

VOICES OF NEW CANADIANS: PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES WITH FRENCH AS A SECOND OFFICIAL LANGUAGE IN CANADA

Allophone students—young people who immigrated to Canada and were unable to speak English or French upon arrival—are often overlooked in French-second-language (FSL)* promotional and advocacy initiatives. Allophone students are not encouraged, and are sometimes actively discouraged, from enrolling in FSL education despite the impressive performance of those who do¹. Indeed, no federal or provincial policy explicitly ensures that Allophone students have access to FSL education.

Canadian Parents for French (CPF) commissioned Callie Mady, PhD, to conduct a study of Allophone attitudes toward Canada's linguistic duality and experiences with FSL education in Canada. With advice and support from CPF-ON and CPF-BC & YK who shared their expertise and experiences with multicultural communities, focus groups were conducted in Toronto, Vancouver, and North Bay. CPF branches and chapters recruited 19 parents of Allophone students by inviting parents from their schools and

communities along with those who had participated in Branch outreach initiatives and in the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages' round table on Canadian diversity. North Bay parents were recruited through the local multicultural centre.

In addition, an online survey gathered the attitudes and experiences of 125 Allophone university students from across the country who had immigrated to Canada, who did not speak English or French upon arrival, and who had been educated in Canadian public schools outside Quebec. Allophone students were recruited via advertisements in university campus newspapers, and a small number of students from the University of Ottawa were recruited for a focus group with the assistance of the Director of Immersion Programs. Students received an honorarium of \$25 for their participation.

ALLOPHONE PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD FSL LEARNING

All Allophone parents interviewed were aware, prior to immigrating, that Canada has two official languages. Despite their surprise that little French was heard in daily life in English-dominated communities, despite the fact that 80% of these parents received no information about French immersion options from the school system, and despite frequent discouragement from educators, Allophone support for linguistic duality and FSL* education remains high. 60% felt that learning both Canada's official languages would benefit their children, and 40% had enrolled their children in French immersion. This figure provides a striking contrast to national immersion enrolment, which

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hovers at about 8%, with provincial enrolment ranging from 6% to 26% outside Quebec. Their commitment to both official languages is further demonstrated by the astonishing 84% of Allophone parents in English-dominated communities who studied FSL themselves. It is perhaps due to their perceptions of the advantages of learning other languages that the vast majority of adult participants sought out opportunities to learn FSL. The fact that 63% of Allophone parents interviewed learned to speak or saw others speaking more than one language in their country of origin may explain their confidence in their children's ability to master multiple languages.

¹ Mady, C. (2007). *Allophone Students in French-Second-Official-Language Programs: A Literature Review*. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 63(5). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

*Although French-second-official-language (FSOL) is the term preferred by many researchers when referring to the experiences of Allophone students (who are learning French as a third or subsequent language, rather than a second language), in this report, we refer to these programs as French-second-language (FSL), in line with the terminology used by ministries of education in Canada.

“And parents, we don’t have to be afraid of, “Oh! Is my daughter, my son’s going to learn the English language at the same time, because if she/he would go there he might mix up the languages. And you know what, I believe this is a myth... So I saw that my kids, they were learning, they were trilingual at this time, and they do not get confused... Now they speak three languages.”

- Vancouver participant

“We are starting, me and my husband, starting to just kind of going through the courses for the French... I believe it’s a bonus if anybody here knows any other language other than English.” - Toronto Participant

“I only have one job, so I have time to learn night time, you know, courses at night... I’m always interested and I’m waiting for the next one to come. I’m gonna register again for the next lesson.” Vancouver Participant

Unfortunately, educators do not share their confidence.

“...We were inquiring about extended French for our older daughter... when we talked about that to the principal and her home teacher, they were both actually trying to, they were both saying, like, “Oh it’s a very hard program, maybe you should think about it.” Instead of encouraging us and encouraging students to go, to explore their interest, they were actually trying to persuade us to stay there and go with the core English program, which was very disappointing, and it should be otherwise.” - Toronto Participant

“... But the teachers say that is too hard for them... for this year it’s okay. I listen to the teacher. But next year he takes French.” - North Bay Participant

Despite educator concerns, fully 95% of parents who chose immersion for their children were satisfied with the decision and with the program.

