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English Speakers and the Struggle to Learn French in Québec's Regions



MARCH 2026



PERT is focused on addressing the employment and employability challenges facing Quebec's English-speaking community.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

English speakers in the regions of Québec are eager to learn and use their French, but call for higher quality training to improve their confidence in key situations of life and work.

The regions of Québec¹ have different settlement, cultural, and economic histories compared to urban centres in the province, which tend to be the focus of research and discussion, as well as programming related French language learning. In contrast, French language training opportunities in the regions are scarce, and may not reflect the realities of regional learners. These include rurality, limited internet accessibility, higher engagement in seasonal work, and lower literacy,² all of which can thwart language learning and impact the employability of minority language groups.

English speakers across Québec report lack of French language proficiency as a barrier to employment, simultaneously grappling with inconsistent access to French language learning supports as well as the social and political atmosphere surrounding use of French. Meanwhile, their context is changing: demographic and economic pressures are changing the nature of jobs and education alongside language expectations in Québec communities and workplaces. To this end, evidence on how English speakers in the regions are learning and leveraging French in their daily lives and careers needs updating.

As such, this report focuses on the experiences of English-speaking Quebecers living in the regions to better understand their experiences learning French and putting their French language skills to use in everyday and workplace situations. It presents findings from PERT's Regional French Language Needs Assessment Survey of over 650 English-speaking Quebecers' French-language learning experiences and perceptions,

¹ This research uses a definition of “the regions” consistent with PERT’s other research and data, where the regions refers to all Québec regions except Montréal. This differs from other definitions of regions that also exclude Laval. In our sample, 1.5% (n = 10) respondents were from Laval. Sometimes “the regions” are also referred to as “the rest of Québec” or ROC.

² Pierre Langois, “Estimation d’un indice de littératie par MRC,” https://fondationalphabetisation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FPAL36_Etude-litteratie-au-Quebec_20230118-2.pdf

and a supplemental survey on English speakers' awareness of French language assessments.

We investigate three main lines of inquiry:

- **Where have English-speaking Quebecers in the regions learned French?**
- **What motivates these English speakers to learn French?**
- **What do they feel they need to improve their French language learning?**

Across these questions, we also ask about English speakers' perceptions of their French language learning experiences to better understand what did and did not help them learn, in their own words. Overall, we found that English-speaking Quebecers in the regions were strongly self-motivated to learn French as a stepping stone towards increasing their cultural participation and strengthening their connections with their francophone neighbours. More practically, they were also motivated to improve their French in order to enhance their employability or secure French-speaking jobs, and ease their navigation of everyday life in Québec.

KEY FINDINGS:

- **Most regional English speakers had some kind of French language training in school (80.0%), but less than satisfactory experiences were common.**
- **Respondents continued French language training as adults (66.4%), and described themselves as able to communicate in French, in general.**
- **Their level of comfort and confidence using their French language skills in everyday situations varied and dropped most when the stakes were highest, such as when accessing healthcare and legal services.**
- **At work, most regional English speakers are required to speak French on the job either occasionally or regularly (79.1%), even though the majority have tended to work in predominantly English-speaking workplaces (80.1%). They tend to speak French at work even when they're not comfortable doing so.**
- **Only 39.0% of regional English speakers worked in French-speaking workplaces in the last ten years.**
- **Respondents were highly motivated by positive, intrinsic reasons to improve their French-language skills. However, many expressed discouragement with not being able to find the right kinds of French language training suitable to their learning needs or schedules.**

Overall, our research suggests that the regional French language learning landscape can be improved by continuing to provide a variety of resources, while investing in the increased accessibility, suitability, and quality of formal learning opportunities. Our survey findings suggest that regional English speakers may judge the suitability and quality of French language learning by the extent to which it helps them navigate key daily situations, integrate socially, and prepare them to confidently and practically engage in francophone work environments.

INTRODUCTION



English-speaking Quebecers are motivated to learn French and use it in their daily lives. They are moved by the idea that they can be bridge-builders between English- and French-speaking communities, and promoters of the French language and linguistic diversity in Québec, Canada, and abroad.³ They are also keenly aware that French language skills are often a determining factor for their employment and career advancement in the province. English-speaking Quebecers are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed, earn a lower income, and live below the poverty line as compared to French speakers – and the gaps are widening.⁴ These experiences are closely related to their lack of adequate French language skills and confidence, as well as linguistic biases in the labour market.⁵ Improving the efficacy of French language learning in the province is a collective priority to close economic disparities and bridge the social disconnect between English and French speakers.

And while Montréal is the locus of most English-speaking Quebecers, it's in the regions of Québec where we see the most pronounced economic and service access disparities between English and French speakers. In these more francophone and less densely populated contexts, English speakers make significant investments to learn French and comfortably participate in their communities. This might look like travelling further for French classes, navigating more frequent communication barriers in key life situations like the doctor's office, or working in more linguistically uniform workplaces.

At the same time, historical English-speaking communities in Québec have their own unique regional, cultural, and economic histories that shape their engagement with the French language and learning programs. These communities are diverse, including both urban and rural residents, Indigenous and immigrant backgrounds, different socioeconomic statuses, varying levels of French language skill, and varying attitudes towards integration and communion with francophone neighbours (at times demonstrating the living legacy of “les deux solitudes”). Understanding these dispositions, and how they change over time as Québec and Canada's social and economic landscape shifts,

3 Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, “[Building bridges: Perceptions and realities about the English-speaking communities of Quebec and their relationship with French in Quebec and bilingualism in Canada](#),” *Government of Quebec*, 2024

4 Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), “Census 2021 Update: A Brief Review of the Latest Data on Employment among Québec's English Speakers,” 2023, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Census-Brief-Update.pdf>

5 Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), “Learning French as an Adult: A Review of Current Best Practices in Adult French-Language Training in Québec,” 2023, <https://pertquebec.ca/reports/learning-french-as-an-adult-a-review-of-current-best-practices-in-adult-french-language-training-in-quebec/>

is crucial to supporting French language growth and socio-economic mobility of all Quebecers for long-term prosperity.

To this end, this report gives a timely update on the French language learning needs of English-speaking Quebecers, focusing on the less-studied context of the regions of Québec. These findings fill gaps in our understanding of English speakers' French language backgrounds, alongside their learning motivations and needs.

The report is structured along three main lines of inquiry:

- **Where have English-speaking Quebecers in the regions learned French?**
- **What motivates these English speakers to learn French?**
- **What do they feel they need to improve their French language learning?**

Across responses, we include English speakers' perceptions of their French language learning experiences to better understand what did and did not help them learn.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS



“The best learning for me has come from speaking with francophone friends and neighbours who don’t judge me. As an Anglo growing up in Québec many of us have been laughed at for our French. How can we change this in society? This has led to a lifetime of fear and shame for me that I feel each and every time I speak French.”

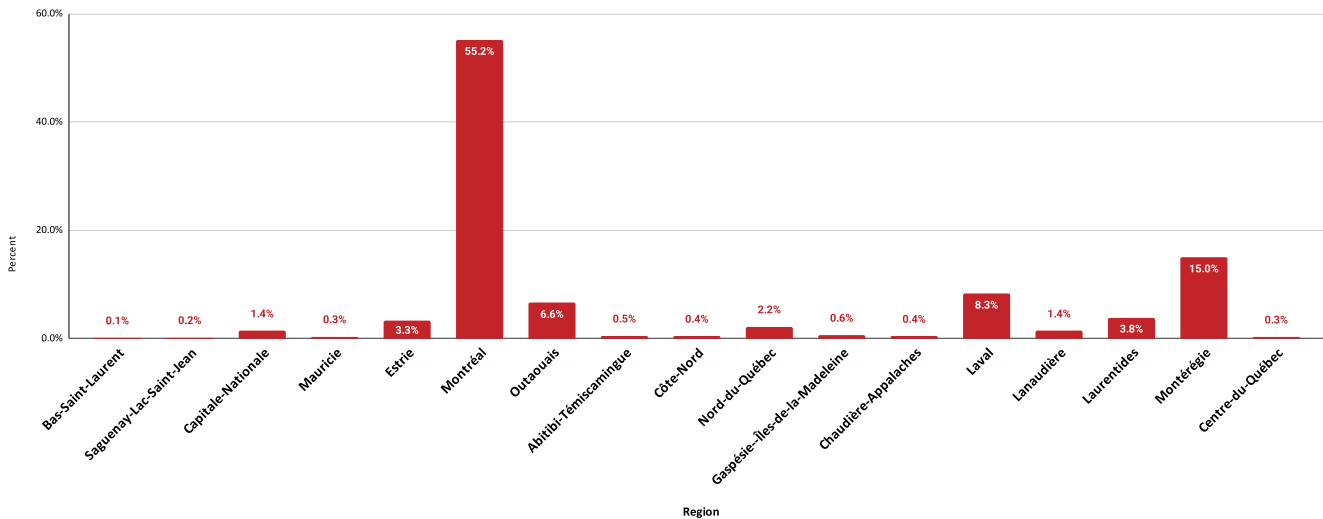
As English speakers have the imperative to learn French, Québec policymakers have a responsibility to ensure an effective, inclusive French language learning environment across all regions. This report offers recommendations for provincial policymakers, municipalities, and French language learning providers to support Québec’s language learning ecosystem. In between the lines of these findings is a case for empathy towards language learners in their goal to navigate the complexities of life in a second language, as well as empathy towards the complexity of responsive policymaking. We also recommend attunement to the situation of English speakers and overlapping minority groups in Québec outside of Montréal to ensure appropriate policy, programmatic, and community-driven solutions.

Context

While each region of Québec has its unique dynamics, a better understanding of shared challenges could lead to more effective, collaborative solutions. Québec’s 15 regions outside of Montréal and Laval⁶ represent about 71.6% of the province’s estimated population in 2021 comprising a mix of small urban centers and large rural communities. According to the 2021 census, the regions are home to roughly 37.1% of Québec’s English speakers, compared to 55.2% who live in Montréal (Figure 1a) and 8.3% who live in Laval.⁷

Each of the province’s 17 regions has a population of at least 1,000 English speakers.

FIGURE 1A: DISTRIBUTION OF ENGLISH SPEAKING QUEBECERS ACROSS REGIONS (CENSUS 2021)⁸



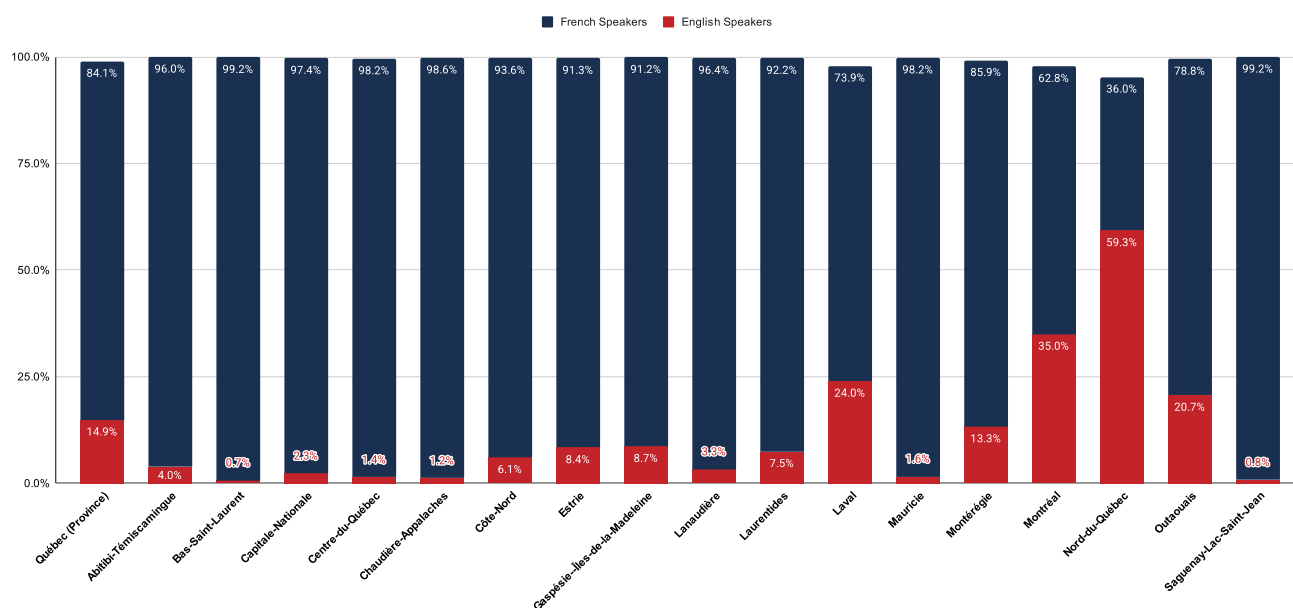
⁶ Here, we use a definition of the regions that refers to all Québec regions except Montréal and Laval. In our survey data, however, our definition of the regions includes Laval, owing to limitations on the disaggregation of respondents. In our sample, 1.5% (n = 10) respondents were from Laval.

⁷ See Page 3-4 of Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), “CENSUS 2021 Update: A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec’s English speakers,” 2023, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Census-Brief-Update.pdf>

⁸ 2021 Census data. For more information see: Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), “Census 2021 Update: A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec’s English speakers,” 2023, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Census-Brief-Update.pdf>

Although most regions are predominantly francophone, several have significant English-speaking populations, such as Nord-du-Québec (59.3%), Outaouais (20.7%), and Montérégie (13.3%) (Figure 1b). In these regions, English speakers make up more than ten percent of the population.

