints. Learning French, in addition to their academic programs, can be an extra burden that prolongs their education. Given the busyness of life as a student, participants described the challenge of pursuing French language training while completing their studies. One participant noted that while they wished for more language training within their educational program, they did not want to be instructed in French since they were accustomed to English as the language of instruction, and switching to French could impact their academic record.

Another international student noted that qualifying for certain programs and careers required a specific level of French proficiency and terminology, but they had not found courses to help them prepare to enter these specific programs or professions. This is particularly true for careers in professional orders, such as healthcare professions, that require a high level of French language proficiency and formal language testing to work in the field.

Participants also described challenges finding work in a French language labour market and wanting to learn French on the job. They indicated that there is a lack of post-graduation work opportunities in French that are oriented toward language learners like them, especially international students who may not have Canadian work experience. This can lead to issues finding appropriate work in the field they are educated and trained, which increases the likelihood that they will migrate to another Canadian province and work there instead.

A few participants also discussed how culture shock and struggling to acculturate to Québec had impeded their language learning. One participant explained that French immersive community-building activities could address this need:



Québec-born English Speakers

Motivation

When asked about their motivations to participate in French language training, most Québec-born participants indicated they were motivated to learn French to work or find a job matching their skills. Some participants indicated that learning French and working is a way to contribute to the socioeconomic development of their communities. They indicated they were invested in remaining in Québec, though some had considered leaving, and they viewed French language training as an important pathway to thriving in the province. At the same time, they described feeling pressured to learn French due to the punitive aspects of language laws in the

province. A few participants indicated that while it was important to them to learn French, they wanted to protect their identities and rights as linguistic minorities in Québec.

One participant noted that their concept of identity as a trilingual person was multifaceted. They described the challenge of being labelled as “English,” “French,” or “Other” without consideration for how their identity was more nuanced than the languages they spoke. Other participants indicated that they were motivated to improve their French to facilitate the intergenerational transmission of French to their children. However, one participant noted that the issue of language was particularly difficult for them to navigate - they wanted to immerse themselves and live in French but did not want to compromise the legal status that permits them and their children access to English language education or health services.

Experiences with language training

Participants in this group discussed challenges in participating in French language training. Even though they had access to French courses and education in primary and secondary school, they indicated that access had been significantly reduced as adults, particularly for publicly funded courses. Some participants indicated that they had been able to take French language courses through referral and subsidies from Emploi-Québec. However, they were unsure of the criteria under which they were eligible for these courses. When asked where they had taken publicly funded French courses, most learners in this group had taken them at adult education centres or community organizations that served English speakers.

Several participants also noted that within existing French language courses, there was too much focus on beginner French and not enough advanced courses, particularly for individuals who had learned French in school and could converse sufficiently in French but needed more advanced courses to address specific learning gaps such as written French and professional French.

“I grew up in Mile End and I had francophone friends on the street. So I never had trouble speaking French. I never had trouble understanding French. Never had trouble reading French...I did French immersion in elementary school...My insecurity about French was always to do with written French.”



Similar to interprovincial migrants, several English-speaking Québec-born participants expressed that they had experienced anxiety with learning French and speaking it in public. They described facing discrimination due to their accent and pronunciation while interacting with fluent speakers, such as being admonished for not learning French sooner or faster, stumbling over certain words, or using an English word when they did not know the word in French. These types of social experiences impacted their French language learning journey. One participant described not feeling accepted as part of Québec society due to their low French proficiency and identity as an English speaker.



Some participants discussed how their lack of French language training and low proficiency had impacted their labour market outcomes, including facing unemployment and underemployment. They indicated that their inability to enter or navigate the labour market was due to their monolingualism or low proficiency in French.

Barriers

Participants who reside in communities outside of Montréal, particularly in rural areas, described challenges in accessing French language training due to distance and community isolation. They faced challenges accessing in-person courses because courses were too far from their community, and they did not have access to reliable and affordable transportation and did not know how to access transportation subsidies. They discussed how they would be able to participate in French language training if courses were available within their community since courses tended to be hosted at educational institutions. For those who could enroll in online courses, taking courses online allowed them to learn French while remaining in their community and meeting other obligations such as work. However, not all participants could take online courses due to limited access to stable and high-speed internet access in certain regions in Québec.

Another barrier identified by learners was the anxiety related to speaking French. As described above, they experienced heightened anxiety as the result of multiple negative interactions while speaking French, which acted as a social barrier to learning in public and interacting with fluent speakers.