“I put my son through the French immersion school...I think I did the right thing for him. Yep. ‘Cause, when he was in school I was also learning at the same time, so I benefited from that... I did it right. For both of us.” - Vancouver Participant

“The French language also help them to find better jobs. And this is a treat. And many other things, as I said, linguistically speaking; it opened up their horizons, and I’m proud of that.” - Vancouver Participant

Parents who had not put their children in immersion expressed regret: 50% of those who had not put their children in immersion would have, had they had information about the program.

“I really felt guilty. It’s almost like he’s missing out and I really felt that I should have known better so he would have a better opportunity. Yeah. Would have been nice. Yeah, especially now, he’s starting to go into the military and he said the other language would have been a big, big bonus. It will open doors for him, whatever he’s doing...I never knew. It’s just sad.” - Vancouver Participant

ALLOPHONE STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD LEARNING BOTH OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Allophone parent commitments to Canada’s official languages and confidence in their children’s ability to learn multiple languages would seem to influence their children. Allophone students presented a number of factors that influenced their decisions to pursue FSL studies in elementary and secondary school. 96% believed that official-language bilingualism would have a positive effect on future employment, 94% stated that they value multilingualism, 79% noted that they were doing well in their French studies, and 59% expressed a desire to learn more about francophone culture.

Allophone students faced roadblocks similar to their parents’ when attempting to enrol in immersion or extended French programs. 33% indicated that the school discouraged their enrolment while fully 42% reported that the school disallowed their enrolment.

“I think it was when my parents wanted to switch me over to immersion in Grade 7, the principal and even the French teacher, she was like “you shouldn’t be here, you don’t have a good enough grasp of English,” She basically told me I was going to fail at it so why would I go into it. And at that point I was like “okay I’m done with this there’s no point.” - Allophone University Student

Despite being discouraged, Allophone students demonstrated commitment to pursuing FSL studies. 50% of Allophone student respondents stayed in French beyond the compulsory period and completed the core French curriculum, compared with provincial completion rates ranging from 6% to 15%². Students also expressed satisfaction with their French proficiency in elementary and secondary school. 87% felt that their French was good/adequate enough to continue FSL at a higher level, and about two-thirds felt it was good enough to cope with social situations, to understand mass media in French, and to apply for jobs requiring French.

Allophone students also consider learning both official languages part of their Canadian identity, with three-quarters indicating that knowing both official languages is an important factor in Canadian citizenship.

“...if you’re going to count yourself as being Canadian you should embrace everything that Canada is about, I mean history wise and culturally wise, it’s a bilingual, two-culture country with English and French so I think you have to accept both of them.” - Allophone university student

88% expressed satisfaction with their post-secondary French studies and with their own performance in these courses. 83% reported that their French was good enough to conduct conversations in French, 66% said that they could understand French mass media, and 58% felt confident enough to apply for jobs requiring French.

CONCLUSION

The interview and questionnaire findings revealed that Allophone adult and university participants are committed to FSL acquisition. Both groups judged the acquisition of languages, FSL in particular, as positive. In fact, the majority of both parent and student participants expressed a desire and took action to study FSL.

Responses show, however, that there is a need to provide immigrant communities with information about educational choices in their regions. Allophone parents’ dissatisfaction with the educational system suggests that schools and school districts should provide more FSL information and support. Respondents also indicated that they received information about education in Canada from cultural centres. Providing cultural centres and other immigrant-serving organizations with information about educational choices is another way to better inform newly arrived parents of their choices.

The full research report can be found on our website: <http://www.cpf.ca/eng/resources-reports-fsl.html>

² Canadian Parents for French. (2004.) The State of French-Second-Language Education in Canada 2004. Ottawa: Canadian Parents for French, p. 36.

VOICES OF NEW CANADIANS: FACT SHEET FOR EDUCATORS



Canadian Parents for French commissioned Callie Mady, PhD, to conduct a study of Allophone attitudes toward Canada's linguistic duality and their experiences with French-second-language (FSL)* education in Canada. An online survey gathered the attitudes and experiences of 125 Allophone university students from across the country who had immigrated to Canada without English or French as a dominant language and who had been educated in Canadian public schools outside Quebec. In addition, focus groups for 19 Allophone parents were conducted in Toronto, Vancouver, and North Bay.