FIGURE 1B: PROPORTION OF ENGLISH SPEAKERS IN EACH QUÉBEC REGION (CENSUS 2021)⁹



Over the past decade, the English-speaking population across Québec has grown.¹⁰ Unfortunately, this has been accompanied by widening gaps in employment and economic outcomes between English and French speakers. Despite English speakers generally having higher education levels and greater participation in the labor force,¹¹ they often experience higher unemployment, earn less than their French-speaking counterparts, and have higher poverty rates.

⁹ 2021 Census data. For more information see: Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), “Census 2021 Update: A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec’s English speakers,” 2023, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Census-Brief-Update.pdf>

¹⁰ Between Census 2016 and Census 2021, the English-speaking population of Québec increased from 13.7% to 14.9%. See: Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), “Census 2021 Update: A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec’s English speakers,” 2023, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Census-Brief-Update.pdf>

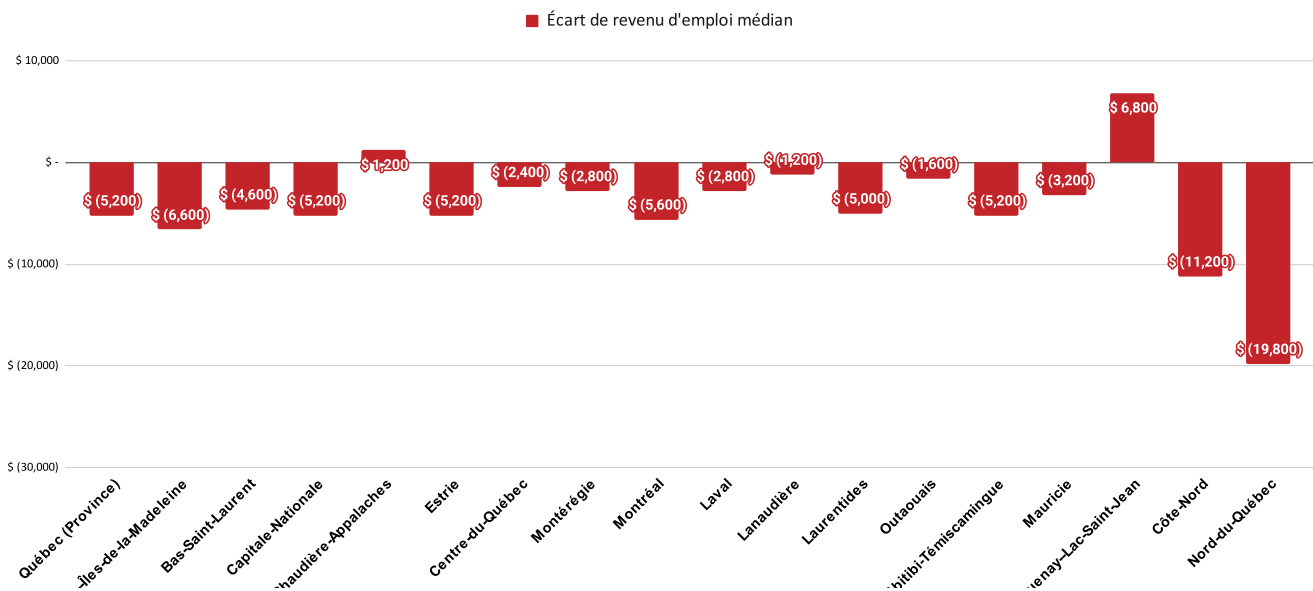
¹¹ Census 2021

There's a mixed picture of this across the regions. While the regions tend to have lower socioeconomic outcomes overall compared to Montréal and Laval, some are much better and some are much worse.

When we look at median employment incomes across Québec, English speakers earn \$5,200 less than French speakers (Figure 1c). However, this number represents significant differences. In some regions like Nord-du-Québec, Côte-Nord, and Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine, income gaps between English and French speakers are as high as \$19,800, \$11,200, and \$6,600 respectively. In two outlier regions, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean and Chaudière-Appalaches, English speakers earn more than French speakers.

FIGURE 1C: MEDIAN EMPLOYMENT INCOME GAP BETWEEN ENGLISH AND FRENCH SPEAKERS ACROSS THE REGIONS (CENSUS 2021)

Écart de revenus entre les Québécois d'expression anglaise et les francophones par région (2021)



These income differences don't tell the full story. Even in these two outlier regions where English speakers have higher median employment incomes than French speakers, English speakers still have worse unemployment and poverty outcomes. In fact, English speakers have higher unemployment rates in every region in the province, and higher poverty rates in 16 out of the 17 regions. And, again, some regions are significantly worse off: in Côte-Nord, English speakers have an unemployment rate almost triple that of French speakers (17.9% compared to 6.8%). Poverty rates among English speakers are highest and almost double that of French speakers in regions of Mauricie (13.3% compared to 6.7%), Bas-Saint-Laurent, Estrie, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, and Capitale-Nationale.¹²

Altogether we see that regional English speakers face a double-bind: they experience the same socioeconomic gaps along linguistic lines, while regional populations as a whole tend to experience worse outcomes as compared to urban centres. Put another way, where outcomes are poorer in the regions, they're typically a little worse among English speakers.

To boot, the regions of Québec – alongside most rural and northern communities in Canada – are grappling with brain drain of highly educated workers¹³ and youth,¹⁴ and concurrent skills and labour shortages across key industries. English speakers in particular are leaving the regions, or the province. This trend is well established over the last century, and recent declines in the English-speaking population have been as high

12 See PERT's series of [Regional Profiles](#) for more information on each region, including disparities between English and French speakers, and among English speakers, along factors of gender, age, race and ethnicity, etc.

13 This is on top of the fact that over two-thirds of university graduates in Québec live in Montréal and surrounding regions, leaving the regions with the challenge to recruit and retain highly skilled workers, youth and newcomers. See: Statistique Québec, "University graduates: the situation in Québec's administrative regions," 2024, <https://statistique.quebec.ca/en/communiqué/university-graduates-the-situation-in-quebec-s-administrative-regions>

14 Nadine Ciamarra and Patrick Lamarre, "Outmigration of Québec's English-speaking youth," Research Brief no. 7., *QUESCREEN*. University of Concordia, 2023, https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescreen/docs/Brief_7_2024_EN.pdf

as -20% in predominantly English-speaking regional county municipalities (RCMs) in Côte-Nord for instance.¹⁵

Technological, demographic, and workplace changes further complicate these issues in under-resourced regions. Access to educational resources, training programs, and opportunities for digital or remote work can be limited, particularly in isolated communities with limited infrastructure, as well as those with deep-rooted social and political cultures.¹⁶ A recent report by PERT highlighted that, although there are 154 French language workforce programs available across Québec, the majority are concentrated in Montréal or scattered across the regions.¹⁷ While this has changed since the creation of Francization Québec in 2023, recent funding issues have led to the shuttering of French language programming in several regions.¹⁸ Consequently, English speakers in rural areas face significant gaps in access to French language training and support.

15 Shannon Bell, "Demographic decline of English speakers in certain regions of Québec." Research Brief no. 12., *QUESCREN, University of Concordia*, 2023, <https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Brief12ENG.pdf>

16 For examples of some of these issues and changes see: Statistics Canada, "Opportunities of working remotely in rural labour markets: Small area estimation from the Canadian Survey on Business Conditions, first to third quarter of 2024." *The Daily*, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/241017/dq241017e-eng.html>; CIHL, "Keeping pace with changing population needs", 2022, <https://www.cihi.ca/en/the-state-of-the-health-workforce-in-canada-2022/keeping-pace-with-changing-population-needs>; Avisaio Conseil, "Étude sur les retombées de la présence des étudiants internationaux à l'enseignement régulier dans le réseau collégial public," *Fédération des cégeps*, 2021, <https://aviseo.ca/en/perspectives/1017/>

17 Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), "French-language training for the workforce: A review of French-language training programs for the workforce in Québec," 2022, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FSL-Inventory-Assessment-Report.pdf>

18 Gareth Madoc-James, "Quebec French teacher let go in cuts to francization says \$10M from province is 'almost nothing'," *City News*, December 5, 2024, <https://montreal.citynews.ca/2024/12/05/quebec-french-teacher-francization-10-million-reaction/#:~:text=Since%20late%20October%2C%20hundreds%20of,teachers%20who%20lost%20her%20job.>

ABOUT THE SURVEY AND SAMPLE



This report presents findings from PERT's 2023 *Regional French Language Needs Assessment Survey* of over 650 English-speaking Quebecers' French language learning experiences and perceptions. Our sample includes the results of respondents over the age of 18 who self-identified as English speakers residing in Québec regions other than Montréal.¹⁹ Respondents either spoke English as their primary language, or they spoke English and French equally (whether or not these were the only languages they spoke).

As an addendum, PERT also conducted a survey in 2024 of 356 English speakers, 156 of whom were from the regions, about their awareness and experience with the *Échelle québécoise des niveaux de compétence en français* and other French language assessments. This report also cites key findings from the regional sample of this second survey, *Understanding Quebecers' Awareness of French Language Assessments*. The complimentary findings help clarify how English speakers assess their French language needs and leverage tools like assessments in their journeys.

See Appendix 1 for the methodology and sample demographics for both surveys.

Our results reflect the French language learning experiences and needs of English-speaking Quebecers on the basis of shared language learning histories (where and how they learned French) and their employment and educational situations.

Demographics

Compared to Québec's English-speaking community, our sample was diverse in age groups above 18 years, including 19.7% youth (ages 18-35), 37.6% aged 36-55, and 36.5% approaching or in their senior years (aged 56-75). Respondents predominantly identified as white women (86.0% women, 95.3% white or caucasian).

Our sample is similar in age structure to the regions (youth make up roughly 20.0% of most regions outside Québec, for instance). Our sample also reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the regions, since approximately 10.0% of English speakers in the different regions identify as visible minorities. A much higher proportion of women responded to our survey compared to the gender structure of the regions of Québec. Regionally, our survey also included a significantly higher number of residents from the Outaouais and Montérégie regions, and reflects the diversity of these regions most.

¹⁹ In our survey data, our definition of the regions includes Laval, owing to limitations on the disaggregation of respondents. In our sample, 1.5% (n = 10) respondents were from Laval. This differs from other definitions of regions that also exclude Laval.

In our sample, 64.2% of respondents were working, 75.2% of whom were employed full-time, year-round. Another 14.8% of employed respondents were employed either part-time or casually. Only 5.0% of all respondents were currently students at the time of the survey.

Respondents who were currently employed were spread across public (41.9%), private (35.7%), and non-profit (26.4%) sector jobs. Roughly a quarter worked in health care and social assistance (25.4%), or educational services (24.7%). Other top industries where respondents were employed included public administration (8.8%) and professional, scientific, and technical services (7.6%).

The regional English speakers surveyed made an estimated median income of \$62,499 or within the \$50,000 to \$74,999 income range.

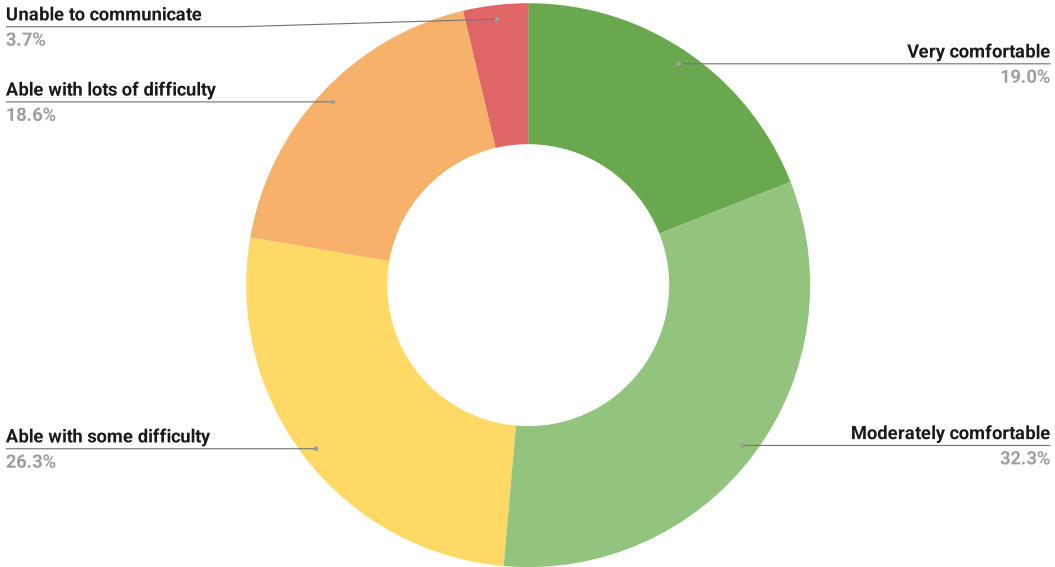
French language level

Overall, almost all the regional English-speaking Quebecers surveyed described themselves as able to communicate in French (96.3%) with varying levels of comfort or difficulty (Figure 2). Only 3.7% felt they were unable to communicate in French.

Respondents were relatively evenly split between those who felt comfortable expressing themselves in French, in general, and those who did so with some level of difficulty. Half of the respondents described themselves as comfortable speaking French (19.0% very comfortable, and 32.4% as moderately comfortable). Still, almost half (44.9%) felt they spoke French with either moderate (32.4%) or lots (18.6%) of difficulty.

A significant number of respondents (17.3%) also communicate comfortably in another language besides English and French, suggesting many respondents have either a third language they speak in regularly or a first language besides English and French.

