



Université de Sherbrooke

Brief from the Université de Sherbrooke

To the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research

For Its Study on Research and Scientific Publication in French

December 2022

Recommendations

The Université de Sherbrooke recommends the following:

1. That the federal government offer permanent support to French-language university presses and other knowledge dissemination activities so that francophone researchers can help spread knowledge in French.
2. That the research granting agencies adopt a policy prohibiting review committees from taking into account a journal's impact factor in order to combat the tendency to penalize research projects that would be published in French-language journals.
3. That the federal government invest in the Service to Assist Research in French (SARF) developed by Acfas to help researchers prepare their funding applications in French.
4. That the federal granting agencies improve the review process for French grant applications by better assessing the bilingualism of reviewers to ensure they understand French applications.
5. That the granting agencies retain measures to rebalance the success rates for applications submitted in French and those submitted in English or ensure they are at least equivalent.
6. That the Committee on Science and Research establish a working group to advise the SRSR committee and the Canada Research Coordinating Committee on implementing the recommendations stemming from the study on research and scientific publication in French.

Introduction

In Canada, we say that diversity is our strength. If we believe this is true, it should be as true for linguistic and cultural diversity as it is for other forms of diversity. In the fields of science, diversity, equity and inclusion increase the quality, impact and usefulness of research.¹ Accordingly, francophone researchers must be able do their research in French with the same support and opportunities as anglophone researchers in Canada.

The Université de Sherbrooke (UdeS) is the heart of a major French-language teaching and research hub in Quebec. Known for its practically oriented programs, alternation of work and study terms and innovative approaches to research and technology transfer, the UdeS generated \$248.6 million in research revenues in 2021–22, an 85% increase in five years. It was already ranked 14th among Canadian universities in 2020–21. What is more, the UdeS leads the country in research revenue growth over the past 20 years.

One of the UdeS's strategic objectives is to help make society more equitable, greener and more inclusive. Cultural and linguistic differences help spark different questions and generate different answers. The way we formulate ideas reflects our culture, our background and the unique features of our language. This diversity produces better thought-out solutions to today's most pressing problems. Canadian society cannot afford to lose this valuable resource and these subtle differences that are still being understood.

The state of French-language research in Canada is currently quite fragile. And it is fragile at every stage, from developing grant applications and reviewing them to publishing the findings and disseminating them. The UdeS would like to thank the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research for undertaking a study on research and scientific publication in French to highlight this situation and propose solutions.

Current situation

In 2021, Acfas – an association that brings together into a common front and supports francophone researchers in Canada so that they can fully participate in the country's scientific life – published a report that paints a complete portrait of the state of minority French research.² The report explains that, while francophone researchers account for 21% of Canada's research community:

¹ NSERC, 2017, *Guide for Applicants: Considering equity, diversity and inclusion in your application*, p. 1.

² https://www.acfas.ca/sites/default/files/documents_utiles/rapport_françophonie_sommaire_final_1.pdf. [in French only]

- French-language journals make up only about 8% of all journals established in Canada since 1960. About 17% of journals are bilingual, while 76% are English-language publications;
- Over 90% of articles are published in English, and the share of articles published in French has been declining steadily since 1955;
- only 5% to 12% of funding applications are submitted to the granting agencies in French;
 - at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, this figure declined from 24% to 12% between 1990 and the study period;³ and
- at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the success rate for English applications is 38.5%, while it is 29.2% for French applications.

The reasons for the ongoing decline in French-language research are clear: the lack of opportunities to publish in French and the increased risk that reviewers do not fully understand their proposals, possibly resulting in rejection, means the system discourages francophone researchers from conducting research in French.

Recommendations

The UdeS supports the many recommendations in the Acfas report entitled *Portrait et défis de la recherche en français en contexte minoritaire au Canada* and would like to underscore the importance of the following recommendations to the SRSR committee's study on research and scientific publication in French:

1. That the federal government offer permanent support to French-language university presses and other knowledge dissemination activities so that francophone researchers can help spread knowledge in French.
2. That the research granting agencies adopt a policy prohibiting review committees from taking into account a journal's impact factor in order to combat the tendency to penalize research projects that would be published in French-language journals.
3. That the federal government invest in the Service to Assist Research in French (SARF) developed by Acfas to help researchers prepare their funding applications in French.
4. That the federal granting agencies improve the review process for French grant applications by better assessing the bilingualism of reviewers to ensure they understand French applications.
5. That the granting agencies retain measures to rebalance the success rates for applications submitted in French and those submitted in English or ensure they are at least equivalent.

³ *Portrait et défis de la recherche en français en contexte minoritaire au Canada en chiffres*, https://www.acfas.ca/sites/default/files/documents_utiles/chiffres_rapport_final.pdf. [in French only]

6. That the Committee on Science and Research establish a working group to advise the SRSR committee and the Canada Research Coordinating Committee on implementing the recommendations stemming from the study on research and scientific publication in French.

Conclusion

The Université de Sherbrooke would like to thank the members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research for the opportunity to express its concerns about research and publication in French. We strongly believe that linguistic and cultural diversity is an asset to Canada. By investing in the dissemination of knowledge in French and addressing the factors that discourage francophone researchers from carrying out their research in French, Canada can make progress on stemming the decline of French-language research.