Allophone parents respect official languages and are confident that their children can learn multiple languages:

60% of Allophone parents felt that learning both of Canada's official languages would benefit their children.

84% of Allophone parents studied FSL themselves.

40% enrolled their children in French immersion, an impressive rate given provincial enrolment rates that range from 6% to 26% outside Quebec.

50% of those who had not put their children in immersion would have done so if they had had information about the program.

63% of Allophone parents interviewed learned to speak or saw others speaking more than one language in their country of origin that may, in part, explain their confidence in their children's ability to master multiple languages.

Allophone students reflect their parents' commitment and confidence:

96% of Allophone students believed that official-language bilingualism would have a positive effect on future employment.

94% stated that they value multilingualism.

Their prior language learning experience also allowed them to judge that having learned one language helps with the learning of another. Allophone parents need information about the Canadian education system and about FSL programs in particular.

Allophone parents need information about the Canadian education system and about FSL programs in particular:

80% of Allophone parents received no information about French immersion options from the school system.

30% of the Allophone parents received no information at all about the Canadian educational system from the school system itself prior to registering their children.

Allophone parents and students are sometimes discouraged from choosing FSL education:

Although schools as well as provincial and federal governments want success for their students, they do not act in a consistent manner to provide FSL learning opportunities to immigrant youth.

33% of Allophone students report that their school discouraged their enrolment.

42% reported that their school had disallowed their enrolment.

Allophone parents and students were satisfied with their FSL learning, despite discouragement and the challenges of learning a third or subsequent language:

Allophone FSL enrolment and retention rates are surprising since the Allophone students receive little encouragement to choose FSL studies.

95% of Allophone parents who had enrolled their children in French immersion expressed satisfaction.

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87% of Allophone students expressed satisfaction with their French learning in elementary and secondary school and felt that their French was good enough to continue FSL at a higher level.

50% of Allophone student respondents remained in French beyond the compulsory period and completed the core French curriculum—an impressive rate compared with provincial completion rates ranging from 6% to 15%.

88% of students expressed satisfaction with their post-secondary French learning.

Educators can support and encourage Allophone parents and students to pursue FSL studies:

- Provide information about all FSL programs to all parents, including immigrant parents.
- Work with cultural and immigrant-serving organizations to

ensure that information about the school system in Canada and FSL education is available to immigrant parents upon arrival.

- Maintain a broad range of FSL program options and entry points so that Allophone children who miss the early immersion program can access other immersion or extended French options.
- Make teachers and administrators aware of the confidence and language-learning advantages of Allophone students who have already learned a second language.
- Make school personnel aware of the career and citizenship benefits of official-language bilingualism for Allophone students.
- Implement Ministry of Education policies explicitly ensuring access to FSL programs for Allophone students.



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REVIEW OF MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION: POLICIES AFFECTING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO FRENCH-SECOND-LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

THE BENEFITS OF FORMAL MINISTRY POLICIES

In Canada, the regulation and supervision of education reside with the provinces and territories¹ who are proud of their educational systems² and carefully guard their constitutional jurisdiction over education³. However, the provinces and territories have not used their authority to create many formal policies that would ensure access to French-second-language (FSL)* education. This absence of direction could lead to inconsistent and inequitable access to FSL education⁴ whereas a formal policy process may be the most effective starting point for achieving more equitable access⁵.

Currently in Canadian schools, policies for access to FSL programs range on a continuum from informal to formal. Some Ministries of Education have developed informal policies that Delaney (2002) described as de facto policies or practices that have become legitimized over time: “These policies develop where no official or stated policy is written down and might be referred to as an ‘unofficial policy.’”⁶ Unfortunately, the “spirit” of an informal policy may be interpreted differently from one school to the next, creating further inconsistencies⁷. At the other end of the continuum, Delaney (2002) found that some Ministries of Education have formal policies that were developed through a process that included stakeholder input.

The adoption of formal policies has advantages. The benefits include increasing public awareness and reducing ambiguity with regard to the goals of the school.