FIGURE 2: COMFORT SPEAKING FRENCH IN GENERAL (N = 656)



English speakers’ self-assessments of their French language level are significant given that most have not taken (or heard of) formal French language assessments: PERT’s [supplementary survey](#) on awareness of French language training assessments found that 82.1% of respondents had not heard of the Échelle Québécoise, Québec’s official French language assessment tool, and only 5.1% reported having taken it. As such, this also means that so few respondents had heard of the Échelle, taken it, and recalled their French language level that we are unable to report regional English speakers’ French language levels according to the scales of the Échelle.

FINDINGS

AT A GLANCE

80% of regional English-speaking Quebecers receive French language education in primary, secondary or post-secondary school, but many feel it is insufficient for real-life use or working in French.

Two-thirds (66.4%) continue learning French as adults, typically trying out a variety of formal learning options and investing in self-directed learning. Yet, very few were aware of formal language assessments (e.g. only 17.9% had heard of the provincial benchmarking assessment – the Échelle québécoise des niveaux de compétence en français – used for immigration, job-readiness programs, and language training).

Most use French to some degree in work and daily life, but their level of comfort and confidence tends to drop when the stakes are highest, such as accessing healthcare or governmental services. Approximately half of the English speakers surveyed

expressed difficulty communicating in French in everyday situations.

Only 39.0% have found work in predominantly French speaking workplaces despite accessing jobs in French being a top motivator to their language learning. Most speak French in their English-speaking workplaces at least sometimes, even when they feel it is outside their comfort zone.

Regional English speakers are highly motivated by positive, intrinsic reasons to improve their French language skills - like social belonging, personal interest, and career growth. However, they express feeling discouraged by the sense that they are unwelcome in Québec no matter how good their French gets, and limited access to suitable learning resources. They call for a variety of practical French language training opportunities that can set them up for living and working in French in the province.

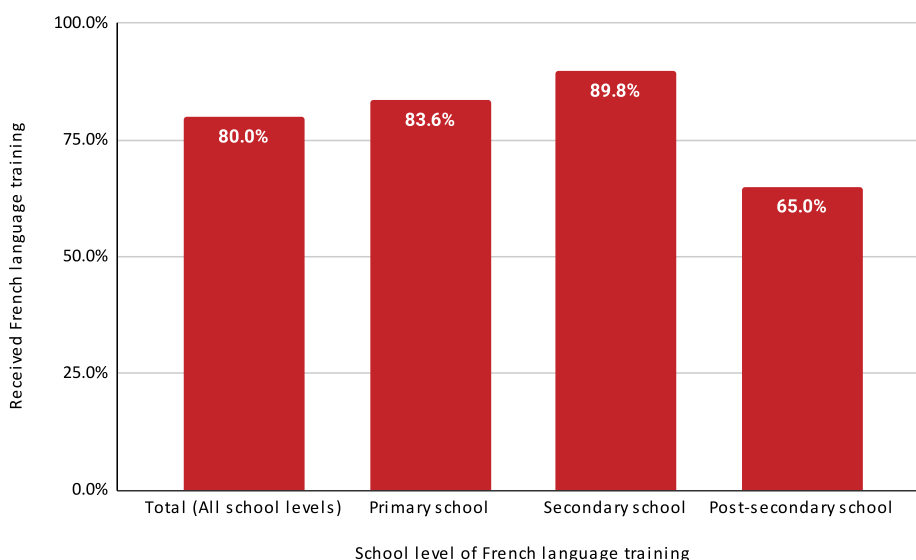
1. French language education and training experiences

This section outlines the French language learning experiences of respondents in school and in their formative years, and later as adults through a variety of language training opportunities. Our survey asked what kinds of French language training respondents had received, where, and what they thought about the quality of these learning experiences.

LEARNING AT SCHOOL

Our survey found that the majority (80.0%) of English-speaking Quebecers surveyed had some kind of French language training during primary, secondary, or post-secondary school (Figure 3).²⁰ Respondents who received French language training in school mostly did so at the secondary level (89.8%), closely followed by primary school (83.6%). While 65.0% of respondents received French language training at the post-secondary level, this number may be lower either because respondents were less likely to receive French language training during this level, or because fewer respondents attended post-secondary school.

FIGURE 3: FRENCH LANGUAGE TRAINING RECEIVED IN SCHOOL BY LEVEL

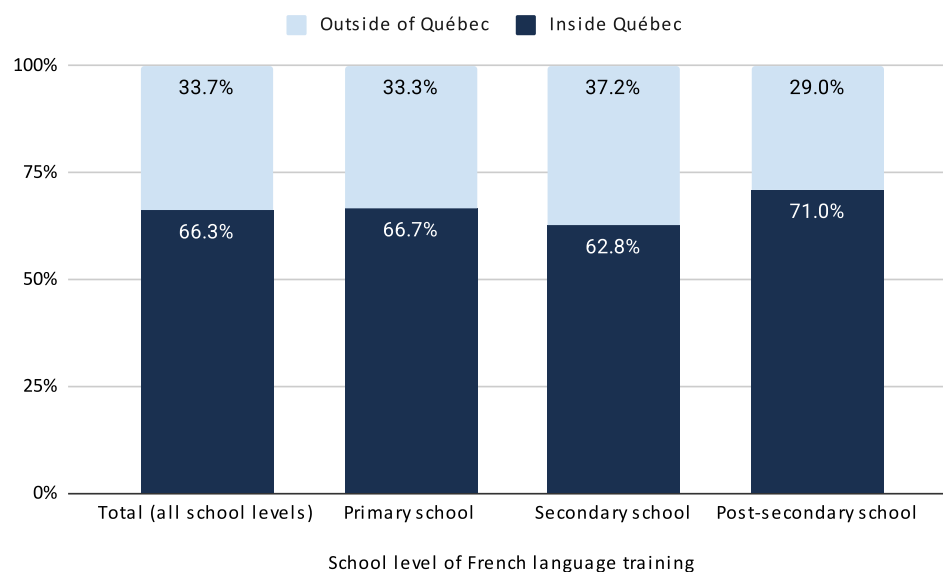


²⁰ Remaining respondents who indicated that they did not receive French-language training at the different levels of schooling (not shown in Figure 3) may have not attended that level of schooling. As such, Figure 3 only shows the total percent of respondents who indicated receiving French language training in school, and not those who did not receive French in school.

Of the respondents who received French language training during school, most did so in Québec (Figure 4). Two thirds (66.3%) of respondents overall received their French language training in a Québec school. While more respondents received French language training during secondary school, these respondents were more likely than those who received French in primary school to have attended schools outside Québec.

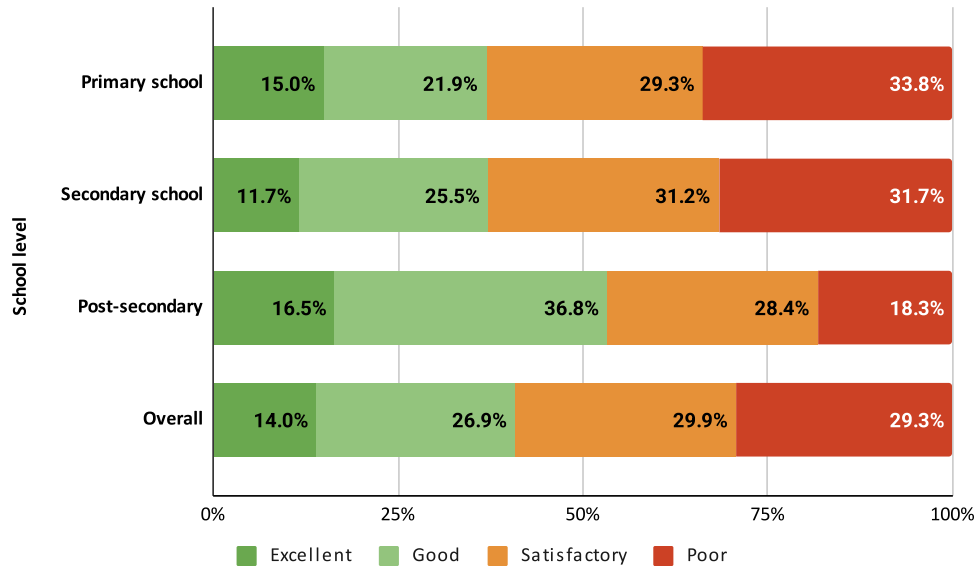
Respondents who learned French in school outside Québec mostly attended schools in Ontario (51.5%) or outside Canada (24.6%). The few respondents who attended schools in other Canadian provinces learned French in Nova Scotia (6.8%), New Brunswick (4.5%), followed by Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia (7.2% combined).

FIGURE 4: PLACE OF SCHOOL WHERE FRENCH LANGUAGE TRAINING WAS RECEIVED, BY LEVEL



When asked to rate the quality of French education they received in school, approximately one third (29.9%) of respondents who had French education in school felt, overall, that their education was satisfactory, while another third (29.3%) felt it was poor (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: QUALITY OF FRENCH EDUCATION RECEIVED AT SCHOOL BY LEVEL (N = 654)



Those who received French language training in primary and secondary school were more likely to rate the quality of these experiences lower (satisfactory or poor). A total of 18.3% of respondents who received French at the post-secondary level rated their language training as “poor” compared to almost a third of respondents assessing their training at other levels. These post-secondary students felt much more positively about their experiences, with over half reporting good or excellent language training experiences at this school level.

When asked to describe these French language experiences in an open-ended question, respondents frequently expressed that French language training during primary and secondary school was simply “not enough” unless immersive. Several respondents mentioned that they lacked the opportunity to use their French outside of these classes. Some quickly lost their French after they graduated. Many wished they had more formal French language learning during school, and some described pursuing further education as adults to continue or “redo” their French language learning. To this end, some respondents felt mandatory French during elementary school or after-school classes would have been helpful. Several respondents also commented on the quality of materials being used in schools, saying the French they learned was “France French.” Conversely, many respondents commented on how much immersion programs, or being in French language environments socially, helped them hone and retain French language skills they learned formally in school.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS²¹

Regional Quebecers on French education in school:



“[I had] French classes for three hours a week. I loved learning, but everything was easily forgotten and never used outside of those hours.”

“There was no practice of French outside of the one hour class of French in high school. I learned to communicate after university when I worked for a company in Montréal where most employees were French Canadian.”

“I found it to be good, but basic. My parents taught me French too and arranged for me to learn French outside of the classroom through activities, private tutors, etc. I also learned a great deal in the workplace.”

“It focused way too much on grammar/things that are not important when it should have primarily focused on speaking and oral skills that we can use when going to French-speaking places.”

“My French education was very basic and repetitive. A high emphasis was placed on accuracy and learning the rules of the language (grammar, spelling, etc.). My development of my competency in French was due to having friends in my neighbourhood with whom I had to speak French with (if I wanted to be their friend). I learned French “on the street”.”

“The French I learned in school was Parisian French. It only gave me rudimentary skills to have basic conversations.”

“It’s extremely difficult to be able to effectively learn and communicate in French if your only exposure is during school hours.”

²¹ Quotes may have been 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 the syntax of long quotes.

A secondary theme among their responses was that French language training in schools focused on basic writing and grammar skills, but not enough on conversational skills in French. Some commented on not being able to functionally use the French they learned in the real world.

Several respondents also commented on their unique needs not being met, such as finding their French language classes inaccessible in relation to their disabilities, or not inclusive or respectful of their Indigenous identities.

ADULT FRENCH LANGUAGE TRAINING

After their formative French learning experiences, or as they enter the province to settle in Québec, many English-speaking Quebecers continue French language training as an adult. In Québec, these types of training options are typically online or in-person, provided by education centres, private or non-profit French language schools and teachers, or in workplaces, and are sometimes required or subsidized by the provincial government.

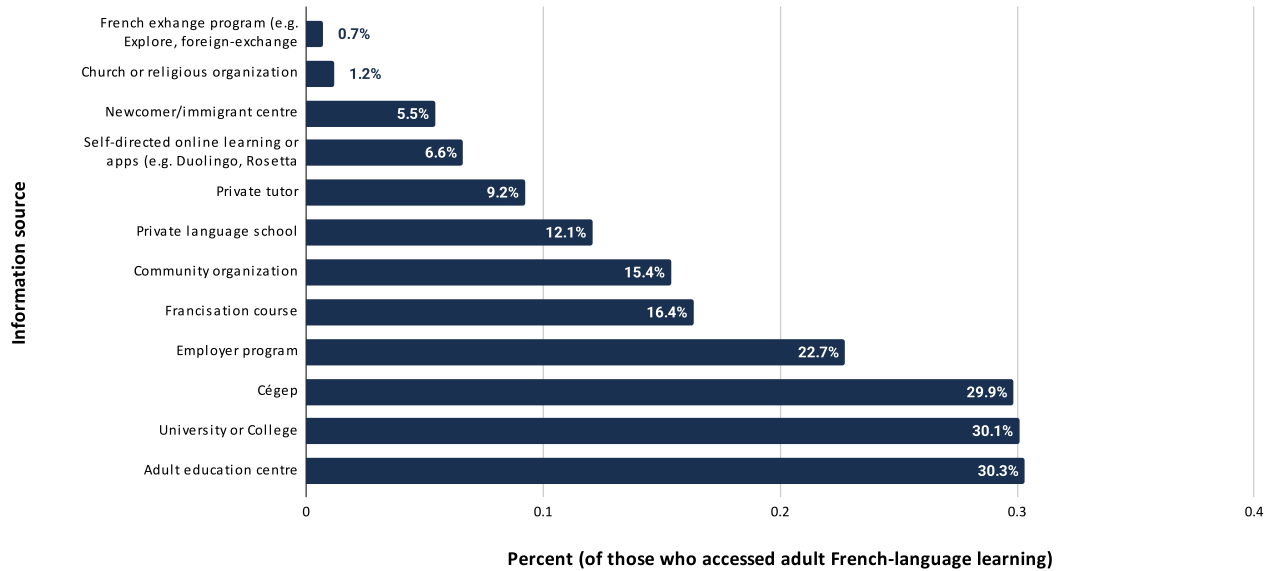
In our sample, most English speakers took French language training as an adult (66.4%), mostly at adult education centres, university or college, or Cégep (30.3%, 30.1%, and 29.9% respectively) (Figure 6). Between school and adult learning experiences, these findings indicate that most respondents likely have some level of formal French language instruction under their belt.