Discussion

As illustrated in the previous section, the motivations, experiences, and barriers that research participants discussed often varied, but there are some key themes and issues among participants that we discuss in this section.

Appreciation of French and Québec

When asked about their initial motivations towards learning French, participants – especially interprovincial migrants and international students – expressed positive sentiments towards learning French and increasing their understanding of Québécois culture and society. They valued Québec’s unique position in North America, and this appreciation was often a motivating factor in their migration and desire to improve their French. This was also the case for Québec-born participants, who expressed a desire to learn French for practical and personal reasons. Most participants discussed positive motivations to learn French that were directly related to a recognition of its importance and value in Québec. These findings echo those in a 2022 survey by Canadian Heritage, which found that most English-speaking Quebecers (55%) were interested in French language cultural products, including books and film, and most (58%) attended cultural events in French.¹³

Desire to integrate into the labour market

Participants also held in common a motivation to learn French stemming from a recognition that this would facilitate their entry into or advancement within the labour market. Learners understood that French language proficiency was often essential to finding a job, especially within their field and skill level. Interprovincial migrants and international students especially emphasized that their ability to stay in Québec depended on finding a job and developing workplace- and profession-specific French. In a 2021 survey by PERT of English speakers in Québec’s labour market, 67% of respondents indicated that French was a leading barrier to employment for them.¹⁴ Additionally, most Canadians (77%) agreed that knowing both French and English improves the chances of finding a job, according to a 2022 Canadian Heritage survey.¹⁵

¹³ “Study on the Appreciation and Perception of Canada’s Official Languages,” Department of Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada, last modified November 29, 2022, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2023/pch/CH14-57-2023-1-eng.pdf

¹⁴ “2021 Employment Survey of English-speaking Quebecers and Organizations,” Provincial Employment Roundtable, last modified 2022, https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PERT_MC_Design_SRQEA_CORE_EINR_D5R02_20220823_EN_Web.pdf

¹⁵ “Study on the Appreciation and Perception of Canada’s Official Languages,” Department of Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada, last modified November 29, 2022, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2023/pch/CH14-57-2023-1-eng.pdf

Labour market insecurity

When asked about their experiences in the labour market, participants described facing challenges navigating the labour market due to their low level of French proficiency. Our previous research has identified French language skills as a primary barrier to employment for English speakers.¹⁶ English speakers have an unemployment rate of 10.9%, 4 percentage points higher than French speakers at 6.9%. This unemployment rate gap has doubled since the 2016 Census, when the gap was 2 percentage points.¹⁷ These labour market challenges created a cycle: without adequate French language training, participants' French proficiency remained low, and they had fewer employment opportunities and less exposure to French in the workplace, further contributing to their lack of linguistic confidence and motivation to pursue language training. Several participants were underemployed or unemployed, even though they had previous work experience and were actively looking for work, while others shared that they were considering leaving Québec due to challenges faced navigating a French language labour market.

Linguistic anxiety and linguicism

Participants described both their initial enthusiasm to pursue French language training and the challenges of being a language learner in the province. Challenges included facing linguicism¹⁸ and harsh judgements of their French skills. These experiences decreased their confidence in practicing French since they were likely to make mistakes, which are inherent to learning. Pedagogical best practices indicate that learning through practice is most effective when individuals are in an environment where they feel safe to make mistakes¹⁹ and are able to integrate those mistakes into their learning experience.²⁰ Yet, some research participants described how they felt uncomfortable making mistakes or practicing their French in public. A 2024 study by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages found that some English speakers who were less fluent in French had felt 'brushed off' by French speakers when they tried to speak French and that these experiences had made them hesitant to use or learn French.²¹ Language learning requires positive reinforcement; this requires positioning language learners as active partners in protecting and promoting French. As one participant summarized, "there has to be a way as a society to say, 'It's okay, we embrace you as you learn.'"

¹⁶ "2021 Employment Survey of English-speaking Quebecers and Organizations," Provincial Employment Roundtable, last modified 2022, https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PERT_MC_Design_SRQEA_CORE_EINR_D5R02_20220823_EN_Web.pdf

¹⁷ "CENSUS 2021 Update: A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec's English speakers," Provincial Employment Roundtable, last modified 2023, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Census-update-2021-En.pdf>

¹⁸ Linguicism is the discrimination or bias against an individual or group on the basis of language or dialect.

