
And After High School?

A Pan-Canadian Study of Grade 12 Students in French-Language Schools in Minority Settings: Educational Aspirations and Plans to Pursue a Career in Their Home Region

Executive Summary

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The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation
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Introduction

A number of students are faced with different barriers as they make their way towards the post-secondary level, ranging from family issues and motivation for pursuing their studies to academic results. Depending on the importance of these barriers, some students will strive to overcome them and enrol in a post-secondary institution, while others will follow a different path. Young Francophones in a minority context sometimes face an additional barrier: access to French-language post-secondary education in their local community is seldom an option. As such, Francophone youth who decide to pursue their studies are often faced with the choice of doing so in English close to home, or moving away in order to continue their education in French.

Beyond the challenges that this represents at the individual level, access to college or university education in French and graduation from a post-secondary program in French are key factors in enabling Francophone communities in a minority setting to maintain their linguistic vitality. Indeed, education in the minority language aims to ensure that not only language but also culture is passed down from generation to generation. Thus, through a French-language education, there is a greater probability that the younger generation identifies with, and actively participates in, the Francophone community.

While Francophone minorities have, in recent decades, made significant gains in terms of primary and secondary education in French, the issue of post-secondary studies is often left out of the picture. In 2005, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages recommended that the Government of Canada establish a “pan-Canadian system of post-secondary education in the French language” (Corbin and Buchanan, 2005, p. 57). In doing so, the Committee recognized that access to post-secondary education in French is crucial in allowing Francophone communities to develop their own institutional leaders and key players in the fields of politics, culture, and business. These committed, dynamic young leaders represent the future of their communities and are essential to their continued vitality.

To date, few studies conducted on the intentions of youth in terms of post-secondary education have focused specifically on students in Canadian Francophone and Acadian communities (Allard, 2005). The main goal of the present study is to analyze the educational aspirations of Grade 12 students enrolled in French-language schools in a minority setting, and factors which may be linked to their intentions to pursue post-secondary studies. The survey’s other goals are to analyze factors which may be linked to these students’ intentions to pursue their studies in French and to subsequently pursue their careers in their home regions.

1. Conceptual Framework

Results of past studies on Francophone communities in the minority setting (e.g. Landry and Allard, 1990, 1996) have shown that language behaviour is influenced not only by macro- and micro-social factors, but by psychological factors as well. As such, it can be hypothesized that the decision to pursue post-secondary studies may well be linked to such factors.

In keeping with the main goal of the survey, a model of educational aspirations was developed. It includes four large groups of variables which are analyzed in relation to educational aspirations: 1) characteristics of the students and their families; 2) characteristics of family experiences; 3) characteristics of school experiences; 4) psychological characteristics of the students. The model provides a framework for analyzing the results of the study.

A reduced model was developed to analyze intentions to pursue post-secondary studies in French, the second goal of the survey. In this model, motivations to undertake studies in French, perceptions of barriers to post-secondary studies in French, and the likelihood of pursuing studies in French are analyzed.

Finally, a simplified model was developed in order to analyze the students' intentions to pursue a career in their home region, a third goal of the survey. In this model, the region's economic context is linked to the students' level of confidence in finding employment. Furthermore, it proposes that another factor, students' perceptions of the quality of services in their community, plays a role in their intentions to pursue a career locally.

2. Methodology

In 2006 and 2007, nearly 5,000 Grade 12 students attending French-language schools in a minority setting in nine provinces and two territories took part in the study. Of the 30 existing French school boards in a minority context that had Grade 12 students, 29 took part in the study.¹

The survey consists of a series of questionnaires which produce a relatively detailed picture of the characteristics of the students, as well as the context in which they develop (school and family

experiences). Aside from these characteristics, the survey measures, among other things, their attitudes regarding post-secondary education, their knowledge of financial aid sources to finance their studies, their perceptions of barriers to pursuing their studies and, finally, how far they plan to go on in their studies (post-secondary aspirations), the likelihood they will pursue their studies in French and the likelihood they will pursue a career in their home region.

1. There are a total of 31 French school boards in linguistic minority contexts. The Nunavut school board did not have Grade 12 students at the time of the survey.

3. Results²

3.1 Sample Characteristics

Table 3.1 shows the main characteristics of the sample, distributed among the four regions studied: New-Brunswick, the other Atlantic Provinces

(Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia), Ontario, and the West/North region (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon and the North West Territories).