66.4% of respondents participated in French-language training as an adult

33.6% did not participate in further training outside their formal education experiences

Respondents tended to access more than one type of French language training. Employer programs were also popular places of adult French language learning: 22.7% of respondents participated in these forms of language training. This was followed by governmental Francisation courses, used by 16.4% of respondents. Private French language courses and tutors were used in roughly similar proportions, with language courses being slightly more popular (12.1% compared to 9.2%).

FIGURE 6: TYPE OF ADULT FRENCH-LANGUAGE LEARNING PROVIDERS AND SERVICES USED (N = 422)



When asked to comment on their learning experiences in an open-ended question, many respondents talked about feeling socially excluded or discriminated against in their communities or French learning programs, discouraging them from continuing their learning. These experiences were often related to respondents' perceived accents or disability when practicing their French.

FRENCH LANGUAGE TRAINING INFORMATION SOURCES

Respondents heard about French language training in many different ways, typically from multiple language sources.

The top sources of information were the workplace (27.6%), online searches (25.2%), through friends or family and their social networks (21.3%). Separate from online searches, another 15.7% of respondents found out about programs through social media.

The English-speaking Quebecers surveyed also learned of language programs through government websites, documents or referrals (12.1%), including at times because participating in a French language course was required by an immigration program.

Public advertisements, newsletters, and traditional newspapers were where 15.7% of respondents heard about programs.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Regional Quebecers on their continued French language training experiences:



“I have taken the government French courses, but they teach French from France. I found them very pointless, and almost against any Québec-isms, so much so that I really lost confidence. Now I have private tutor classes with a Québécois teacher and my confidence is definitely getting better and it makes more sense in everyday life.”

“I’m already 50 and although I have tried very hard throughout my life to keep improving my French, I don’t think I will ever be fully comfortable or fluent because I never went to school entirely in French so I never picked up the Québécois accent or expressions.”

“It’s hard to find help that is free and accessible for intermediate speakers (everything free and accessible is usually for beginners and Francisation is impossible to get, especially when awaiting Permanent Residence).”

“After doing Explore three times and living in Québec for three years I feel very confident in my French, but that was not always the case.”

“When I took classes...the exercise book was all in French. The instructions were as well, but I can’t speak French well, so I couldn’t understand the instructions in order to do the exercises. I gave up because it was too frustrating. The instructions had vocabulary that I hadn’t learned yet as I was a beginner. The exercises were for beginners but the instructions were for people who could already speak French.”

2. Experiences using French language skills in life and work

Respondents' French language skills and comfort levels varied depending on the setting and task. Our survey asked English speakers in the regions to describe their French language skills and experiences at work and in everyday situations.

USING FRENCH AT WORK

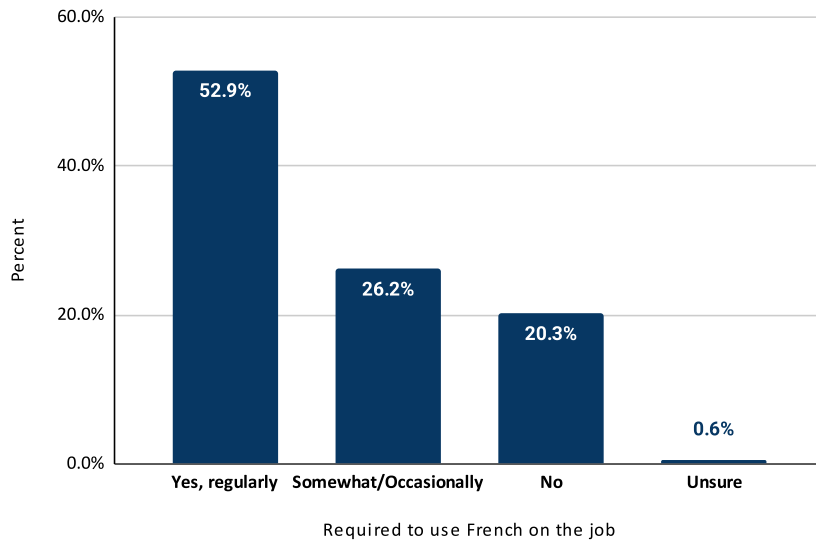
In the last ten years, the English-speaking Quebecers who were surveyed tended to work in English language workplaces (80.1%). Only 39.0% had experience working in French-speaking environments. A very small number of respondents (1.9%) reported working in jobs where another language besides English and French was the primary language spoken, such as Indigenous languages (e.g. Cree, Innu), German, or Spanish.

Yet it was common that respondents were required to speak, read, or write French on the job over the last ten years, even when French was not the language their workplace predominantly used (Figure 7). Half of all respondents were regularly required to use French on the job (52.9%) and 26.2% had to occasionally. In total, 79.1% of regional English-speaking Quebecers surveyed were required to communicate in French during their work experiences over the last ten years.

80.1% of respondents worked in predominantly English-speaking workplaces over the last ten years.

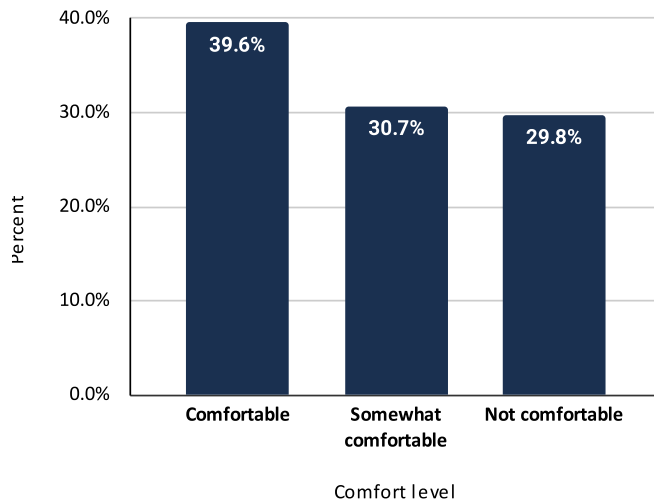
39.0% had experience in French-speaking workplaces.

FIGURE 7: EXPERIENCE BEING REQUIRED TO USE FRENCH ON THE JOB (N = 637)



This is a higher percentage of respondents than how many reported being comfortable or somewhat comfortable communicating in French on the job (70.3%) (Figure 8). A significant number of regional English-speaking Quebecers surveyed (29.8%) also indicated they were not at all comfortable using French on the job. This indicates that English speakers who are not comfortable using French persevere in spite of their discomfort.

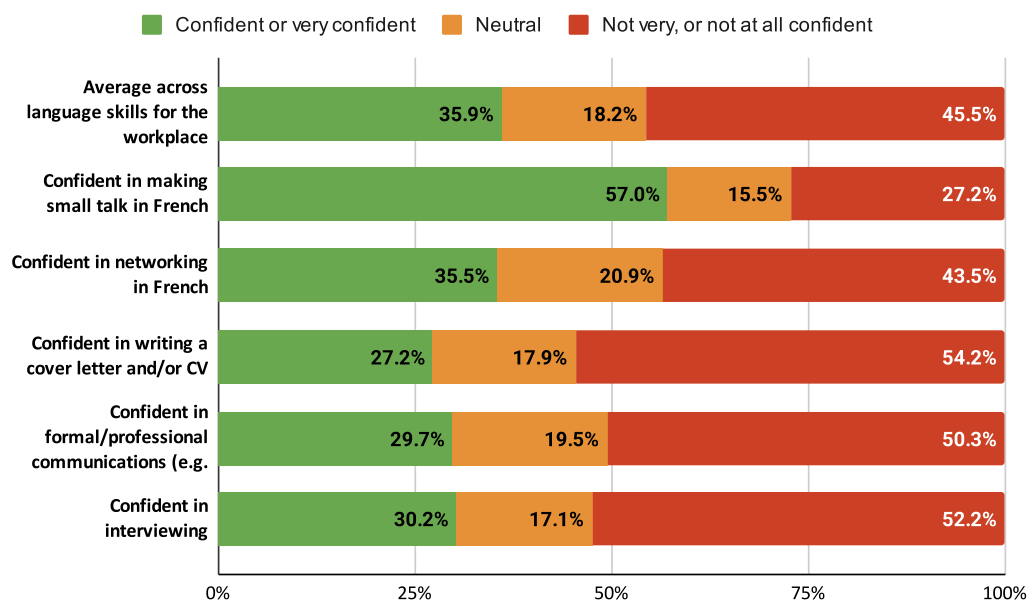
FIGURE 8: COMFORT COMMUNICATING IN FRENCH AS REQUIRED ON THE JOB IN LAST TEN YEARS (N = 632)



And while 29.8% of respondents reported not being comfortable speaking French on the job when they were required to, they were much more likely to report some level of comfort (70.3%). Recalling that only a third of respondents had worked predominantly French-speaking workplaces, this suggests that many regional English speakers have the skills to work in French but have not yet had the chance.

Besides their general comfort communicating in French in the workplace, our survey also asked about regional English-speaking Quebecers' confidence in their French language skills across a variety of work-related tasks (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: FRENCH-LANGUAGE SKILLS IN THE WORKPLACE (N = 626)



With this higher bar of confidence compared to comfort, we see that across various work-related tasks, respondents rated their French skills lower. On average across the various types of language skills for the workplace, less than half of respondents (35.5%) were confident, and a larger share (45.5%) reported that they were not confident in these areas.

Regional English speakers were more confident in tasks that were more informal: 57.0% of respondents felt confident making small talk in French at work, and 35.5% felt confident networking, for example.

However, roughly half of respondents expressed that they do not feel confident in more formal and concrete work-related situations such as writing a cover letter or CV (54.2%), communicating formally (50.3%) whether by email or in meetings, for instance, or interviewing (52.2%). Another 43.5% did not feel confident networking in French.

And while it's worth celebrating that a quarter of respondents feel confident in writing, formal communication, and interviewing, this is ten percentage points lower than the proportion of those who have worked in French-speaking workplaces, suggesting that English-speaking Quebecers may face challenges in career transitions and navigating the job market.

USING FRENCH IN DAILY LIFE

The English-speaking Quebecers we surveyed encountered French in a variety of settings outside of work where they were required to put their French language skills to work.

Engaging in retail and consumer services (e.g., restaurants and stores, auto mechanics, travel agencies) and health care institutions (e.g., hospitals, ambulances, the provincial health insurance board) in French were almost ubiquitous experiences among respondents (87.6% and 81.7% respectively). These were followed by social settings such as community groups, social gatherings and friendships with francophones (72.7%), and accessing other government services such as going to the library, participating in elections, or accessing municipal services and regulatory bodies (71.0%).

Engaging in the school system (24.1%) and daycare services (14.6%) were also significant places English speakers heard or spoke French in daily life. Considering only a very small percentage of respondents (5.0%) were students themselves, these points of contact are likely to have been parents engaging with their children's schools.

It is also significant that 13.3% of respondents recently engaged with the justice and legal system in French in some way.

Other places English speakers used their French in some way included recreational activities like the gym or sports leagues and hobby clubs, financial and insurance bodies, housing, maintenance and real-estate related interactions, places of worship, at home with French-speaking family, and volunteer work.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Regional Quebecers on communicating in French at work:



“In school, I feel like all we learned were verbs. I didn’t learn actual vocabulary, I didn’t learn how to converse in French or function in the world. I learned how to actually communicate once I was an adult through employment and friendships with francophones.”

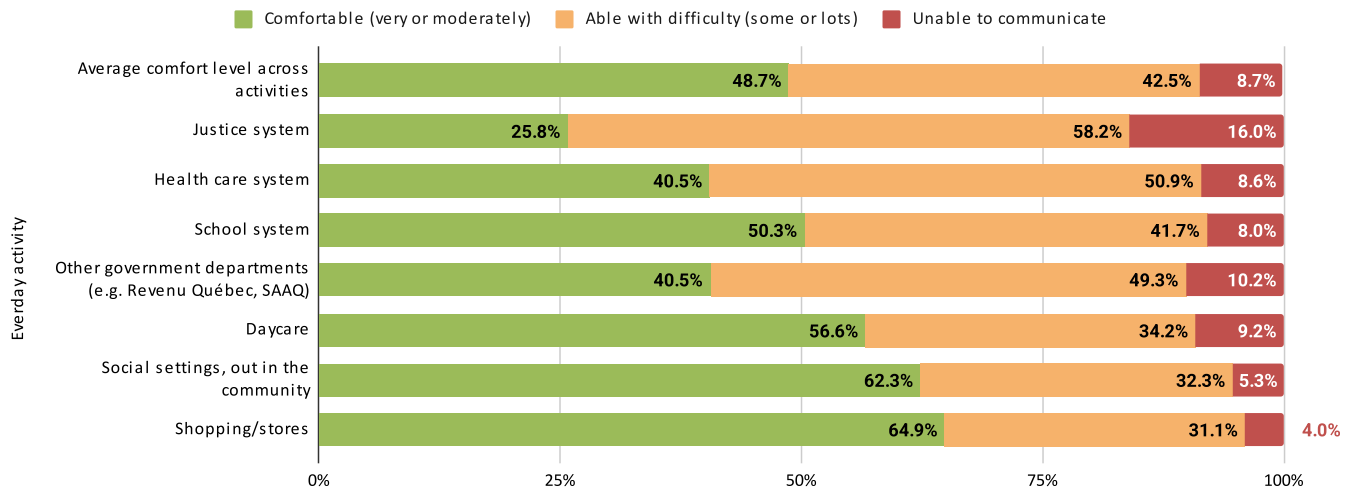
“Everytime I took French for employment opportunities, once I was hired I very rarely had the opportunity to use it, so I would lose it again and again.”

