

Brief to the Standing Committee on Science and Research

Research and scientific publication in French

October 2022

Executive summary

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is pleased to submit this brief as part of the “Research and Scientific Publication in French” study undertaken by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research.

As the national voice for academic staff, CAUT recommends measures to support research and scientific publication in French across Canada. CAUT therefore recommends the following specific actions:

- Develop a pan-Canadian strategy in partnership with the provinces and territories to ensure sufficient and stable federal funding to make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable and to increase research.
- Encourage the development of tools and incentives for francophone researchers and students to pursue their graduate studies in French and to publish in French.
- Establish special scholarships for francophone students.
- Improve the collection and analysis of data on work and education conducted in French in post-secondary institutions.

CAUT feels it is essential that the federal government play a leadership role and become a true partner in post-secondary education and academic research, particularly in order to support post-secondary education in French, a major pillar of the vitality of Canada’s francophone minority communities.

Introduction

CAUT represents more than 72,000 professors, librarians, researchers and other professionals and academic staff at 125 post-secondary institutions across Canada, including universities, colleges and polytechnics. CAUT is a strong advocate of academic freedom and works actively in the public interest to improve the quality and accessibility of post-secondary education in Canada.

Canada’s post-secondary education system is the engine of our prosperity, the foundation of our

democracy and a source of solutions to present and future problems. Across the country, universities and colleges are flagship institutions that promote the cultural, social, economic and scientific development of communities. This is especially true for francophone minority communities, where the importance of these institutions is all the more crucial.

The educational missions of universities and colleges are inextricably linked to a commitment to maintaining a connection with the historic francophone communities in the various regions of the country and to the preservation, interpretation and dissemination of cultural works and archival materials from these communities.

Research is at the heart of academic freedom and the academic mission of our post-secondary institutions. Research enables our society to move forward based on science, providing the evidence needed for informed decision-making by both government and business leaders. Research also allows the public to judge these choices and make their own decisions, provided that this research and the resulting popularization is available in both English and French.

Francophone and bilingual post-secondary institutions therefore provide community and public infrastructure, in addition to their central mission of teaching, training and conducting research in French. It is essential to offer post-secondary education opportunities in French so that francophone talent can join Canada’s workforce in the various communities, and even to be a magnet for francophones from around the world, whether they are students, researchers or academic staff. Ultimately, the objective is to enable graduates to work and provide services in French in various fields within their communities.

General principles

CAUT believes that students and academic staff have the right to conduct their careers and research activities in the official language of their choice. The vitality of communities depends on the existence of institutions and services that foster the development of their potential, including a thriving post-secondary sector.

That is why, even before getting to research and publication, it is essential to put in place the necessary resources to make post-secondary education in French accessible and available across the country.

Across Canada, most francophone minority communities are served by small and medium-sized universities. The pandemic has certainly further weakened the supply of post-secondary programs in French, thereby undermining demand. Recent crises in some of these institutions are symptoms of a more serious problem.

The federal government must play a role in ensuring accessibility to post-secondary education in remote regions and within the Canadian Francophonie, not only to help retain young people in these regions, but also to attract students from elsewhere. Access to education and the development of communities and regions go hand in hand.

The impact of government underfunding on post-secondary education in French

The Canadian academic Francophonie was already on an alarming trajectory before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic contributed to exacerbating the pressures on francophone university education, particularly in minority communities.

The most compelling example is that of Laurentian University, which on February 1, 2021, embarked on an insolvency process under the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA), the first of its kind in Canada for a post-secondary institution.

This process led to the elimination of 69 academic programs, 58 undergraduate programs, nearly half of which were delivered in French, and 11 graduate programs. In addition, 110 teachers lost their jobs. A number of students and teachers left Laurentian University for other institutions, a blow to the viability of this tri-cultural and bilingual institution, but also to the francophone community in Greater Sudbury and northern Ontario as a whole.

While the financial crisis at Laurentian University was due to a management failure on the part of its administration, questionable planning, a lack of transparency and collegiality, the funding model for

post-secondary education by the provincial and federal governments is also to blame.

