



Provincial Employment Roundtable

Learning French as an Adult: A Review of Current Best Practices in Adult French-language Training in Québec

Acknowledgements

We are thankful to the many subject matter experts who participated in this study.

Special thanks to the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois(es) d'expression anglaise (SRQEA), whose financial support made this work possible.

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The views expressed herein are those of the Provincial Employment Roundtable.
They do not purport to reflect the views of the SRQEA.

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Publication date: June 2023

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Executive Summary

Learning French is a challenge for many linguistic minorities in Québec. Given the growing primacy of French in the province, learning French is increasingly a priority for individuals who face French-language barriers and seek to participate in broader Québec society and the labour market. Previous research by the Provincial Employment Roundtable has explored Québec's adult French-language training ecosystem in order to understand the availability and accessibility of programs in the province. This research demonstrated that Québec's adult French-language training framework is a patchwork of programs with varying availability and costs, as well as significant barriers to access for individuals depending on their regional location, immigration status, and employment status, among other eligibility criteria.¹

Additionally, although there are tangible benefits to language learning, research shows that adults can encounter more difficulty in learning a language compared to youth; adults require more time and investment to improve their language proficiency and are often managing various commitments, such as work and caregiving.² Given the particular characteristics of adult language learning, special attention must be paid to the development and implementation of adult language programs.

This study aims to contribute to the improvement of adult French-language training programs in Québec. It provides an overview of best practices for adult French-language training based on interviews with twenty-four (24) educators, administrators, and researchers working to improve adult French-language training, as well as secondary peer-reviewed research on language learning. Focus is placed on French-language training for English speakers, particularly those who face language-related barriers to employment.

The following best practices were identified by interviewees: plurilingualism, cultural exchange, confidence-building, lifelong learning, use of learning technology, flexible learning environments, work-integrated programs, supporting the education workforce, limited class sizes, and low user fees.

These best practices are examined in order to develop the following recommendations for the Québec government and stakeholders to improve adult French-language training for English speakers across the province:

1. Increased investments in work-integrated language training programs.

- Develop and fund programs for job-specific French-language training and French-language work placement programs.
- Incentivize employees and employers to enroll and participate in work-integrated French-language training programs.

2. Increased investments to support the education workforce.

- Invest in the recruitment, training and retention of French-language teachers and staff.
- Collaborate with the education sector to establish resource centres for French-language teachers to share pedagogy.
- Implement rapid-training programs to certify new teachers to deliver adult French-language training.
- Integrate French-language mentors and volunteers into the learning ecosystem.

3. Increased collaboration amongst program providers to develop and implement French-language training programs that include plurilingualism, cultural exchange, confidence-building and lifelong learning as main pedagogical approaches.

4. Develop and implement a strategy to better leverage technology to improve learner outcomes.

- Increase access to online French-language training content.
- Invest in learning technologies to facilitate autonomous learning.
- Improve digital literacy among all Quebecers.
- Expand high-speed internet infrastructure across Québec.

5. Expansion of the availability of affordable adult French-language training programs in order to lower barriers to accessing programs.

- Increase the number of free or low-cost programs in order to lower financial barriers to accessing French-language training.
- Set limits for class sizes.
- Ensure flexible learning environments by experimenting with in-person, hybrid and online learning options.

Implementation of these strategies holds the potential to improve Québec's French-language training ecosystem and support the French-language learning goals of English speakers across the province.

¹ This research outlined the availability, accessibility and findability of French-language training programs for individuals in the labour market. See Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022). "Inventory Report: French-language Training for the Workforce in Québec." Retrieved from: <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FSL-Inventory-Assessment-Report.pdf>

² Eguz, Ezra. (2019). "Learning a second language in late adulthood: benefits and challenges," *Educational Gerontology*, 45:12: 701-707, DOI: 10.1080/03601277.2019.1690273

Introduction

Learning French is a challenge for many linguistic minorities in Québec. Although there is no definitive data on the number of linguistic minorities who require French-language training, the limited data available suggests that there are an estimated 441,000 linguistic minorities in Québec with minimal French-language proficiency.³ Of these linguistic minorities, the majority identify as English speakers (83.6%). Previous research by PERT has focused on the relationship between employment and French-language skills among English speakers in Québec. A 2021 survey showed that a lack of French-language skills is the leading barrier to employment for some English speakers in the labour market.⁴

Labour market activities such as job searching, interviewing with employers, and integrating into a workplace often require a minimum level of French; English speakers without enough French-language skills can encounter barriers to entering and navigating the labour market.⁵ A separate study showed that English speakers tend to have higher unemployment rates and lower incomes than French speakers across most regions in Québec.⁶

More recently, updates to Québec’s Charter of the French Language have reinforced French’s primacy as the language of work in Québec, further entrenching the requirement for individuals in the labour market to have adequate French-language skills.⁷ Although there is a long history of French-language training within Québec’s standard education system, adult language training has historically been an area of secondary interest to Québec policymakers.