“As an adult learner, it can be difficult to carve out time to learn French when work, family and other priorities are in the mix. So, I am a firm supporter of having dedicated hours for French learning as part of my work day. I’ve done it twice now and it has been easier to schedule as well as to ensure the brain capacity needed for that type of learning.”

Respondents reported that they were able to communicate in French across settings outside work (91.3%), with a relatively even split in degree of comfort or difficulty (Figure 10). Across different types of everyday activities, respondents were on average either comfortable communicating in French (48.7%) or able to with some level of difficulty (42.5%). Less than ten percent (8.7%) reported being unable to communicate.

Some settings proved more challenging than others. While most respondents felt capable of communicating in French in more informal situations like when shopping, accessing retail services, or in social settings, communicating in more formal settings and engaging governmental institutions introduced greater levels of difficulty. This mirrors the findings related to use of French at work: in general, respondents were more comfortable using French in informal rather than formal settings.

FIGURE 10: COMFORT COMMUNICATING IN FRENCH IN EVERYDAY CONTEXTS (N = 656)



Respondents' comfort levels dropped when it came to school, healthcare, and justice related communications. While exactly half (50.3%) felt comfortable communicating in school settings, just as many either did not or were unable to entirely.

Respondents were mostly uncomfortable when accessing government services and the healthcare system in French, with almost half reporting feeling some or a lot of difficulty communicating (49.3%) and a strong number (10.2%) reporting being unable to communicate. Recalling that 81.7% of respondents reported being in situations where they may need to use their French skills for healthcare related settings recently, this suggests that some respondents are at significant risks of miscommunication on healthcare matters.

Similarly, 13.3% of respondents reported needing to engage the judiciary system in French recently but experiencing some level of difficulty or inability to do so (74.2%).

Taking the various life situations on balance, it is significant that roughly half of respondents have some level of difficulty navigating everyday situations with their current French skills.

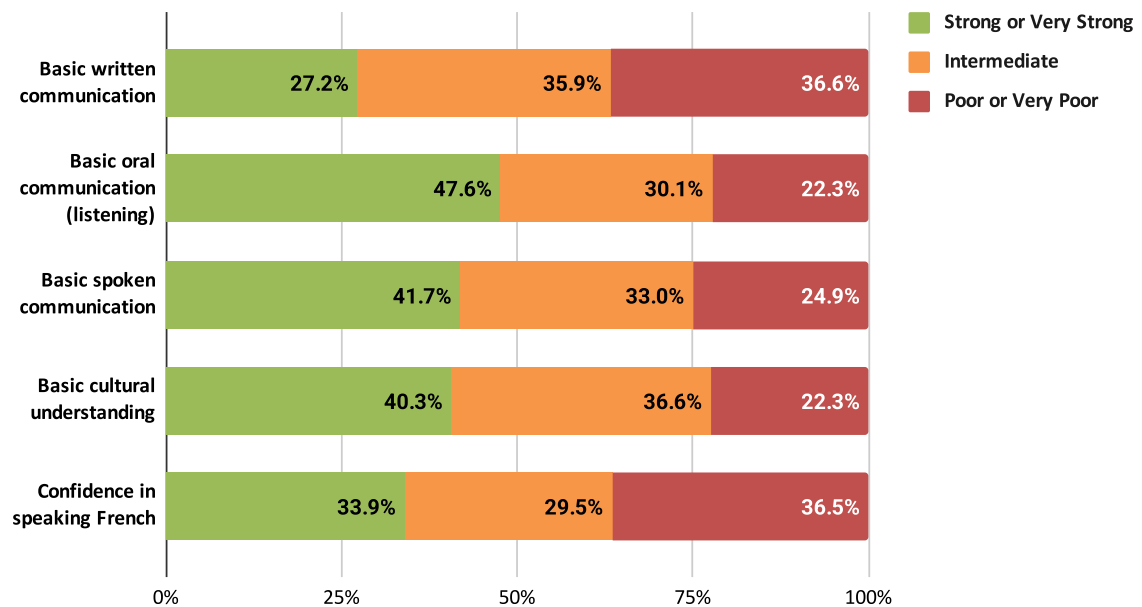
Respondents also rated their French skills in social settings (Figure 11). In these settings, respondents found basic writing for social purposes to be most difficult. Over a

third of respondents (36.6%) felt their written communication skills were poor or even very poor, and another 35.9% rated their writing skills as intermediate.

While respondents felt their ability to speak and listen in social situations was strong or very strong (41.7% and 47.6% respectively) or intermediate (33.0% and 30.1%), they did not feel as confident doing so. While 33.9% did feel their confidence was strong or very strong, even more, 36.5%, felt they had poor or very poor confidence speaking French.

Overall, respondents also felt good about their basic cultural understanding in social situations: 36.6% felt their level of understanding was intermediate, and 40.3% felt their understanding was strong or very strong.

FIGURE 11: FRENCH-LANGUAGE SKILLS IN SOCIAL SETTINGS (N = 655)



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Regional Quebecers on communicating in French in daily life:



“I consider myself bilingual and am very comfortable using French in my day-to-day life. However, when it comes to health care or the judicial system, I would be very uncomfortable and disagree with having to use my second language in these kinds of important situations.”

“I consider myself at an Intermediate level for speaking which varies depending on the context and who I am conversing with.”

“Even though I am quite fluent, areas with a specific vocabulary like medicine, dentistry, psychological counseling etc. are challenging, especially in terms of my comprehension.”

“When speaking to me, people still switch to English 16 years later, which feels discouraging and offensive given the current political climate.”

“I think what’s lacking in my experience is the opportunity to actually use the French I already know. I am not out in the working world, at this stage, with few friends, and no family whatsoever in Québec, so the opportunity to speak is very limited.”

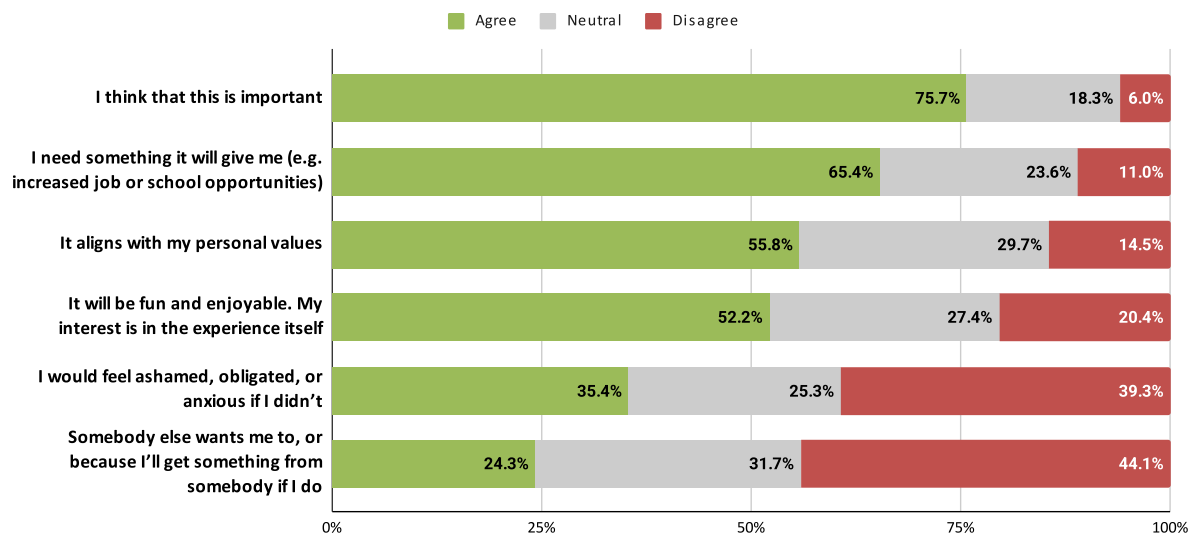
3. Motivations for learning or improving French

The regional English-speaking Quebecers surveyed were positively motivated to learn French.

When asked about their attitudes towards learning French in the first place, most were motivated by the feeling that learning French is important (75.7%), or that it will help them achieve personal goals like opening doors to education or job opportunities (65.4%) (Figure 12). It was also common that respondents felt learning French aligned with their personal values (55.8%), and would be a fun and enjoyable experience (52.5%). Of the respondents who did not resonate with positive motivations, they were most likely to disagree that the process of learning the new language might be fun (20.4%).

Still, the English speakers surveyed were divided on how negative motivations impacted their attitude toward learning French. Over a third of respondents felt that anticipating feelings of shame, obligation or anxiety if they did not learn French motivated their French learning (35.5%). Almost the same proportion of respondents disagreed that this impacted their learning journey (39.3%). Feelings of pressure or reward, that somebody else wanted them to learn French or that they would get something from somebody if they learned, were the least likely motivations among the English speakers surveyed. Only 24.3% resonated with these attitudes, and 44.1% disagreed that these motivations impacted them.

FIGURE 12: ATTITUDES AND FEELINGS TOWARDS LEARNING LEARN FRENCH (N = 655)



To further clarify these motivations, our survey probed for concrete reasons respondents currently wanted to improve their French language skills (Figure 13). These correspond more to their immediate goals related to French language learning. We see more granularly that respondents were most motivated by a desire to better navigate Québec society and systems (70.2%).

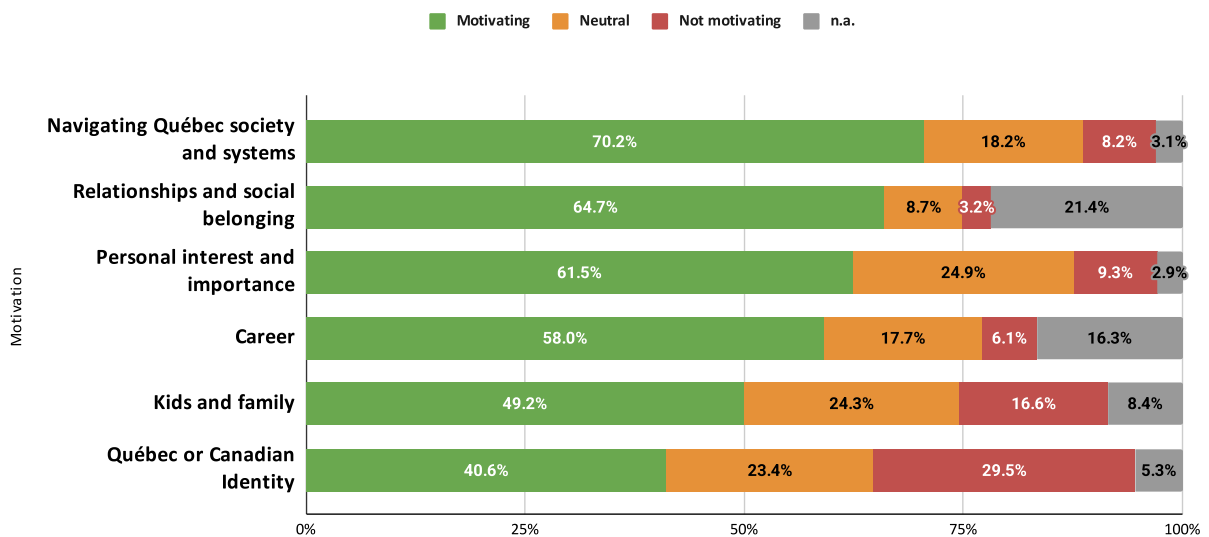
Almost two-thirds (64.7%) cited their relationships and a desire for social belonging as a reason to pursue French language learning. Similarly, almost half (49.2%) of respondents also said that their kids or family were primary motivations for improving their French.

Career-related motivations were also popular among respondents, with 58.0% feeling they agreed overall that this impacted their desire to improve their French language skills.

We additionally found that 40.6% felt compelled by a sense of Québec or Canadian identity, while 29.5% expressed that these were not motivating factors in their French learning.

While not a significant motivator overall, a notable number of respondents indicated that fear of discrimination, or feelings of guilt or pressure were motivating them to improve their French-language skills. This reason was respondents' top answer when asked for other motivations they'd like to volunteer.

FIGURE 13: MOTIVATIONS TO IMPROVE FRENCH LANGUAGE SKILLS



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Regional Quebecers on their motivations to learn French:



“I decided to transfer schools in fourth grade to have access to a French immersion program because I wasn’t learning French in my previous school. My father is French and I wanted to be able to communicate with him and his side of the family. I made that choice, and it is still the best decision I made to this day. My French immersion program was amazing at catching me up so I could follow the rest of the class to primary graduation and I left that school perfectly bilingual and ready for French studies in high

school. French is an asset anywhere in the world. I’m so glad I learned it.”

“I see no option for my future here. Even if I take more lessons it is unlikely I will ever be comfortable speaking it or being accepted here. I don’t want to deal with the health care system when I get sick or need end care. After 16 years I feel like I failed here.”

