

Research and Scientific Publication in French



Universities
Canada

Brief Submitted to the Standing Committee on Science and Research

December 2022

The voice of Canada's universities



As the national voice of universities in francophone minority communities and in Quebec,

Universities Canada is well aware of the important role that higher education institutions play in promoting cultural expression and ensuring that francophone minority communities and the Canadian francophone community as a whole can conduct research and publish in the language of their choice.

Universities Canada is the voice of Canada's public and private not-for-profit universities, at home and abroad. Through teaching, research and community involvement, universities transform lives, strengthen communities and find solutions to some of the most pressing issues facing Canada and the world.

A worrying trend

Recent studies conducted by Acfas and other organizations on the decline of French-language academic research published in Canada have revealed a worrying trend.

In just 10 years, from 2011 to 2021, the number of French-language publications fell from 595 to 490, a 17.6% decrease. The decrease in the number of French-language academic journals is closely related to the decline in the number of articles written in French. Since 1980, the number of French journals has decreased by 14.3% in the natural sciences and medicine, and by 25.6% in the humanities. Since 1960, only 8% of new academic journals have been French, while 17% have been bilingual and 76% have been English.

The share of research grant applications submitted to granting agencies and the Canada Foundation for Innovation in French is also declining, even among francophones, who account for 21% of researchers. Despite this high percentage, applications submitted in French make up only 5% to 12% of all applications to federal research funding agencies. Astonishingly, less than half of applications to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council from francophone and bilingual institutions in Quebec are written in French.

Francophone researchers now worry that their applications will not be reviewed properly if they are written in their mother tongue. Recent historical data from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) collected between 2001 and 2015 show success rates of 38.6% for anglophones applying in English, 37% for francophones applying in English and 24.8% for francophones applying in French. It is worth noting that CIHR has begun taking steps to address this significant variance.



A mandate for action

The federal government has a duty to protect the vitality of the French language, particularly in francophone minority communities, and to provide continuing support to higher education institutions to enable them to carry out their essential research, teaching and publishing activities.

Universities Canada welcomes the new positive measures the federal government is proposing in amendments to the *Official Languages Act*, which will impose new duties to enhance the vitality of the French language through “the creation and dissemination of information in French that contributes to the advancement of scientific knowledge in any discipline; [support for] sectors that are essential to enhancing the vitality of English and French linguistic minority communities, including the culture [and] education...sectors; [and the protection and promotion of] the presence of strong institutions serving those communities.”

A world language

French is a world language with approximately 300 million speakers. Building relationships with members of the international francophone community, particularly the scientific community, should be one of Canada’s strengths. The decline of French in scientific and academic publications in Canada only serves to drive a wedge between Canadian researchers and their counterparts in the international francophone scientific community. This divide is detrimental to Canadian scientific diplomacy and international research collaboration.

Recommendations

In light of the issues and opportunities outlined above, as well as the federal government’s duty to support higher education in French and in a minority official language, Universities Canada makes the following recommendations:

1 - Ensure that Canada’s research granting agencies and review committees have the policies and expertise to review French-language applications in a fair and equitable manner.

The different success rates for applications submitted to granting agencies in French and those submitted in English is worrisome. The government should ensure that granting agencies are equipped and have the resources and policies needed to give equal consideration to English and French applications so that francophone researchers can confidently submit applications in the language of their choice.



2 - Ensure that francophone researchers have equitable access to opportunities in the federal scientific ecosystem.

Where possible, the government should aim to provide equal opportunities for researchers to conduct, present and publish research in French through federal research funding programs and through partnerships with universities and other institutions.

3 - Fund higher education institutions to better serve francophone minority communities and promote research and scientific publication in French.

The culture of education, discovery, research and publication in French must reflect the strength of Canada's francophone community and its institutions.

In keeping with its election promises and its positive commitments to the proposed reforms to the *Official Languages Act*, the federal government should double funding to higher education institutions through official languages support programs and make that funding permanent. It should also ensure that these resources can be used for current and recurring programs. In addition, the government should commit to providing resources to the new Service to Assist Research in French and to platforms that promote research in French, such as Érudit.