¹⁹ See, for example, "Creating a Safe Speaking Environment," Cambridge University Press, last modified May 2018, https://www.cambridge.org/gb/files/7215/7488/5502/CambridgePapersInELT_SafeSpeaking_2018_ONLINE.pdf

²⁰ See Jason Moser et. al., "Mind your errors: Evidence for a neural mechanism linking growth mind-set to adaptive posterror adjustment," *Psychological Science* 22, no. 12 (Fall 2011): 1484, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611419520>;

Laurence G. Weinzimmer and Candace A. Esken, "Learning from Mistakes: How Mistake Tolerance Positively Affects Organizational Learning and Performance," *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* 53, no. 2 (2017): 322, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886316688658>

²¹ "Building Bridges," Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, Government of Canada, last modified June 2024, <https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-06/building-bridges-perceptions-realities-2024.pdf>

Barriers to participation

A lack of awareness of available programs is a challenge, with some participants indicating they were unaware of the recent eligibility changes that increased access to French language training. There is a need for more promotion of the free and subsidized French language training programs available to language learners, including promotion online and offline in community and educational spaces. It is also important that community liaisons, including career services professionals and education counsellors, as well as those working in client-facing government positions such as Emploi-Québec, are educated on the existence of these programs so that they can refer learners and provide them with accurate information on how to register.

Participants described barriers to enrolling in French language training as having a negative impact on their motivation and experience of learning French. Most participants explained that finding information and resources, figuring out the eligibility, and enrolling in courses for French language training were often confusing. In cases where they could register, participants reported a low availability of courses and long wait times. This was supported by subject matter experts interviewed, who indicated that enrollment was a point of friction where learners would drop off if they were unsure about how to register. A 2024 report by Québec's Commissioner of the French Language found that since its launch in 2023, Francisation Québec had not been able to adequately respond to the large volume of requests for courses, and there were bottlenecks in delivering courses.²² These experiences demonstrate that while there have been notable increases in the availability, access, and eligibility for French language training in Québec in recent years, barriers in enrollment still impact participation.

Limited programming options

Learners who could access information about courses and enrol described the limited variety of courses available. Participants indicated that courses often focused on beginner-level skills and standard French language vocabulary. While there is a need for these types of programs, particularly among newcomers to Québec, participants indicated the need for more advanced courses. The limited French language training options left participants uncertain about the next steps they could take to improve their French. Subject matter experts interviewed, particularly those with teaching experience, indicated that the availability of classes was a significant barrier for participants.

Bridging programs

Participants, especially international students, described the difficulty of balancing French language education with their studies and suggested that they would benefit from French language education after completing their studies in a manner that would enable them to transition directly into the workforce, which we refer to here as bridging programs. Bridging

²² "Évaluation du déploiement de Francisation Québec," Commissaire à la langue française, last modified May 2024, https://www.commissairelanguefrancaise.quebec/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/RA_chap4_evaluation-FQ.pdf

programs allow skilled talent to overcome language barriers and find meaningful work by providing direct pathways into French language workplaces. Bridging programs specifically designed for graduates from English language vocational schools, colleges, CEGEPS, and universities would help address the French language training challenges that new graduates face. These programs have multiple benefits; they can facilitate graduates' integration into the workforce, support French language policy goals, and help Québec retain its educated workforce.

Work-integrated learning

Some research participants expressed that they would be more likely to participate in French language training programs if they were integrated into the workplace and formally recognized by the provincial government as skills training programs, similar to other employer-paid skills training programs. Programs such as Revenu Québec's Contribution to the Workforce Skills Development and Recognition Fund²³ could be expanded or used as a model to integrate French language training as an eligible training expenditure. Another creative approach could be a modification of a recommendation from the Fédération du commerce du Québec for the Québec and Canadian governments to collaborate in the creation of Voluntary Continuing Education Savings Plans (VCESP) for workers.²⁴ The plans would allow savings to be accumulated during one's working life and fund training for workers, with employers contributing under certain conditions. These plans could include French language training as an eligible training expense.

The workplace also offers opportunities for informal and immersive language learning. Fluent French speakers can act as language brokers in the workplace by reviewing French language emails or documents or providing a supportive environment for the language learner. This impromptu *jumelage*²⁵ could be expanded through province-wide campaigns with information on how fluent French speakers can support language learners. Similarly, large-scale mentorship and networking programs, particularly for English speakers in the labour market, would help improve informal language learning opportunities.

Social integration activities

Several participants discussed the importance of social integration activities in bridging linguistic communities and providing informal learning such as language learning cafés, linguistic exchange programs, and cultural events. They emphasized that their French language learning journey would be improved with opportunities for regularly applying what they are learning.