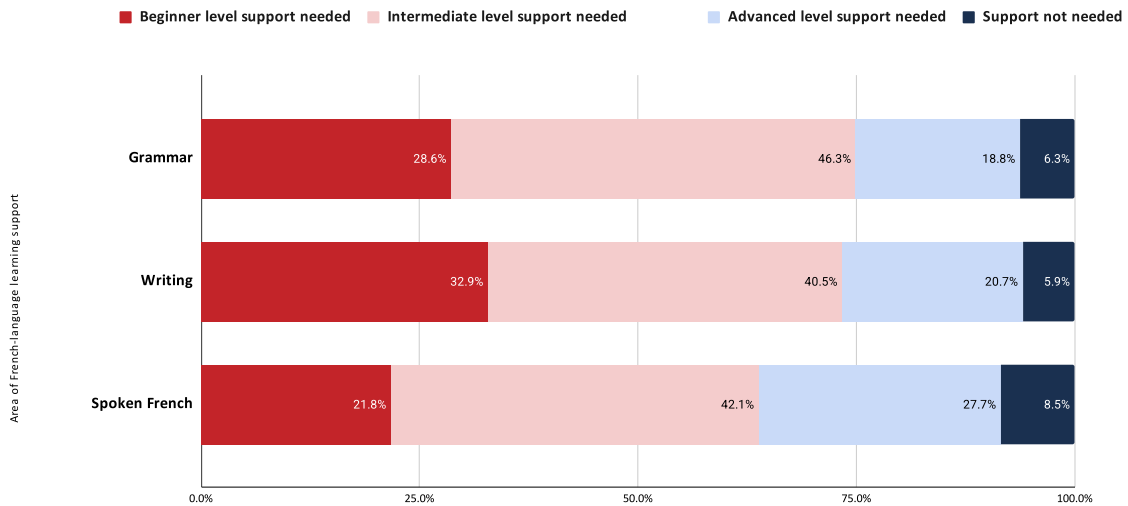
4. French language training desires

We asked respondents what they felt they needed from French language learning. This included support in various areas as well as levels of French language proficiency, and the types of program structures and delivery methods they felt would be most suitable.

Overall, 89.9% of respondents said they needed French language learning support in at least one area. Figure 14 shows three key areas respondents were asked about.

The level of support respondents needed for the different aspects of French proficiency (grammar, writing, spoken French, etc.) varied. Most needed intermediate-level help (41.3% average across the different areas of learning, including some not shown); 26.7% wanted beginner support on average across the areas, and 21.9% wanted advanced support.

FIGURE 14: AREA AND LEVEL OF FRENCH-LANGUAGE LEARNING SUPPORT NEEDED (N = 639)²²

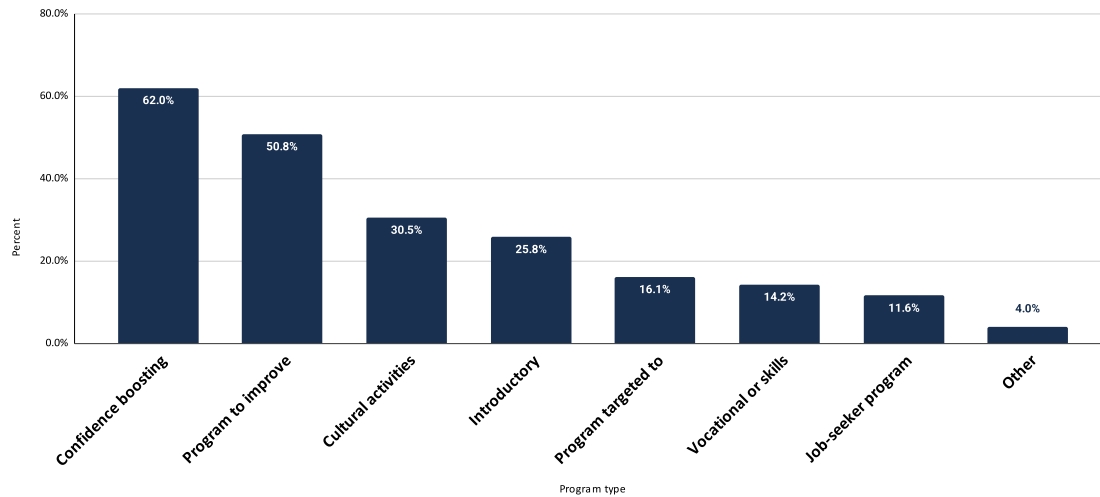


Overall, when asked about the types of programs they felt they needed (Figure 15), respondents were interested in confidence boosting French language programs.

Half of respondents (50.8%) indicated interest in intermediate or advanced level programs (Figure 15), which is a slightly larger proportion than how many respondents felt they needed intermediate or advanced support across different areas of learning (Figure 14 averages not shown). After acquiring a foundational level of French language skills, some respondents prefer more specific language learning activities tailored to their needs, such as confidence boosting programs, cultural activities, or work-related programming.

²² For each area of support in the graph, 100% represents the 89.9% of respondents who said they needed French-language learning support.

FIGURE 15: DESIRED PROGRAMS (N = 597)



Respondents who felt they needed the most support in developing their writing and grammar skills were more likely to be at beginner to intermediate levels, and conversely respondents who wanted support developing their speaking skills were more likely to be at the advanced level (Figure 14). Still, a quarter of respondents were interested in introductory conversational programs geared towards beginner learners (25.8%) (Figure 15), roughly matching the 21.8% who indicated their need for beginner level support for spoken French (Figure 14).

Many respondents also volunteered in open-ended questions that they wanted support in developing industry-specific, technical, and formal writing skills. This was reflected in respondents' interests in job-related programs (Figure 15) comprising: 11.6% interested in programs focused on job searching (help writing a CV or cover letter, or preparing for interviews); 14.2% interested in vocational or skills training programs integrating French; and 16.1% interested in programs targeted to a specific job. In open-ended questions, intermediate- and advanced-level French language learners wanted courses tailored to their work contexts, sometimes perceiving that locally available courses were for beginners or job-seekers.

A third of respondents wanted cultural activities like art programs, activities with children, and social outings as learning opportunities. This corresponds with the qualitative responses from the English speakers surveyed: there was a strong desire for French

language programs to offer more Québec cultural learning and localized, informal language learning.

It was also notable in qualitative responses that older French language learners asked for refresher courses, and perceived that their desires for continued French language learning were sometimes neglected.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Regional Quebecers on their French language learning program desires:



“My immersive experiences pushed me and gave me the confidence to speak but I need to improve my written French.”

“Government specific vocabulary would help.”

“It needs to be hands-on and applicable immediately for me to retain it.”

“I would like advanced, high-level writing help. I’m already doing grant applications in French to Quebec and national-level funders, but I’d like to learn to minimize my mistakes. My goal is to get as close to writing as well as a francophone (who writes well) as possible. I have not yet found a course that meets this objective.”

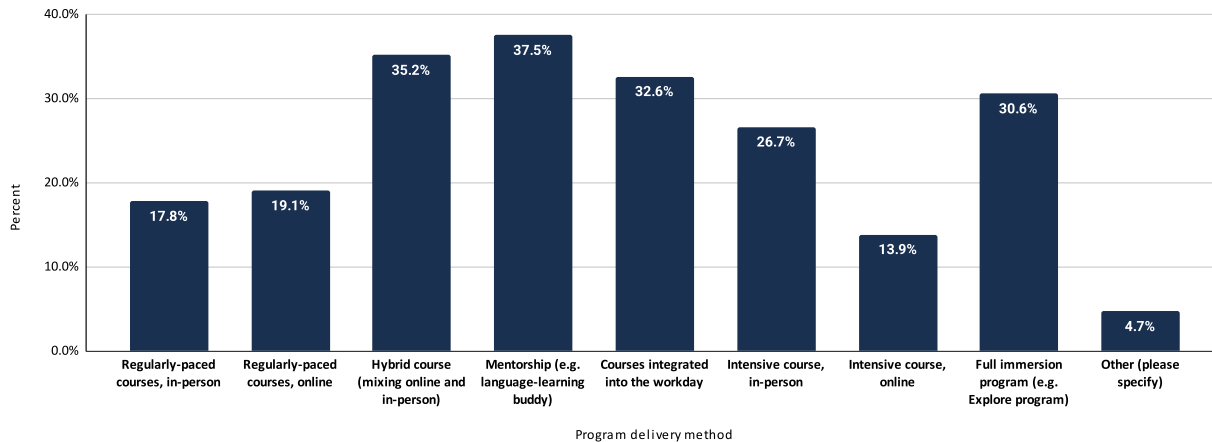
“I want a focus on real life learning experiences. Book learning doesn’t always foster the best learning.”

“I would like to have more French conversations with native French speakers.”

“Conversational programs for intermediates focused on colloquial French would be useful.”

When it came to program delivery methods (Figure 16), over a third of respondents (37.5%) liked the idea of mentorship programs, making it the most desired type of program delivery option. Closely following this preference were hybrid courses that mix online and in-person learning (35.2%), on-the-job courses that are integrated into the workday (32.6%), and full immersion programs (30.6%).

FIGURE 16: DESIRED METHOD OF PROGRAM DELIVERY FOR FRENCH-LANGUAGE LEARNING COURSES (N = 634)



More traditional programs that are regularly paced throughout the week, whether online or in-person, were less popular, preferred by less than a fifth of all respondents.

Overall, we see that respondents are interested in a variety of programs including a mix of both formal and informal delivery options. This diversity was further reflected in qualitative questions. Respondents frequently commented that program flexibility is a priority but also described a variety of program structures and delivery methods to meet that objective. Several respondents called for more attention to in-program accommodations for disabled people and caregivers, while others asked for flexibility, for instance receiving time off work to engage in learning. Respondents also expressed that flexible program delivery might look like accommodating reasonable absences or self-pacing. Several respondents also felt the cost of programs was inaccessible.

Respondents also clarified in qualitative responses that sometimes a program’s accessibility had less to do with its structure or delivery and more to do with the fact that the program information and instruction was in French rendering it inaccessible, especially to beginner-level learners.

DISCUSSION:

FOUR PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING FRENCH LANGUAGE TRAINING IN REGIONAL QUÉBEC



Our survey findings on the experiences of regional English-speaking Quebecers learning and using French highlight several important considerations for policymaking and French language learning program development and delivery. This section outlines the main themes related to our lines of inquiry, which are:

- **Where have English-speaking Quebecers in the regions learned French?**
- **What motivates these English speakers to learn French?**
- **What do they feel they need to improve their French language learning?**

Our findings revealed a few areas that call for consideration in French language training and policy development, reflected in four themes:

- **Quality of French language education in schools**
- **Positive learning motivations**
- **Developing pragmatic programming**
- **Enhancing program accessibility and variety**

This section discusses these themes in relation to one another, laying out priority considerations that our survey identified as ways to potentially improve regional French language training outcomes. These themes are the basis of the subsequent recommendations for improving French language training and policy for regional English speakers.

PRIORITY 1:

ENSURING QUALITY FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN SCHOOL

Quality French language education in school sets the tone for future learning and motivations.

The education system is one of the first and most enduring touchpoints for French language learning among regional English-speaking Quebecers. Our survey revealed several strengths of this system, as well as a number of ways that French language education in schools can be more impactful.

First, respondents indicated that the quality of instruction is often lagging. It is significant that so many regional English-speaking Quebecers (approximately 60%) reported

only satisfactory or poor quality French language learning experiences during primary and secondary school. In our study, most respondents continued with adult French language learning despite high reporting of low quality school experiences. On one hand, low quality school experiences may discourage some learners from continuing French language learning as an adult. Others may pursue adult French language learning because they felt their school learning was insufficient to develop adequate proficiency. Either scenario signals a priority to ensure French language learning opportunities are high-quality from the beginning to support the social and economic integration of learners, and the efficiency of our overall training systems.

What is more, these formative experiences, for better or worse, can also affect learners' sense of belonging as linguistic minorities. Maintaining quality language training can support retention in the province and progressive increases in French language proficiency and use.

Second, many respondents indicated interest in more opportunities to learn French informally, or practice socially, alongside their schooling activities. Respondents highlighted that these social, cultural, and immersive experiences would be especially impactful for learners in English-speaking areas or youth who lacked opportunities to practice French outside of school. Those who did experience these kinds of opportunities credited these informal learning environments for translating their foundational French language skills into useful levels of proficiency.

Third, while our survey does not surface specific issues related to accessibility of post-secondary education or brain-drain,²³ peripheral research as well as anecdotal reports indicate there are far fewer English language post-secondary educational institutions²⁴ in the regions of Québec, as well as a dearth of centers offering French language learning. A recent PERT report found that, for instance, 30% of French language workforce programs were in Montréal with the remaining dispersed across

23 Nadine Ciamarra and Patrick Lamarre, "Outmigration of Québec's English-speaking youth," Research Brief no. 7. QUESCREN. University of Concordia, 2023, https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Brief_7_2024_EN.pdf

24 For instance, see CEGEPs listed across the regions at <https://www.lecegep.ca/en/>.

Québec, and non-existent in several regions.²⁵ As across Canada, rural regions in Québec tend to have fewer educational and training resources, which may function as a push factor for students as well as highly educated workers, who tend to be more mobile.²⁶

Across these findings, three specific issues or needs stand out:

- For English speakers who do not go on to attend post-secondary education or pursue additional French language training, early education experiences are the only formal French language learning they receive. These students are most at risk of stagnating in their French language skills and careers requiring French.
- English speakers were most likely to reflect positively on educational experiences that were immersive, and enabled them to use and test their French skills. Those who articulated a desire for improved educational experiences often described interest in these kinds of immersive activities.
- English-speaking youth may be inclined to move to and stay in cities like Montréal after graduation if they do not feel sufficiently confident in their French language skills to pursue work in francophone workplaces, which may be more prevalent in the regions. Post-secondary students' pursuit of French language training in school reflects their motivation to improve their skills, potentially influencing their decision to stay in regions like Québec. Universities, colleges, and Cegeps are generally well-resourced and provide the unique opportunity to provide adults with social language exchange while learning. And, while these students who received French training during their post-secondary education reported better experiences overall, nearly half still described their training as only satisfactory or poor.