Table 3.1: Main Sample Characteristics

	NB	Atlantic	Ontario	West/North	Total
Number and percentage³					
Number of students	1,992	211	2,360	429	4,992
% of the sample	39.9	4.2	47.3	8.6	100.0
Age					
Age (average in years)	17.2	17.6	17.5	17.5	17.3
Sex					
Female (%)	53.4	55.0	54.8	50.1	53.8
Male (%)	46.6	45.0	45.2	49.9	46.2
Family Structure					
Father/Mother (%)	73.4	79.8	73.3	81.1	73.8
Parent with spouse (%)	13.0	9.3	13.0	9.0	12.8
Single parent (%)	9.8	8.7	9.7	4.3	9.5
Other (%)	3.8	2.2	4.0	5.6	3.9

Table 3.2: Parental Education

	NB	Atlantic	Ontario	West/North	Total
Mother's Level of Education					
Partial Secondary School or Less (%)	14.6	12.9	8.9	4.6	12.1
Completed Secondary School (%)	27.0	20.4	25.0	25.1	26.1
Completed College (%)	35.8	35.8	31.9	24.4	33.9
Bachelor's Degree (%)	18.0	24.1	24.3	30.5	20.9
Master's or Ph.D. (%)	4.6	6.8	9.9	15.4	7.0
Father's Level of Education					
Partial Secondary School or Less (%)	29.6	30.6	14.0	12.3	23.0
Completed Secondary School (%)	22.0	17.5	22.4	16.5	21.9
Completed College (%)	28.9	27.5	31.2	26.7	29.7
Bachelor's Degree (%)	12.5	11.3	18.5	24.8	15.2
Master's or Ph.D. (%)	7.0	13.1	13.9	19.7	10.2

2. The results section of the full report provides commentary on 61 different tables. The present summary retains only a limited selection

3. It should be noted that results related to numbers and percentage are not weighted. Other results have been weighted in order to reflect appropriate representation of each school and region.

There are significant differences between the regions in terms of parental education (Table 3.2). There are also important differences between regions in family income as estimated by the students. Overall, the socio-economic status of families in New Brunswick and the Atlantic Provinces is lower than among families in Ontario and the West/North region.

3.2 Educational Aspirations and Intentions

Nearly 90% of students expressed a strong intention to pursue post-secondary studies (Table 3.3), echoing a trend noted in other recent pan-Canadian studies (e.g. see Looker and Thiessen, 2004; RCCFC, 2003, 2005).

The majority of students intend to pursue a university education (58%), while a significant proportion of them plan to pursue their education at the college level (37.4%) (particularly in New Brunswick and the Atlantic Provinces). Overall, intentions to pursue university studies are far higher among females (67.4%) than males (47%). The opposite is true relative to college studies: a greater percentage of males

(45.7%) aspire to this type of post-secondary education than females (30.5%)

Most of the students intend to begin their post-secondary education immediately after finishing high school (Table 3.4), though the proportion of students who intend to postpone their post-secondary studies by one year or more after high school is not negligible (between 9% and 18% according to regions).

3.2.1 Family Context

Overall, the students consider their family experiences to be quite positive in terms of communication. Their answers indicate that their parents' behaviour has resulted in their experiencing feelings of autonomy, competence and belonging. The majority of students indicate that their mother and father have spoken with them about their school life, have encouraged them in their schoolwork, and have expressed expectations regarding their academic success.

Furthermore, parents seem to raise the issue of their academic expectations (at the secondary level) regularly, with more than 50% of parents expressing such expectations very often.

Table 3.3: Intentions to Pursue a Post-Secondary Education

	NB	Atlantic	Ontario	West/North	Total
Weak (%)	2.4	5.6	2.9	3.5	2.7
Moderate (%)	9.6	15.0	10.7	12.2	10.2
Strong (%)	87.9	79.4	86.4	84.3	87.1

Table 3.4: Short-Term Plans After High School

	NB	Atlantic	Ontario	West/North	Total
Work, start a business, family business (%)	3.3	9.1	5.0	4.7	4.1
Start a family (%)	.5	2.3	1.6	1.6	1.0
Neither work nor study (ex: travel) (%)	2.3	.0	2.2	3.3	2.3
Internship or training program (%)	2.3	2.3	3.3	2.3	2.7
Studies, one year or more following graduation (%)	16.7	9.2	12.2	18.0	14.9
College studies (%)	28.8	27.0	29.5	25.6	28.9
University studies (%)	46.3	50.0	46.2	44.4	46.2

