

Université du Québec à Chicoutimi



MONTREAL



SAGUENAY



SEPT-ÎLES

Brief prepared by the Vice-Rector for Research,
Creation and Innovation

at

the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi

presented to the

Standing Committee on Science and Research as
part of its study on scientific research and
publications in French

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UQAC

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SUMMARY

Through the research and creative activities of its university community members, the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (UQAC) helps ensure that the French language is present in Canadian science and research. This brief presented to the Standing Committee on Science and Research voices the concerns of UQAC's Vice-Rector for Research, Creation and Innovation about the declining use of French by research teams in federal programs. To counter this trend, UQAC is submitting various proposals aimed at consolidating the role that university journals play in disseminating scientific information in French in Canada and at ensuring better access to francophone academic publications. It also proposes that federal agencies ensure that funding applications submitted in French receive equitable treatment and that the agencies also commit to recognizing the value that French scientific output lends in helping achieve their objectives of diversity and excellence.

Introduction

UQAC is a member of the Université du Québec network,¹ a collaborative francophone network recognized for its excellence, accessibility and openness. As such, UQAC shares long-standing concerns that have been expressed in numerous forums and consultations over the years. Those concerns involve the accessibility of research support measures implemented by the Government of Canada and the ability those measures have to support the diversity of Canada's research community.

Some examples of those concerns include the accessibility of grants and awards for researchers from all institutions, regardless of geographic location, size of home institution or official language used.

¹ Spread across Quebec from east to west and north to south, the 3,000 professors at the Université du Québec create, transfer and mobilize knowledge in all fields, thus placing the network in the top ten Canadian universities with the highest volume of research. Each year, the ten institutions welcome one third of Quebec's university students and half of the province's Indigenous students.

The purpose of this brief is to address this last point, which is of major importance for a university located in a region with a strong francophone majority. Our institution aims to fully contribute to teaching, supporting the development of the communities it serves, and research, which occupies a prominent place in the scientific community as a whole.

Strengthening opportunities for disseminating scientific information in French in Canada

Within the framework of various international partnerships, our university has developed teaching and research relationships throughout the international Francophonie. As a result, the work of its professors and students helps expand research and publishing in Canada in French. However, our library staff conducted a bibliometric analysis of publications and discovered that there is an issue with identifying French-language publications by Canadian researchers in library databases and catalogues. *Érudit* plays an essential role in the availability of academic publications in French. In order to support *Érudit*'s development, it is recommended that

- *Érudit* be provided with increased and stable funding as it is the primary mechanism for disseminating academic publications in French in Canada.

The most accessible dissemination opportunities, academic journals (especially those of modest size), are often shouldered by determined individuals who make an unparalleled personal investment. Some journal support services are provided by university libraries but, again, the needs are great and resources are limited. Furthermore, the requirements for open access grant funds have changed significantly in recent years, imposing new restrictions on researchers and journals without necessarily supporting the francophone publishing system, which is struggling to make the transformation required by the large funds. Open access academic journals are one of the keys to fully accessible science in French at reasonable and controllable costs. Strengthening and developing these opportunities for disseminating scholarly publications in French, in our opinion, justifies:

- increased involvement of federal agencies in the financial support of academic journals and in recognizing the involvement of those who contribute to their publication.

Finally, in order to ensure compliance with open access requirements and to facilitate the identification of French-language science products in Canada, to improve their visibility and accessibility, and to ensure the sustainability of content, given that many journal sites do not have archives, we believe that federal agencies could support:

- a concerted effort to standardize the description of francophone academic publications in order to create a directory of francophone, open access academic publications.

Ultimately, and following the same logic of the previous analysis and recommendations, UQAC supports the following ACFAS² recommendation to address the challenge of disseminating knowledge in French in Canada:

- *We recommend that Canadian Heritage and the provincial governments establish a fund to support university presses and other knowledge dissemination activities in French, such as scientific journals, popular magazines and media.*

Actions to counter the decline of the use of French in research and publishing in Canada

UQAC is well known across Canada for its partnership research, which has earned it an excellent success rate in federal grant programs. This type of research involves partners from the communities served, which means that the deliverables are most often produced in French. The majority of our researchers use French in all their scientific publications and in their applications to federal programs. However, a surprising proportion of francophone researchers at UQAC remain convinced that it is better to submit applications to federal agencies in English and that having English publications in their portfolio is advantageous in terms of the influence and impact of their publications. Since these researchers conduct their research in French, they must devote additional effort and resources to demonstrating that they are willing to use English. These efforts and resources could be devoted to research rather than to activities that—even though it is far from being their primary objective—contribute to the decline of the use of French in research in Canada and in the world.