In order to reverse these cuts and strengthen collegial governance to prevent the kind of poor financial management that led to insolvency, there must be greater accountability and public funding.

Francophone programs in minority settings are increasingly threatened because they are considered “not profitable” in an environment where courses are prioritized based on factors according to which the small size of a class justifies a budget cut. By increasing public funding for post-secondary education, we will be able to have smaller faculties, make fairer choices and offer high-quality education. The allocation of additional funding in Budget 2021 to ensure the vitality of official language minority post-secondary institutions was a step in the right direction.

The federal government must work with the provinces to ensure that these funds do not remain unused, and mechanisms must be explored to allow institutions to have direct access to these funds, as in the case of the Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund.

CAUT has welcomed the government’s recommendation to strengthen the early childhood minority language education continuum at the post-secondary level, in accordance with the wording of the 2021 plan entitled “Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada,” which sets out the Government of Canada’s intentions regarding the modernization of the *Official Languages Act*. The government’s desire to better protect institutions in official language minority communities across the country must include post-secondary institutions. We hope to see legal protection for access to the full range of post-secondary programs in French across the country, including for research.

Investing in a public post-secondary education model

While increasing federal funding for the official languages program is crucial, it is not sufficient to address the threats to bilingual and francophone post-secondary education due to the long-term erosion of public funding to Canadian colleges and universities. CAUT also highlighted the need for federal-provincial-

territorial collaboration to develop a national strategy in order to ensure high-quality, affordable and accessible post-secondary education through increased, predictable and transparent federal transfers.

In Canada, public funding for post-secondary education has not kept pace with enrolment for decades now. In 1990, just over 80% of university operating funding came from public funding. As of 2018, that figure had plummeted to about 47%. As a result of years of declining public funding in real terms, institutions are increasing tuition fees and class sizes, eliminating programs and jobs, and reducing their research capacity. One of the consequences is that about one-third of academic positions are not permanent and do not lead to tenure, and are less research- and service-oriented. University and college libraries, which are essential to the prosperity of francophone minority communities, are also underfunded. Budget cuts affecting libraries have a disproportionate impact on the purchase of books in French in francophone minority communities.

For example, in 2018, Laurentian University's faculty sounded the alarm, noting that 98% of the library's budget was allocated to English-language books, leaving only 2% of the budget for French-language books. Students complain that they are unable to find documents in French.

Librarians and archivists located in post-secondary institutions offering programs in French in a minority setting must have the resources they need to play a full role in the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge and information.

It is important to keep in mind that if the number of students and research professors decreases, the number of library loans and references will follow the same trend, and vice versa, which will only continue to erode the vitality of French-language education.¹ The last federal-provincial post-secondary education supplement was in 2008. Now is the time to work on an agreement with the provinces to protect public post-secondary education.

Francophone research assistance

In its latest report on research published in June 2021,² ACFAS identified four types of research challenges in francophone minority communities.

These challenges relate to:

- on-campus support for francophone researchers;
- access to resources;
- dissemination of knowledge in French; and
- the evaluation and promotion of research conducted in French and in relation to francophone communities.

These challenges mean that francophone academic staff members have a heavier workload and face more barriers than their English-speaking colleagues. It is important to mention that members of the francophone academic staff at post-secondary institutions established in minority communities are often called upon to assume additional duties. These duties include the translation of documents, interpretation, representation and communication. CAUT believes that the increased workload of francophones in minority communities must be recognized.³

These requests for additional benefits may come from various bodies, including administrative or departmental authorities. These tasks are rarely formally recognized, either in terms of workload or pay. This raises significant equity issues for francophones since they are not usually assigned to the anglophone academic staff.

This extra work of a linguistic nature is often intended to support research, knowledge dissemination, didactics and pedagogy. So there is, at the core, a negative pressure on the members of the academic staff who are trying to contribute to science outreach in French.