According to the students, their parents' expectations regarding post-secondary education are quite high. Nearly 60% of parents expect their child to pursue university studies, and 30% expect their child to pursue college studies. Certain significant variations appear according to region: 75% of students in the West/North region indicate that their parents expect them to pursue university studies, while 55% give the same answer in New Brunswick. On the other hand, parental expectations regarding college studies are highest in New Brunswick, at 35%. Ultimately, and despite these expectations expressed by the parents, only half of the students consider that their parents had a significant influence on their decision regarding post-secondary studies, and one in five students claims parental expectations had very little influence on her or his decision.

3.2.2 School Context

According to the students, their educators' behaviour at the primary and secondary levels contributed to their experiencing feelings of autonomy, competence and affiliation. Indeed, 62% of students consider that their educators and counsellors expect them to pursue university studies, and 25%, college studies.

The study's data show that few students are very satisfied with their own academic performance. Notably, performance in French class garnered the lowest percentage of satisfaction: only 38% of students expressed strong satisfaction with their results in French class. Interestingly, the ethnolinguistic vitality of New Brunswick's Francophone community is strongest among the regions covered in this study, but students in this region are the least satisfied with their performances in French.

3.2.3 Students' Motivations Regarding Post-Secondary Education

Of the six types of motivation analyzed, two are strongly characteristic of the students' motivations regarding post-secondary education. Namely, *identified regulation* (the reasons and motives associated with achieving personal goals), and *external regulation* (the instrumental reasons associated with, for example, career and economic status). Intrinsic motivation for post-secondary studies (reasons related to stimulation and accomplishment) is, however, moderately strong, while amotivation (reasons reflecting the absence of feelings of satisfaction or accomplishment) is very weak.

Overall, a strong majority of students (78.3%) claim to be very confident in their ability to complete their post-secondary studies, which does not however mean they are unaware of the barriers they may face. About 45% of the students responded that indecision due to a lack of awareness about potential careers represents a moderate or serious barrier, while 20% of the students answered that lack of family support represents a moderate or serious barrier. Moderate to strong worries about money and debt also figure as barriers.

3.2.4 Financing of Post-Secondary Studies

Nearly one-third (31.6%) of the students consider they have a weak knowledge of the sources of financing for post-secondary education, and only one student in 10 claims to have a good understanding of the subject. Nearly two-thirds of the students (67.7%) are very or moderately concerned about debt and the financing of their post-secondary studies. For the majority of students, loans and bursaries are regarded as a complementary source of financing, as a significant proportion of them are counting on their parents' support and their own savings to pay for their post-secondary education.

3.3 Likelihood of Pursuing Post-Secondary Studies in French and Preferred Language for Post-Secondary Studies

Slightly less than two-thirds of the students (64.1%) of French-language schools in a minority setting indicated a strong likelihood of pursuing their post-secondary education in French, though the differences between regions are significant (Table 3.5). The percentage of students in New Brunswick who indicated a strong likelihood of pursuing French-language post-secondary studies is notably twice that of students in the other Atlantic Provinces (71.4% versus 35.6%). What is more, slightly less than six out of 10 (57.2%) students in Ontario, and slightly more than four out of 10 (42.7%) students in the West/North region express the same strong likelihood. It is telling that the percentages of students in the West/North region and in the Atlantic region who indicate a strong likelihood of pursuing post-secondary studies in French rise by nearly eight points in the West/North, and by nearly

six points in the Atlantic region, when distance and cost are not factored into their decision.

In terms of the linguistic make-up of post-secondary classes, the percentage of students who would prefer their post-secondary education to include two-thirds or more of classes in French (Table 3.6) is moderately high (55.7%). This indicates that more than four in 10 students would opt for programs where half or more of the classes are given in English.

The study revealed four types of barriers to pursuing a post-secondary education in French (Table 3.7). In order of significance they are:

- poor academic results in French class (nearly 20 percent of students consider this a major barrier);
- distance from a French-language post-secondary institution (approximately 10 percent of students consider this a major barrier);
- preference for studies in English (nearly 10 percent of students consider this a major barrier); and
- limited number and funding of bursaries available for post-secondary education in French (slightly more than five percent of students consider this a major barrier).