²³ For payrolls exceeding \$2 million, employers are required to allocate an amount representing at least 1% of the total payroll to eligible training expenditures to participate in workforce skills development. See, "Contribution to the Workforce Skills Development and Recognition Fund," Revenu Québec, Government of Québec, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://www.revenuquebec.ca/en/businesses/source-deductions-and-employer-contributions/calculating-source-deductions-and-employer-contributions/contribution-to-the-workforce-skills-development-and-recognition-fund/>

²⁴ "Accelerate the Pace: Federal Platform," Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec, accessed March 11, 2024, https://www1.fccq.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccelerateThePace_federal_web.pdf

²⁵ Jumelage, or intercultural twinnings, are informal language exchanges that pair a language learner with native speakers from the host culture. They aim to facilitate reciprocal exchange and mutually enrich the cultural understanding of the other. See "Intercultural Twinnings for students," Intercultural Twinning, Université du Québec à Montréal, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://jumelagesinterculturels.uqam.ca/en/>

Informal learning opportunities can increase learners' confidence and help lower anxiety about speaking French in public.

Conclusion

Participants in this study described a high motivation to learn French. Many of them had taken courses or tried to enroll in French language training programs and described taking opportunities to practice their French. However, they also encountered challenges in their French language learning journey, including a lack of awareness about programs, low availability, uncertainty about eligibility, issues registering for programs, a lack of appropriate French courses, and heightened anxiety about speaking French with fluent French speakers. These experiences created barriers to them continuing the French language training journey. Participants and subject matter experts interviewed provided recommendations on improving pathways to learning French in Québec, including more significant investments in profession-relevant language training, particularly work-integrated programs. They also discussed the importance of social integration activities that allowed for informal learning opportunities and bridging linguistic communities.

We provide the following recommendations to help address these challenges:

Reduce barriers to French language training

- Improve the Francisation Québec website by enhancing its usability and comprehensiveness as a one-stop-shop online government platform that provides all resources and information related to adult French language training in Québec.
 - The platform should provide diverse learning resources for all stakeholders, with sections dedicated to different stakeholder groups, including employers, volunteers, employment services providers, language training providers, teachers, and learners.
 - The platform should direct learners toward language assessments and provide real-time information on the status and availability of French language /training programs.
 - Information on French language training should be made available in multiple languages to increase accessibility for linguistic minorities.
 - Develop a provincial targeted marketing strategy to raise awareness of existing French language programs among English speakers. Coordinate this promotion of programs with major English language institutions and community organizations to maximize outreach.

Expand the scope of available French language training programs

- Fund informal language training programs to match language learners with volunteer French speakers.

- Develop programs to accommodate learners with different levels of French proficiency, including advanced speakers looking to perfect their French.
- Fund formal and informal language-learning programs, including book clubs, mentorship, networking, conversation circles, and cultural events at libraries and community centres.

Invest in on-the-job French language training

- Leverage the private and public sectors to increase on-the-job French language training
 - Establish bridging programs for English-speaking post-secondary graduates to help them transition into French language workplaces through combined language training and work experience programs.
 - Fund programs that support linguistic minorities with relevant professional experience to transition directly into their professional field, specifically in professional orders and fields facing labour shortages.
 - Review and update incentives to increase employers' participation in language training within the workplace.

Invest in the education workforce to improve the quality and offer of French language training programs

- Invest in the recruitment, training and retention of French language teachers and staff.
- Implement rapid training programs to certify new teachers to deliver adult French language training.
- Collaborate with teachers and pedagogical experts on leveraging new language-learning technologies such as artificial intelligence and software for self-directed learning.

Collect detailed data to track the impact and success of French language programs in Québec

- Regularly collect and publish linguistic data in Québec to track French language competency levels.
 - Data collected should include the population's speaking, listening, writing, and reading competencies.
 - Evaluate how technology can be leveraged to improve the tracking of the population's French language proficiency.

Bibliography

Adapted from Statistics Canada. (2021). Population in private households aged 15 years and over by age (7), first official language spoken (5), gender (3), immigrant status (4), Indigenous identity (3), knowledge of official languages (5), selected demographic, cultural, educational, labour force and income characteristics (124) and visible minority (15), for the Province of Québec, the RCMs of the Province of Québec and the administrative Regions of the Province of Québec, 2021 Census - 25% Sample Data, [custom table].