CAUT recommends that post-secondary institutions recognize the additional workload these tasks represent for some of their staff. It is unlikely that this recognition by institutions will be implemented without additional incentives or resources to do so.

Furthermore, too many authorities place less value on scientific publications and the communication of scientific results in French, for example when they

study a file for tenure, promotion or the allocation of research funds.

A publication should not be devalued solely on the basis of the language in which it was produced.⁴ The choice to publish in French should not negatively impact the careers of academic staff and scholarly publications in French must therefore be recognized in the same way as English publications.

CAUT members indicated that even if research is conducted in French, projects may need to be translated in order to be eligible for a grant or to obtain the ethical approval required for conducting the research. The resources required to prepare a grant application are often non-existent. External peer review committees often misunderstand funding requests in French. It is difficult to form research groups in French and presentations to university colleagues on research must frequently be made in English.⁵

In fact, the ability of peer review committees to assess funding applications drafted in French varies greatly depending on the federal organizations that are funding the research. The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages reviewed the practices and processes in place and found this in a 2008 study.⁶

Minimum representation in both official languages on review panels is not interpreted consistently across agencies. “Typically, agencies operate bilingual peer review committees based on the self-declared functional bilingualism of reviewers. To assess applications submitted in French, peer review committee members are required to be functionally bilingual. Some agencies ensure that a minimum number of members on committees evaluating French applications are francophone.”

Similarly, the lists of experts from the organizations’ databases contain in theory enough bilingual people in various specialties, but again, “this is based on self-assessment and none of the agencies test the language skills of their external experts.”

Publishing in French

The number of scientific journals published in French is smaller than in English, which is a problem for all francophone researchers worldwide. Simply put, there

are fewer dissemination vehicles and a smaller readership than for scientific journals publishing in English.

Some researchers therefore publish their work in English to make sure they are understood. Even when graduate students write their theses in French, they often have to publish their papers in English to make a name for themselves in their field of research. Even when it would be simple or possible to do so, the tendency is to publish in English to ensure that the results of their work are disseminated on a larger scale, that it has a greater impact, that there be more opportunities to be cited and thus have a better chance of generating interest when looking for grants. An important area in which improvements could be made is the protection of programs that promote the dissemination of research in French, given the low number of French-language journals in certain fields.⁷

That said, this choice by researchers also comes with an increase in workload. Most researchers need more time to write if they are not writing in their native tongue. In addition to scientific research, writing also requires more time to become familiar with the English vocabulary and to ensure the accuracy of the terms used, not to mention the revision of grammar and syntax, which also takes more time. In addition, the peer review process may also be affected. Researchers will therefore not subsequently take on the additional workload required to publish a version in French.

According to information gathered by Vincent Larivière, Canada Research Chair in the Transformations of Scholarly Communication, only 0.5% of Quebec research articles published in 2014 in international journals were written in French in the natural and medical sciences. This percentage only rose to 9.4% in the social sciences and humanities. Since 1980, the number of articles written in French has decreased by 14.3% in the natural and medical sciences, and by 25.6% in the social sciences and humanities.⁸

According to Larivière, in university rankings, only articles published in the most prestigious journals are considered, and they are all in English. The emphasis on rankings and measures has resulted in many post-secondary institutions placing less emphasis on French-

language scholarly publications when making hiring, tenure and promotion decisions. Since English is the international language of academic publications, francophones find themselves in a difficult situation within a profession in which bibliometrics determine career prospects. This is systemic bias that is disadvantageous to research in French and hinders the publication of scientific articles in French.

CAUT echoes a number of recommendations made to the federal government in the ACFAS report regarding research challenges, including:

- the need to invest in French scholarly communications, including open access and open educational resources in French;
- the need to improve the policies and practices of the Tri-Council in order to ensure the equitable evaluation and promotion of research in French; and
- financial support for the Service d'aide à la recherche en français (SARF) to foster francophone collaboration in research and higher education in Canada.