Table 3.5: Likelihood of Pursuing Post-Secondary Education in French

	NB	Atlantic	Ontario	West/North	Total
Weak: 0 – 35 % (%)	13.4	46.5	23.4	33.6	18.5
Moderate: 36 – 65 % (%)	15.3	18.1	19.4	23.8	17.2
Strong: 66 – 100 % (%)	71.4	35.6	57.2	42.7	64.1

Table 3.6: Desired Proportion, Given the Option, of Post-Secondary Studies in French

	NB	Atlantic	Ontario	West/North	Total
Two-thirds or more in English (%)	15.7	48.0	25.4	30.0	20.5
Half/Half (%)	22.3	23.0	25.3	29.2	23.8
Two-thirds or more in French (%)	62.1	28.6	49.3	40.8	55.7

Table 3.7 Barriers to Pursuing a Post-Secondary Education in French

	NB	Atlantic	Ontario	West/North	Total
Preference for English					
Minor Barrier (%)	60.6	40.9	51.1	41.7	55.9
Moderate Barrier (%)	31.2	44.2	37.7	47.0	34.6
Major Barrier (%)	8.1	14.9	11.2	11.3	9.5
Distance From Francophone Institution					
Minor Barrier (%)	64.7	47.5	53.0	42.2	59.0
Moderate Barrier (%)	27.4	35.4	35.1	39.9	31.0
Major Barrier (%)	7.9	17.1	11.9	17.9	10.0
Number and Funding of Bursaries					
Minor Barrier (%)	60.6	58.6	58.4	44.4	59.1
Moderate Barrier (%)	33.9	28.2	34.3	45.6	34.4
Major Barrier (%)	5.5	13.3	7.3	10.0	6.5
Poor Grades in French / Weak Interest					
Minor Barrier (%)	50.0	43.4	53.2	54.7	51.4
Moderate Barrier (%)	31.4	35.2	31.7	35.2	31.7
Major Barrier (%)	18.6	21.4	15.1	10.2	16.9

Significantly, the percentage of students who consider these barriers major varies by region. Students in the Atlantic region and in New Brunswick are particularly concerned with poor academic results in French, while distance from a French-language post-secondary institution, and the number and funding of bursaries for post-secondary education in French are of particular concern to students in the Atlantic and West/North regions.

3.4 Intentions to Pursue a Career Close to Home

Overall, a relatively small proportion of students (slightly more than one-third) are considering pursuing a career close to home (Table 3.8). In the Atlantic region in particular the proportion is only slightly more than one-quarter of all students.

Table 3.8: Strength of Intentions to Pursue a Career in Home Region

	NB	Atlantic	Ontario	West/North	Total
Weak (%)	28.0	34.4	20.6	18.1	24.8
Moderate (%)	38.4	38.9	42.5	48.6	40.4
Strong (%)	33.6	26.7	36.9	33.3	34.8

Only about 40% of students are very confident in their ability to find employment in their region (Table 3.9). The percentage of students in Ontario and the West/North region, where five to six students in 10 said they were very confident of finding work close to home, is significantly higher than in the Atlantic region and New Brunswick, where only three to four students in 10 gave the same response.

The results show a significant relation between the students' intentions to return to pursue a career

close to home and his or her perceived likelihood of finding work in the region. This reflects the particular importance of the regional economic context as a factor which might entice students to establish themselves in their home region to pursue their career after their post-secondary studies. Finally, the perception of the quality of services in the home region is also linked to the intention of pursuing a career in that same region. However, this factor is not as important as the confidence and likelihood of finding a job in the region.

Table 3.9: Confidence in Ability to Find Work in Home Region

	NB	Atlantic	Ontario	West/North	Total
Weak (%)	25.3	23.3	11.6	9.5	19.4
Moderate (%)	36.6	44.4	40.2	33.8	38.0
Strong (%)	38.1	32.2	48.2	56.7	42.6

Conclusion

The results of this study show that Francophone communities in minority contexts need not worry about their students' interest in post-secondary studies. Indeed, the educational aspirations of students in these communities are generally very high. Overall, more students aspire to a university education than to college studies. Moreover, a higher percentage of girls show an inclination toward university studies than boys. Conversely, more boys than girls show a favourable inclination toward a college education.