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

Another issue of concern relates to the findings of a 2021 study carried out by ACFAS comparing success rates of applications submitted to federal agencies (NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR) in each language. The data showed clear differences and led ACFAS to recommend that measures be implemented to increase the proportion of applications submitted in French as well as their success rate. UQAC is reiterating the relevance of this recommendation, because if we want to take action to counter the decrease in the use of French in research in Canada, it is important to implement measures that guarantee that applications submitted in French have the same chances of being funded. As an example of measures that could be implemented, UQAC suggests that federal agencies make formal commitments to the following:

- the value of a diverse cross-section of researchers as a component that contributes to the excellence of the Canadian scientific community;
- the obligation to treat applications fairly, regardless of the official language used;

and that, of course, these commitments be acted upon by the appropriate authorities and ultimately by all Canadians. Encouraging more researchers to apply in French is essential, but federal research funding agencies must also improve what might be called the “fair reception” of funding applications written in French. To meet this challenge, UQAC joins those who are calling for improvements in the ability of review committee members to understand and analyze French-language applications.

Among the other elements that concern the committees set up by Canadian organizations and that can have an impact on the success of applications from francophone researchers, UQAC asks that publications written in French appearing in francophone or bilingual periodicals be appreciated for the true value they contribute to Canadian scientific diversity. This should help increase the value of French-language publications in researchers’ portfolios.

Communicating with federal departments

It has happened in the past, even at francophone universities, that communications or research contract offers are received from a federal department and written exclusively in English. It would be advisable to ensure that departments are able to communicate in French with francophone universities. In addition to facilitating communication, it would also contribute to increasing the diversity of expertise available to departments to meet their research and development needs.

Conclusion

UQAC would like to underscore the relevance of the Standing Committee on Science and Research's current insights. For a francophone university, this subject is of major concern and our efforts are ongoing in order to counter the progressive decline in the use of French. UQAC believes that the Government of Canada has useful tools to support such efforts, and we hope that this brief will encourage new initiatives to increase the use and visibility of the French language in research and publication in Canada.

About the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi

Founded in 1969, UQAC is part of the largest university network in Canada, the Université du Québec. Boasting 60,000 graduates, UQAC welcomes 6,500 students each year, including more than 2,000 students from some 50 countries around the world. Renowned for the close relationship between its students and its 250 professors, UQAC offers a unique experience and more than 200 programs of study. When it comes to research, the institution is recognized as one of the most productive universities in Quebec in terms of research partnerships. Throughout its history, it has developed several research niches, setting it apart internationally.

Recommendations

- 1- UQAC recommends that
 - *Érudit* be provided with increased and stable funding as it is the primary mechanism for disseminating academic publications in French in Canada.
- 2- UQAC is of the opinion that strengthening and developing these opportunities for disseminating scholarly publications in French justifies
 - increased involvement of federal agencies in the financial support of academic journals and in the recognition of the involvement of those who contribute to their publication.
- 3- UQAC is asking that federal agencies support

- a concerted effort to standardize the description of French-language academic publications in order to create a directory of open access French-language academic publications.
- 4- UQAC supports the following recommendation of ACFAS³ to address the challenge of disseminating knowledge in French in Canada:
- We recommend that Canadian Heritage and the provincial governments establish a fund to support university presses and other knowledge dissemination activities in French, such as scientific journals, popular magazines and media.*
- 5- UQAC suggests that federal agencies make formal commitments to:
- the value of a diverse cross-section of researchers as a component that contributes to the excellence of the Canadian scientific community;
 - the obligation to treat applications fairly, regardless of the official language used.
- 6- UQAC asks that publications written in French appearing in francophone or bilingual periodicals be appreciated for the true value they contribute to Canadian scientific diversity. This should help increase the value of French-language publications in researchers' portfolios.
- 7- UQAC recommends that federal departments be able to communicate with francophone universities in French.

³ ACFAS. 2021. *Portrait et défis de la recherche en français en contexte minoritaire au Canada* [overview and challenges of research in French in a minority context in Canada].