Statistics Canada. "Census in Brief English–French bilingualism in Canada: Recent trends after five decades of official bilingualism Census of Population, 2021," Catalogue no. 98-200-X, is. 2021013. Last modified June 21, 2023.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-x/2021013/98-200-x2021013-eng.pdf>

Cambridge University Press. "Creating a Safe Speaking Environment." Last modified May 2018.

https://www.cambridge.org/gb/files/7215/7488/5502/CambridgePapersInELT_SafeSpeaking_2018_ONLINE.pdf

Commissaire à la langue française. "Évaluation du déploiement de Francisation Québec." Government of Québec. Last modified May 2024,

https://www.commissairelanguefrancaise.quebec/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/RA_chap4_evaluation-FQ.pdf

Department of Canadian Heritage. "Study on the Appreciation and Perception of Canada's Official Languages." Government of Canada. Last modified November 29, 2022,

https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2023/pch/CH14-57-2023-1-eng.pdf

Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec. "Accelerate the Pace: Federal Platform." Accessed March 11, 2024.

https://www1.fccq.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AccelerateThePace_federal_web.pdf

Government of Québec. "Full-time French courses." Accessed March 7, 2023.

<https://www.quebec.ca/en/education/learn-french/full-time-courses>.

Government of Québec. "Immigration." Last modified February 23, 2023.

<https://www.quebec.ca/en/immigration>

Government of Québec. "L'organisation et ses engagements." Last modified June 6 2023.

<https://www.quebec.ca/gouvernement/ministere/immigration/francisation-quebec>

Holt, Cimminnee, and Sta Kuzviwanza, "Québec and the rest: A survey of national and international approaches to adult language training," Provincial Employment Roundtable. Last modified 2023.

<https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Quebec-and-the-rest-A-survey-of-national-and-international-approaches-to-adult-language-training.pdf>

Lapointe, Julie-Anne, and Laurence Martin. “Les programmes d’immersion mènent-ils au bilinguisme?” Radio-Canada. Last modified June 8, 2021.

<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1799635/ecoles-programme-immersion-bilinguisme-francais>

Mandara, Jelani. “The Typological Approach in Child and Family Psychology: A Review of Theory, Methods, and Research.” *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 6, no. 2 (2003): 129-146. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023734627624>

Ministère de l’Immigration, de la Francisation et de l’Intégration. “Francisation Québec.” Government of Québec. Last modified June 6, 2023.

<https://www.quebec.ca/gouvernement/ministere/immigration/francisation-quebec>

Moser, Jason, et. al. “Mind your errors: Evidence for a neural mechanism linking growth mind-set to adaptive posterror adjustment.” *Psychological Science* 22, no. 12 (Fall 2011): 1484-1489, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611419520>

Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. “Building Bridges.” Government of Canada. Last modified June 2024.

<https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-06/building-bridges-perceptions-realities-2024.pdf>

Provincial Employment Roundtable. “2021 Employment Survey of English-speaking Quebecers and Organizations.” Last modified 2022.

https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PERT_MC_Design_SRQEA_CORE_EINR_D5R02_20220823_EN_Web.pdf

Provincial Employment Roundtable. “CENSUS 2021 Update: A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec’s English speakers.” Last modified 2023.

<https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Census-update-2021-En.pdf>

Revenu Québec. “Contribution to the Workforce Skills Development and Recognition Fund.” Government of Québec. Accessed November 2, 2023.

<https://www.revenuquebec.ca/en/businesses/source-deductions-and-employer-contributions/calculating-source-deductions-and-employer-contributions/contribution-to-the-workforce-skills-development-and-recognition-fund/>

Statistics Canada. “Census in Brief English–French bilingualism in Canada: Recent trends after five decades of official bilingualism Census of Population, 2021.” Catalogue no. 98-200-X, is. 2021013. Last modified June 21, 2023.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-x/2021013/98-200-x2021013-eng.pdf>

Univeristé du Québec a Montréal. "Intercultural Twinings for students," Intercultural Twinning. Accessed November 20, 2023. <https://jumelagesinterculturels.uqam.ca/en/>

Univeristé du Québec a Montréal. "Intercultural Twinings for students." Intercultural Twinning. Accessed November 20, 2023. <https://jumelagesinterculturels.uqam.ca/en/>

Weinzimmer Laurence G., and Candace A. Esken, "Learning from Mistakes: How Mistake Tolerance Positiely Affects Organizational Learning and Performance," *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* 53, no. 2 (2017): 322-348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886316688658>



PERT

393 Rue Saint-Jacques Montréal, Suite 258,
Montréal, QC H2Y 1N9

Telephone: 1-855-773-7885

Email: info@pertquebec.ca

Website: <https://pertquebec.ca>