The study also indicates that for a majority of students, loans and bursaries must be considered as complementary to the financial resources put forward by their families and themselves. This reflects the fact that a significant proportion of students are mainly counting on their parents and on their own savings to fund their post-secondary education. Nearly one-third of students claim, however, to have limited knowledge about sources of financing, and only one student in 10 believes their knowledge of the subject to be very good.

For Francophone communities it is not enough that students pursue a post-secondary education. As stated by the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages (Corbin and Buchanan, 2005), Francophone communities in a minority context are striving to ensure, among other things, access to French-language post-secondary education for their youth. In this way, they hope to nurture a new generation of leaders and key players and, in doing so, guarantee their revitalization and future development. Regarding the likelihood of pursuing a post-secondary education in French, Francophone communities are concerned that their students often have little choice but to enrol in English-language institutions. Our study confirms that their worries are well founded. It shows that a significant percentage of Grade 12 students in French-language schools choose to pursue post-secondary studies in

Anglophone institutions or in programs offered mainly in English within bilingual institutions.

This phenomenon is more serious in the Atlantic and West/North regions, though we must note that it is not negligible in Ontario and New Brunswick. According to the Francophone communities, this situation is often attributable to the lack, in certain regions, of Francophone post-secondary institutions or of programs offered in French corresponding to students' desired fields of study. For a large percentage of students from Francophone communities in a minority setting, the considerable distances separating them from Francophone post-secondary institutions that offer the programs they wish to follow remains a serious problem. The situation is slightly less critical with regard to programs in the humanities and education – which are offered in all the regions we surveyed, though certainly not in all provinces and territories — but it is particularly dire in programs such as pure and applied sciences and health sciences, among others. Invariably, distance implies an extra financial burden, and our study clearly shows that a significant percentage of students already have financial concerns regarding their post-secondary education before they even begin to consider their preferred language of study. At the same time, poor grades in French are most often cited as the barrier preventing students from pursuing a post-secondary education in French, with one student in 10 citing poor grades as a major barrier.

Francophone communities have a vested interest in their students' pursuing their career in their home region upon completion of their post-secondary education. They have great hopes that these young graduates will serve as the leaders and key players of tomorrow, fostering the social, economic, political and cultural development of their communities. The results of this study show, however, that fewer than four students in 10 intend

to establish themselves in their home region to start a career after their post-secondary studies, and that only slightly more than one-third of them expressed a strong intention of doing so. Moreover, while we have noted variations between regions in some respects, it is clear that across the country only a minority of students express a strong intention of establishing themselves in their home region to pursue their career.

As such, many minority Francophone communities are faced with the significant challenge of attracting and keeping those graduates of their secondary schools who have left to pursue their post-secondary studies in other regions, provinces or countries. Rural communities in particular are feeling the impact of this exodus, largely because economic sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mining, to name only a few, are facing serious upheavals. Moreover, the rural exodus affects not only a great proportion of high school graduates, but also parents and entire families who find themselves, through lack of employment, forced to move to urban centres in their province or in other provinces.

French-language post-secondary institutions perform a considerably more complex role than simply providing programs in French: They are also engines of renewal, contributing to the cultural, economic and political vitality of the Francophone communities they serve. It is therefore critical that we not only bolster the resources of those

institutions already in place, but also that we create new institutions in the communities where a sufficient Francophone population base exists. What is most important in our opinion is that Francophone post-secondary institutions manage to provide the most complete college and university programs possible, and that they continue their outreach efforts to attract high school students. Given the small Francophone population in certain regions, however, many Francophone communities and their post-secondary institutions will have to find creative and innovative new ways to provide access to French-language programs of study, maintain the quality of the programs they have, and provide financial support, in order to meet the needs of those students who wish to pursue a French-language post-secondary education. Among other things, Francophone communities should strive to develop with the aim of integrating and retaining young post-secondary graduates who could pursue their careers there.

Furthermore, if they hope to meet the challenge of establishing a “pan-Canadian system of post-secondary education in the French language” (Corbin and Buchanan, 2005, p. 57), Francophone communities in a minority setting will need the assistance of a federal government that is not only aware of its obligations in terms of supporting official language minority communities, but also fully committed to initiatives designed to ensure their continued vitality.

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