Encouraging francophones in minority communities to study in their language

Because of limited courses and programs in certain fields of study, francophone students in minority communities are often forced to pursue post-secondary education in English. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages has already heard clear evidence from a number of witnesses that the lack of post-secondary education opportunities in French is discouraging K-12 students from studying in French and is undermining the francophone educational continuum.⁹

The question was asked in Ontario's 2012 report on the state of French-language postsecondary education in central southwestern Ontario: "What is the impact of this almost non-existent offer of postsecondary programs in French? The answer is rather simple: No access, no future. In other words, for the francophone community, it is slow death. And for society as a whole, it is an incredibly sad missed opportunity."¹⁰

Access to francophone and bilingual post-secondary institutions is essential to ensuring that minority-

language students can complete their education in French. This access is also crucial for the francophone minority community as a whole in order to ensure the presence of francophone service providers in key sectors such as education, health care and the public service. It would be a good idea for the expert group to think about the need for French education opportunities to ensure the stability of the francophone workforce.

The federal government already offers special scholarships to anglophone students studying in French. Scholarships could be offered specifically to francophones who choose to pursue their education in French, particularly at the graduate level. This could help eliminate the vicious cycle caused by low enrolment, which leads to a decrease in course availability, which in turn leads to an even greater reduction in enrolments. This would have a positive impact on the French-language research capabilities of institutions and, consequently, on the publications that would result from them.

Improving data collection

During the census and other surveys, Statistics Canada could do a better job of tracking people whose first language is French at work, or who study in French. It would also be useful to keep track of the academic programs in which these students are enrolled.

Through Statistics Canada's National Graduates Survey,¹¹ we already know that a significant proportion of francophone students outside Quebec attend English-language postsecondary institutions, 47% at the undergraduate level and 65% at the graduate level. These data, which date back to 2015, are alarming. It means that the majority of francophones outside Quebec choose English for their post-secondary education, whether for reasons of proximity, choice of programs offered or reputation.

Improved data collection and dissemination are needed. There is no doubt that the post-pandemic picture has not improved. The government must follow up more closely on trends in post-secondary education in French in Canada.

Conclusion

The Canadian Association of University Teachers is pleased to present this brief to the Standing Committee

on Science and Research. We emphasized the crucial role of public funding for post-secondary education, especially where francophones are the minority. We have also proposed ideas on how the federal government can help francophone students and researchers. We think these are all elements that are needed to safeguard our post-secondary education system and help avoid a situation as catastrophic as the one at Laurentian University. Francophones across

Canada have the right to substantive equality in education. They must be able to have access to an education equivalent to that of the linguistic majority. Post-secondary education, research and scientific publishing in French must therefore receive the appropriate assistance to ensure the vitality, growth and development of Canada's Francophonie.

Notes

¹ CAUT Francophones' Committee. Report to Council on the CAUT's 3rd Francophones' Conference, p. 4, March 2018.

² ACFAS, Portrait et défis de la recherche en français en contexte minoritaire au Canada [Portrait and challenges of research in French in the minority context in Canada], June 2021.

³ Policy Statement, CAUT Council, Recognition of Increased Workload of Francophones in a Minority Context, November 2012.

⁴ Policy Statement, CAUT Council, Recognition of the Value of Disseminating Research in the French Language, November 2013.

⁵ CAUT Francophones' Committee. Report to Council on the CAUT's 3rd Francophones Conference, p. 3, March 2018.

⁶ Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The Role of Canadian Federal Research Funding Agencies in the Promotion of Official Languages, January 2008.

⁷ CAUT Francophones' Committee. Report to Council on the CAUT's 3rd Francophones Conference, p. 3, March 2018.

⁸ "The dominant language of science" Bulletin (65:2) CAUT 2018.

⁹ Report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, 42.1, Respect for language rights in Ontario: an issue for all of Canada, p. 15, June 2019.

¹⁰ Office of the French Language Services Commissioner, "The State of French-Language Postsecondary Education in Central-Southwestern Ontario: No access, no future," p. 2, June 2012

¹¹ Statistics Canada, "National Graduate Survey," November 2020