The impacts of this perceived low quality instruction and the associated negative experiences is a warning sign that young learners may not retain their French language learning. This equally represents a loss of investment in Québec's skills and labour pool.

25 Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), "French-language training for the workforce: A review of French-language training programs for the workforce in Québec," 2022, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ESL-Inventory-Assessment-Report.pdf>

26 Kevin McQuillan, "Leaving the big city: New patterns of migration in Canada." Research Paper, 17:06, *School of Public Policy, University of Calgary*, 2024, <https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/UP48-Patterns-MigrationCda.McQuillan.Apr24.r2.pdf>

27 Yimin Shan, "Whether successful language learners require intrinsic motivation," *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 10, no. 5 (2020): 549-559, <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=103611>

Improvements in French language education are needed at all levels to enhance social integration, job readiness, and workforce retention among regional English speakers.

PRIORITY 2:

LEVERAGING POSITIVE, INTRINSIC MOTIVATIONS TO LEARN

Positive, intrinsic motivations are primary drivers of French language learning among regional English-speaking Quebecers, and feelings of social and cultural belonging can help or hinder their efforts.

The second theme we identified in regard to French language programming and policy in Québec is that regional English speakers are self-motivated to improve their French language skills. In our survey, respondents were mostly motivated by positive, intrinsic forces such as a general sense that learning French is important (75.7%), or that it aligns with their personal goals (65.4%) or values (55.8%). From a language-learning standpoint, these types of motivations are more conducive to better language-learning outcomes, carrying learners through times of challenge or discouragement.²⁷ Additionally, English speakers' motivations were rooted in their interest in the French language and Québécois culture, as well as aspirations to actively use French in their social and economic lives. This is promising for socio-economic participation.

These positive and intrinsic motivations are of practical and political importance. For one, they suggest that investments in French language learning in the regions are well-placed. Second, that English speakers are eager to learn and use French tells us that programs that respond to their unique needs are more likely to see strong uptake and better outcomes. As such, investments in learning what English speakers need exactly, resulting in responsive programming, are well-placed, and policies and programs that reflect these positive motivations back to English speakers in their messaging may contribute to a more encouraging – and accurate – narrative of their learning situations and attitudes.

These findings illuminate two considerations for accounting for learner motivation:

- Regional English speakers who are motivated to learn French to better navigate Québec society and integrate socially and culturally may be especially impacted by how well language programs support these goals. They are likely to respond best to programs that emphasize social and cultural integration. On the other hand, they

may feel discouraged if the language learning doesn't feel immediately useful in their everyday lives.

- Language learners who are negatively motivated to learn French, for instance by anticipating feelings of shame, obligation or anxiety as seen in this study, may also be less likely to use or retain their French skills.^{28,29} Experiences and issues during the learning journey, such as embarrassment or exclusion, the social experience of French courses, and narratives surrounding language laws (examples from our survey's qualitative findings) risk discouraging these learners.³⁰

There is an additional dimension to these findings. In the regions, the legacy of historic English-speaking populations, coupled with lower immigration, can contribute to a distinct social and cultural separation between English- and French-speaking communities (“les deux solitudes”). Leveraging social and cultural motivations to learn French while being mindful of potential demotivators surrounding French language learning will look different in these more entrenched communities as compared to those that may be more diverse.

PRIORITY 3:

PRAGMATIC PROGRAMMING FOR EVERYDAY LIFE AND WORK

Context is key: Regional English speakers pursue practical French language learning for work and life in Québec

Regional English speakers have very practical – if not urgent – French language learning needs. It is concerning that almost all survey respondents had some level of formal French language learning, continued in adult French language learning, but widely reported being unable to or uncomfortable navigating daily life in French. What is more,

28 Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig and Beatrix Burghardt, “Preventing attrition and promoting retention,” *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 19 (2020): 66-81, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1269456.pdf>

29 R.C. Gardner, “Motivation and second language attrition,” *Porta Linguarum*, 8 (2007): 9-20, <https://digibug.ugr.es/bitstream/handle/10481/31616/Gardner.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

30 See also: Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), “User journeys of language learners navigating Québec’s French language training ecosystem,” 2024, <https://pertquebec.ca/reports/user-journeys-of-language-learners-navigating-quebecs-french-language-training-ecosystem/>

they reported higher communication barriers and lower confidence in more high-stakes everyday situations – like going to the hospital, or interacting with government services.

Similarly, respondents reported working predominantly in English language workplaces, but needing to regularly use French despite high levels of discomfort. They described a lack of confidence to execute core career-development tasks in French, even among higher proficiency learners who estimated they could meet workplace language requirements in general.

Following from this, it is of no surprise that across a variety of survey topics, respondents showed a strong inclination towards practical French language learning geared towards navigating daily life and social situations, and working and advancing their careers in French. While language foundations are, of course, necessary, our survey suggests strong consideration be made for programming that can be practically leveraged as soon as possible. A pragmatic approach that emphasises specificity is key. For example, respondents' interest in French language support for specific work or industry situations, especially at more advanced levels, suggests that they may be experiencing linguistic barriers to advancement that are less about overall French language fluency and more about role-dependent fluency and more nuanced areas of industry-specific vocabulary. Functional proficiency seems to be a top goal.

French language programming may be more impactful in the regions if it supports French language learning alongside urgent practical needs and economic advancement, particularly among:

- Regional English speakers who feel less confident using French in more high stakes situations, or who are more likely to use governmental services, healthcare, etc. where communication barriers can impact both their wellbeing and experiences using French.
- Regional English speakers who are motivated to improve their French for job-readiness, and career-development, especially those who are using their French in English speaking workplaces and desire to use more French on the job, or obtain work in predominantly French speaking workplaces or roles.

PRIORITY 4:

ENHANCING ACCESSIBILITY WHILE STRIVING FOR PROGRAMMATIC DIVERSITY

Regional English speakers use and want a variety of continued language learning opportunities - but what is accessible isn't always suitable.

Regional English speakers surveyed expressed a desire for flexible programming and demonstrated demand for a broad variety of program structures and delivery methods. They demonstrated interest in more traditional forms of continuing adult education, while also showing strong interest in self-directed and on-demand French language learning resources, such as mentorship opportunities or private tutors. Our findings suggest that regional English speakers seeking to learn or improve their French piece together different resources to create a programme that best meets their needs and situation.

There are two takeaways for consideration here:

For one, flexibility looks different to different program-users depending on their learning needs and life situations. This validates the need for a carefully maintained variety in French language learning programming. Split preferences on what flexibility of programming looks like (during the workday versus outside the workday, for instance) may also represent the circumstances of different learners, such as whether respondents' jobs are remote or in-person, whether the respondents have dependents or not, and who lives more rural or remotely. While investigating these issues in detail was outside the scope of this survey, qualitative responses suggested that respondents' programmatic preferences are related to overlapping barriers.

Our findings also reiterated that what is suitable may not be accessible, and vice versa. In our study, formal learning opportunities including courses at adult education centres, universities, or Cégeps were the top type of continued French language learning respondents said they used, but they were only actually accessed by about a third of respondents. Respondents also accessed a variety of more specific, informal and self-directed resources. This may suggest that participants are pursuing a trade off between services that are suitable versus those that are accessible.

Further, regarding accessibility, some respondents expressed not being able to find programs that they knew existed, for instance because the information about the programs

was in French. This issue with program findability and accessibility has been evidenced in other PERT reports.³¹

This puts the following groups at the forefront when it comes to program accessibility and suitability:

- Regional English speakers who face more barriers of access to formal and informal French language programming, such as people who are rural, disabled, people with lower income, caregivers, or people with lower literacy or digital skills.
- Regional English speakers with different work schedules and formats, including in-person and online, irregular hours, and seasonal schedules.
- Quebecers who may seek out continued French language education for the first time as adults, or who lacked quality foundational French language education in school, and may have to rely on more programs to achieve French proficiency.
- Beginner level French language learners who may find French language programming difficult to access if information and delivery are provided in French.

That respondents expressed desire in a variety of programmatic preferences indicates a need to ensure the overall French language training system is coherent. A piecemeal approach can be turned into an effective modular one if the quality and accessibility of existing suitable programs is upheld while new ones are developed. This may include positive duplication where needed to improve accessibility. From a policy standpoint, these findings indicate that the development of such a coherent system would require a diversity of regional stakeholders across the table, including educational institutions and employers.

³¹ Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), "French-language training for the workforce: A review of French-language training programs for the workforce in Québec," 2022, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FSL-Inventory-Assessment-Report.pdf>

CONCLUSION

Overall, we found that while most regional English-speaking Quebecers have a foundation of French language education from either school and/or a variety of French language training opportunities as adults, it often does not adequately support their integration in Québec's de facto francophone social, political, and economic life. Our survey respondents reported strong intrinsic desires toward cultural participation, using French at work or in everyday life, that motivated their French language learning. These efforts, however, may be dampened by frustrations such as lack of access to suitable programs, or perceived lack of social safety when practicing their French. Even so, regional English speakers prove active in pursuing a variety of French language learning opportunities, both formal and informal. Our findings suggest that regional English speakers would be eager to leverage better quality, more diverse, and more accessible programming to work in French, confidently navigate daily life, and build their relationships with French-speaking Quebecers and culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS



The provision of appropriate and accessible French language learning is a team effort. Government policy and programs must respond to regional needs and realities, identified and implemented through consultation and collaboration with regional English speakers, community organizations, French language training providers, and employers. We therefore make the following recommendations to enhance the French language learning ecosystem available to regional English speakers, and improve their French language learning experiences:

1. Revise current French language training policy and discourse to better reflect the realities and interests of English-speaking learners

- A. Develop policies and programs that reflect the positive interests and motivations of English-speaking Quebecers to learn French and actively participate in French work environments and daily life.
- B. Support public narratives in policy and media that affirm regional English speakers' positive motivations to learn and use French and respond to discourse that risks alienating discouraged learners.

2. Strengthen French language learning delivered in educational institutions and contexts to ensure strong early foundation and attachment

- A. Create more opportunities for immersive French language experiences and social exchange alongside French language training in school to increase students' use and practice of their French language skills.
- B. Invest in increasing the quality of French language education in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools in the regions, especially in lower resourced communities, and communities where French language training outside of schools may be less accessible.
- C. Invest in school-to-work transitions, wrap-around supports, and continued French language education for post-secondary students learning French, aiming to improve retention of highly educated French-language learners in the regions.
- D. Consider practical French language learning content in schools to ensure English speakers are prepared to confidently communicate in French in everyday life after graduation, and increase retention.

3. Strengthen French language training opportunities and application for navigating everyday life

- A. Develop practical language learning opportunities or support that encourages social and political participation, especially among youth and historically marginalized groups.
- B. Support context-specific French language learning content or supplementary programming that prepares English speakers for high-stakes, everyday scenarios such as navigating healthcare, government, judicial, and school systems. Consider support for immersive and informal learning formats, such as mentorship or volunteering.
- C. Develop French language learning programs suitable to English speakers who are not in school or the labour market and eager to improve their French language skills to fully participate in Québec life, and to support work, and educational transitions.

4. Strengthen French language training tailored to economic inclusion and French use at work

- A. Develop practical language learning opportunities that support regional English speakers' job-related French fluency, such as French language learning opportunities tailored to specific industries, roles, and work-related situations. Emphasize investment in programs corresponding to top regional industries.
- B. Support French language support for job-search and interviewing situations.

5. Improve current French language training framework and program content to increase suitability and use

- A. Draw upon existing resources to better house information, registration, and learning pathways for French language learning (both informal and formal opportunities) in one place.
- B. Create a framework to help learners determine the type of French language learning resources most suitable to their needs and context, and to chart their learning trajectories and outcomes.

C. Expand offering of existing local programs of different levels of French language learning, especially in rural and remote areas.

D. Develop a diversity of French language learning programs of varying structures and delivery modalities to meet regional English speakers' accessibility needs at different points in their lives and careers.

6. Improve accessibility of current French language training framework and program content to ensure findability and uptake

A. Consider programmatic structures that prioritize continued learning over time-sensitive program completion to accommodate life interruptions and regional English speakers' personal investments in language learning.

B. Provide English language support or information around French language programs to increase the findability and completion of programs among beginner level French language learners.

C. Consider English language program instruction for French language program content in beginner level programs to improve the usefulness of the learning content and adherence to programs.

D. Support digital skills learning alongside French language learning for improved take-up and effectiveness of online learning, or develop digital skills support for online French language learning resources.

7. Increase data collection and inclusion surrounding French language learning ecosystem to ensure continued applicability and use of French language training

A. Support continued research on the unique French language learning needs of English speakers in the regions of Québec, including investments in qualitative research and probabilistic sampling across regions.

B. Include regional English speakers, English language community organizations, and education stakeholders in the policy development process for French language training.