Formal policies also provide a framework for school planning, ensuring consistency in operational procedures within and between school communities. In addition, when formal policy-making is grounded in research, it is given greater credibility as it provides evidence to support the policy. When stakeholders believe that the policy responds to needs of the students, they are more likely to support its implementation. Cooper, Fusarelli and Randall (2004) support the notion that legitimizing the policy by expertise and stakeholder participation improves the process. In particular, Delaney (2002) points to the example of how formal policies provide newly appointed school administration with clear direction and stability, which promotes continuity of school programs. At the same time, policies may be perceived as a formalized act, with a pre-agreed objective, “approved or sanctioned by an institutional body or authority.” The weight of the government and support of the stakeholders give focus and reality to policies.

Mady (2007) found that the absence of such policies can lead school administrators to make decisions contrary to research and exclude students from FSL studies. Loreman (2007) noted that without supportive formal policy, administrators have difficulty promoting school reform.

Formally sanctioned provincial policies regarding access to FSL education could provide consistency of access between boards and among schools whereas lack of such policies can give rise to inequities in access. An illustration of current inequitable FSL practices occurs when school boards decide if French immersion parents are charged for bussing. It is therefore feasible for a student in one region to receive bussing free of charge while another student in a neighbouring district cannot access bussing as the family is unable to pay the fees levied by the school board. This varied access to FSL education can lead to inequitable opportunities for children in Canada.

... Absence of direction could lead to inconsistent and inequitable access to FSL education whereas a formal policy process may be the most effective starting point to achieving more equitable access.

¹ Marsh & Willis, 2003;

² Levin & Farthing, 2004; Levin, Glaze, & Fullan, 2008;

³ Levin, 2009;

⁴ Mady & Arnett, 2009; Mady & Turnbull, 2010;

⁵ Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004;

⁶ Delaney, 2002, p. 164.;

⁷ Loreman, 2007.

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EXISTING FORMAL POLICIES**

The purpose of this study was to examine formal, specific provincial/territorial policies as they pertain to Canadian Parents for French (CPF)'s indicators of equitable access to French-second-language (FSL) programs. More specifically, the study sought to answer the following research question: To what extent do the provinces/territories put formal, specific policies into place in order to provide for equitable access to FSL programs?

In order to answer the above question, a formal policy document review of the Ministries of Education's websites was conducted. The review was then shared with Ministry personnel, which provided an opportunity for them to offer further direction.

The following matrix shows the findings of the study according to CPF's indicators for equitable access to FSL programs compared with the corresponding existence of specific, formal policies.

DO THE PROVINCES/TERRITORIES HAVE POLICIES...	AB	BC	MB	NB	NL	NT	NS	NU	ON	PE	SK	YT
... to ensure that distance education is available to provide FSL learning opportunities to students in small, rural and remote districts?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
... to ensure that every parent is regularly informed about FSL options and entry points, as well as the French-language proficiency levels that can be expected from each option?	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
... to ensure that a wide range of FSL entry points is maintained at the elementary and secondary levels?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
... to ensure that Allophone students are encouraged and permitted to enrol in core French, alternate core French, and French immersion programs?	N	N	N	P	N	N	N	N	P	N	N	N
... to ensure the provision of specialist services for gifted students in core French, alternate core French, and French immersion programs?	N	N	P	N	N	N	P	N	N	N	N	N
... to ensure the provision of specialist services for academically challenged students in core French, alternate core French, and French immersion programs?	N	N	P	N	N	N	P	N	N	N	N	N
... to ensure the admission of academically challenged students to alternate core French and French immersion programs?	N	O	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
... to prevent differential program fees for alternate core French and French immersion programs?	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
... to prevent differential fees for transportation to alternate core French and French immersion programs?	N	O	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
... to prevent the establishment and use of admission criteria?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
... to prevent capping the numbers in alternate core French and French immersion programs?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

LEGEND

Y = yes

N = no

P = issue partially addressed

O = issue addressed but in opposing direction

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** Quebec has not been included in this research because immigrants to QC are required to study French as their first official language.

CONCLUSION

The significant finding from the study is the relative absence of specific, formal policies at the provincial/territorial level that would ensure equitable access to French-second-language (FSL) programming according to CPF's criteria. Although absence of formal policies pertaining to access to FSL education does not necessarily equate to absence of commitment or equitable practices, it does provide more opportunities for potential inconsistencies. Conversely, an increase in formal policies that specifically address the above influential factors of equitable access to FSL programming could provide a foundation grounded in research, where applicable, on which administrators could base their decisions.

You will find the full report at www.cpf.ca.

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