APPENDIX 1A:

ABOUT THE REGIONAL FRENCH LANGUAGE NEEDS SURVEY

This report presents quantitative and qualitative findings from PERT's *Regional French Language Needs Assessment Survey*. This voluntary and confidential survey investigated the French-language learning experiences and perceptions of English speakers living across Québec. It covered the following topics:

- **Demographics**
- **Employment**
- **Experiences using French in daily life and work**
- **Experiences of French-language learning, resources, and information**
- **Attitudes and motivations towards French-language learning and use**

The 20-minute, online survey was distributed across Québec by the Regional Development Network (RDN), on behalf of PERT, between the months of April and July 2023. The survey was distributed through a wide variety of regional organizations and networks interfacing with English speakers to ensure as diverse a sample as possible within PERT and RDN capacities for non-random sampling techniques. Eligible respondents were at least 18 years old, and a resident of Québec.

This report presents the results of 656 individuals ($n = 6560$) who self-identified as “an English speaker or an Anglophone”, interpreted as members of Québec’s English-speaking community (ESCQ).³² Our sample included respondents who were 18 years of age or older and live in a Québec region other than Montréal.

³² It is worth noting that respondents who identified as English speakers may also identify as members of other linguistic communities.

This project was funded by the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise (SRQEA).

SUMMARY OF SAMPLE

Sample size: 656 adult English speakers living in the regions of Québec.

Table & Figure 17: Region³³ (n = 656)

Region	Percent	n
Abitibi-Témiscamingue	4.0%	26
Bas-Saint-Laurent	1.4%	9
Capitale-Nationale	7.8%	51
Centre-du-Québec	1.1%	7
Chaudière-Appalaches	1.5%	10
Côte-Nord	7.3%	48
Estrie	3.4%	22
Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine	7.2%	47
Lanaudière	1.2%	8
Laurentides	9.3%	61
Laval	1.5%	10
Mauricie	0.2%	1
Montérégie	30.9%	203
Nord-du-Québec	0.3%	2
Outaouais	21.8%	143
Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean	1.2%	8

³³ Montréal excluded.

FIGURE 18: AGE (N = 708)

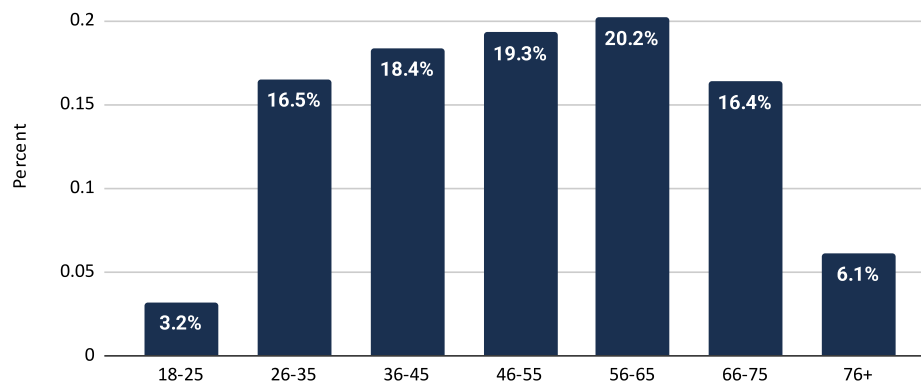


FIGURE 19: GENDER (N = 655)

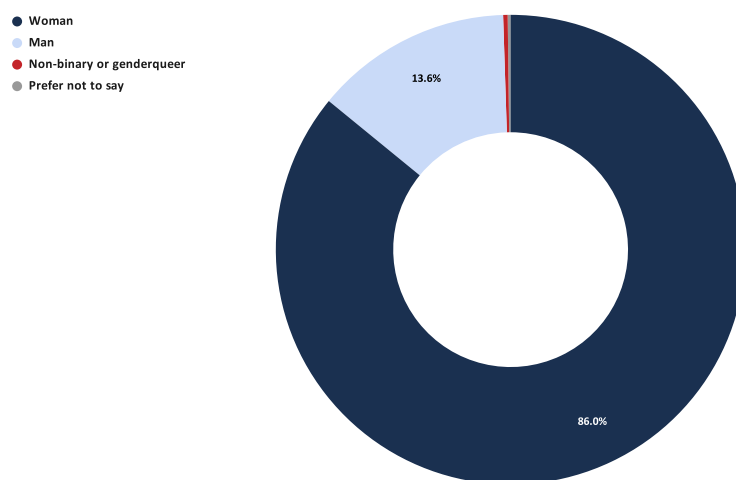


TABLE 20: INDIGENOUS IDENTITY (N = 708)

Indigenous identity	Percent	n
No	95.3%	624
First Nations	2.1%	14
Métis (i.e. members of the Métis Nation, namely, the Métis Nation of Ontario, the Manitoba Métis Federation, the Métis Nation—Saskatchewan, the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis Nation British Columbia)	1.2%	8
Inuk (Inuit)	0.3%	2
Native American Indian/Alaska Native/Pacific Islander	0.2%	1
Indigenous from outside Turtle Island/North America or other (please specify)	0.0%	0
Prefer not to respond	0.9%	6

TABLE 21: VISIBLE MINORITIES (N = 655)

Visible minority group	Percent	n
No (White, caucasian)	92.1%	613
Asian	2.7%	15
Latin/Hispanic	2.0%	6
Middle Eastern	1.4%	9
Black	1.1%	10
Another group	1.1%	4

TABLE 22: EDUCATION STATUS (N =655)

Education status	Percent	n
Yes, I am a full-time student	2.9%	19
Yes, I am a part-time student	2.1%	14
Not a student	95.0%	622

TABLE 23A: EMPLOYMENT STATUS (N = 653)

Employment Status	Percent	n
Employed	64.2%	419
Unemployed	4.6%	30
Not in labour market	31.2%	204

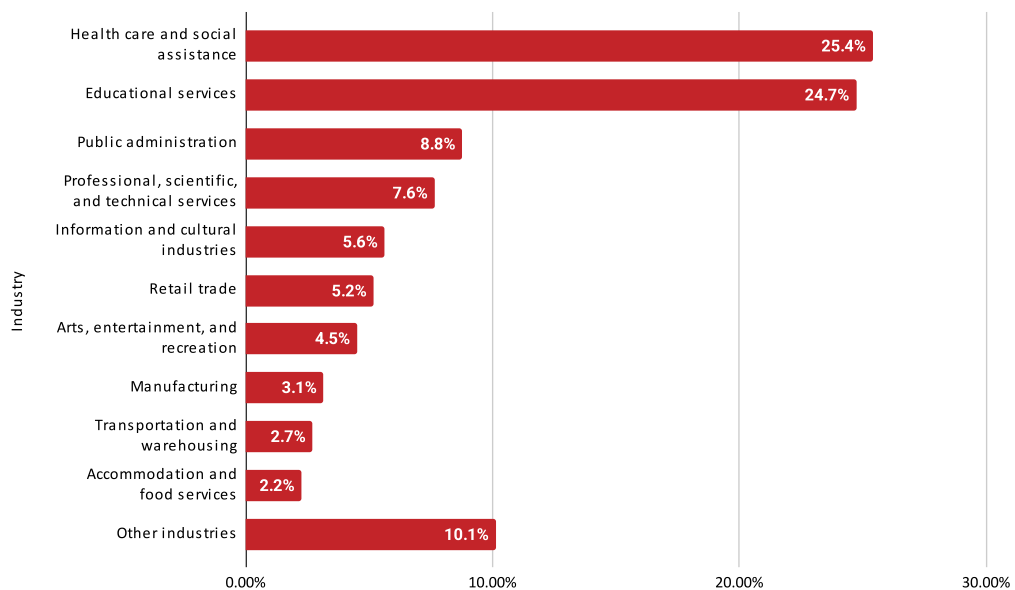
TABLE 23B: EMPLOYMENT TYPE OF EMPLOYED RESPONDENTS (N = 419)

Employment type	Percent	n
Full-time, year-round	75.2%	315
Part-time, year-round	14.8%	62
Casual, seasonally	10.0%	42

TABLE 23C: SECTOR (N = 451³⁴)

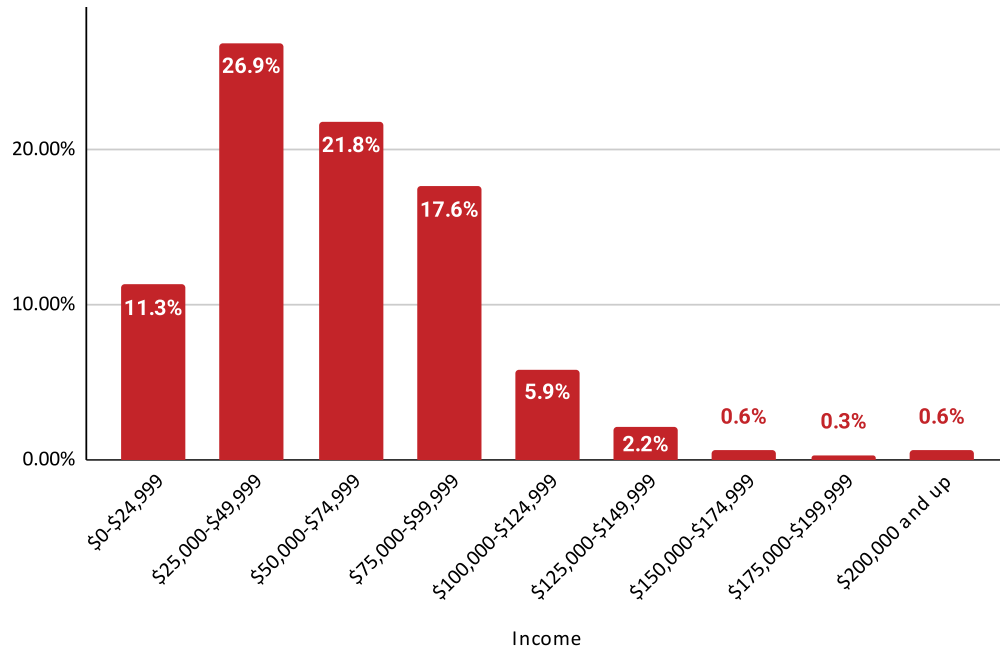
Sector	Percent	n
Public (e.g. government services, public education, public transit)	41.9%	189
Private (e.g. major corporation, small business)	35.7%	161
Non-profit (e.g. community organization, union, faith group)	26.4%	119

FIGURE 24: TOP TEN INDUSTRIES (N = 445)



34 Multiple choice, given to all employed and unemployed respondents

TABLE 25: INCOME (N = 647)



APPENDIX 1 B: ABOUT THE SUPPLEMENTARY SURVEY

This report includes some findings from PERT's 2024 5-minute online survey, *Understanding Quebecers' Awareness of French Language Assessments*. This survey asked 292 English speaking Quebecers, 156 from the regions, about their awareness and experience with the Échelle Québécoise and other French language assessments. The survey was designed as a complimentary addendum to the *Regional French Language Needs Assessment (RFLNA)* survey to better understand how English speakers are assessing their French language skills and using assessment tools. To validate RFLNA survey findings, the survey also repeated and added questions related to attitudes towards improving French language skills, namely what motivates and demotivates their learning. The survey found consistent findings, and so this report includes what was new information.

Full results of this supplementary survey will be released in a forthcoming PERT report.

SUMMARY OF SAMPLE

The survey collected 156 responses from English speakers, ages 18-75, living in Québec regions other than Montréal. These respondents predominantly came from the Capitale-Nationale and Montérégie region, as with PERT's 2023 survey.

More than half of respondents from this survey were longtime residents of Québec, living in the province for 10 years or more (52.9%), or 6-10 years (11.6%). A total of 35.5% of the regional English speakers surveyed were newcomers to Québec (0-5 years of residence) from other provinces or abroad. Overlapping these numbers, respondents were evenly split between those born in Québec (36.1%), another Canadian province (31.0%), or outside of Canada (32.9%).

While all spoke English as their primary language, 10.9% indicated they spoke French just as well and often. This corresponds to 17.3% of respondents who considered themselves fluent in French. Overall, respondents' self-assessed French levels were mostly at the intermediate level (29.5%), with almost as many beginner (24.4%) and advanced (25.0%) level learners. Only 3.8% of respondents said they had no French language proficiency.

ANNEXE II: STATISTIQUES RAPIDES

- 80% of English-speaking Quebecers had some kind of French language training in school.
- 59.2% felt the quality of their French education in school was satisfactory or poor, and 40.9% rated their experiences as good or excellent.
- 66.4% participated in French-language training as an adult, mostly from adult education centres, universities or colleges, cégep, or employer programs.
- Top information sources about French-language training programs included the workplace (27.6%), online searches (25.2%), and social networks (21.3%).
- Almost all the regional English-speaking Quebecers surveyed described themselves as able to communicate in French (96.3%) but their levels of comfort or difficulty varied greatly over specific everyday or work situations. Even if they were able to communicate, almost half (44.9%) described themselves as having some or a lot of difficulty speaking French in general, and 3.7% were unable to entirely.
- Most respondents were motivated by the feeling that learning French is important (75.7%), or that it will help them achieve personal goals like opening doors to more job or education opportunities (65.4%).
- In the last ten years, the English-speaking Quebecers who were surveyed tended to work in English language workplaces (80.1%). About a third (39.0%) also worked in French-speaking environments.
- 79.1% of regional ESCQ surveyed were required to communicate in French in either their French- or English-speaking work experiences over the last ten years.
- This is a higher percentage of respondents than how many reported being at least somewhat comfortable communicating in French on the job (70.3%)
- Less than half of respondents (48.7%) were confident using their French-language skills across various work-related tasks, and almost as many (42.5%) reported that they would have some or a lot of difficulty communicating in those situations.
- In everyday life situations, regional English speakers expressed lower confidence levels using the French-language skills the higher the stakes were, such as when interacting with governmental, healthcare, and judicial systems in the province.

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