Prior research has outlined how Québec’s adult language training framework is a patchwork of programs with varying availability and costs, as well as significant barriers to access for individuals depending on their regional location, immigration status, and employment status, among other eligibility criteria.⁸ For those who can access a program, learning a language as an adult can be a challenging process. Research shows that adults learn via different cognitive processes than youth; they require more time and investment to improve their proficiency, and spoken production is more difficult.⁹ Adult learners also typically manage multiple commitments, such as work and caregiving.¹⁰ Given the particular characteristics of adult learners, special attention must be paid to the development and implementation of adult

language programs that support their success.

This study examines the perspectives of educators, administrators, and researchers working to improve adult French-language training in Québec. Focus is placed on French-language training for English speakers, particularly those facing language-related barriers to employment. Using qualitative interviews with subject matter experts and secondary peer-reviewed research on second-language acquisition, this study identifies some of the best practices being deployed by educators and program providers to improve adult language acquisition. It is our hope that by capturing the lessons and successes of adult French-language training in Québec, we can better inform future programs and training approaches in the province.

³ Adapted from Statistics Canada. (2017, November 29). “Statistics Canada 2016 Language References Guide.” Retrieved from: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/003/98-500-x2016003-eng.cfm>

⁴ Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022) “2021 Employment Survey of English-Speaking Quebecers & Organizations”; Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022). “English-language Vocational and Technical Training in Québec.” Retrieved from: <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/English-Language-Vocational-and-Technical-Training-in-Quebec.pdf>; Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022). “French-language support for Québec’s English-speaking Professionals.” Retrieved from: <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/French-language-training-for-the-workforce-in-Quebec.pdf>

⁵ Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022). “2021 Employment Survey of English-Speaking Quebecers & Organizations.” Retrieved from: https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PERT_MC_Design_SRQEA_CORE_EINR_D5R02_20220823_EN_Web.pdf

⁶ English speakers in Québec have a higher unemployment rate of 8.9% compared to the French speakers’ unemployment rate of 6.9%. French speakers have a higher median after-tax income than English speakers, with the income gap at \$2795. See Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022). “Employment Profile of English speakers in Québec.” Retrieved from: https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/PROVINCIAL_PROFILE_QUEBEC.pdf

⁷ The Charter of the French Language was updated through Bill 96. Bill 96 has wide-ranging effects on language in public communications, education, and healthcare. See Bill 96, An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec, 1st Sess, 42nd Leg, Québec, (2021).

⁸ This research outlined the availability, accessibility and findability of French-language training programs for individuals in the labour market. See Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022). “Inventory Report: French-language Training for the Workforce in Québec.” Retrieved from: <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FSL-Inventory-Assessment-Report.pdf>

⁹ Eguz, Ezra. (2019). “Learning a second language in late adulthood: benefits and challenges,” *Educational Gerontology*, 45:12: 701-707, DOI: [10.1080/03601277.2019.1690273](https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2019.1690273)

¹⁰ Eguz. (2019).

Methodology

This study compiles both primary source qualitative interviews with subject matter experts and secondary peer-reviewed research to present a comprehensive review of best practices in adult French-language teaching and learning in Québec.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators, administrators, and researchers across Québec. Recruitment for the subject matter experts was based on a purposive sampling strategy to include individuals with different roles in the French-language training ecosystem. Individuals working for organizations that provide French-language training were identified across Québec, as well as researchers on language acquisition and pedagogy. Potential participants were emailed. Additional subject matter experts were referred through conversations with the first round of contacts. A total of twenty-four (n=24) interviews were conducted:

- Nine (n=9) French-language program administrators, coordinators, and pedagogical consultants
- Nine (n=9) French-language teachers
- Six (n=6) academic experts who focus on language acquisition, linguistic minorities, and pedagogical approaches to language-learning

Interview participants were from organizations including post-secondary institutions, public adult education centres, and private language learning schools. All participants possess direct experience and knowledge of Québec's French-language training ecosystem.

Participants were surveyed through 1-1.5 hour digital interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. The participants were questioned on a handful of broad themes in addition to probes on their particular expertise. The primary areas of inquiry were as follows:

- Knowledge of Québec's French-language training ecosystem
- Challenges and opportunities for programs
- Identifying best practices in French-language teaching and learning

Responses were sorted thematically to identify common themes and best practices. All direct quotes are from transcripts of the recorded interviews. Some quotes have been lightly edited for clarity,¹¹ without changing the meaning or intent of the speaker.

This study does not rely on a specific definition of "best practices." Instead, the concept of best practices is predicated on a compilation of teacher training practices, administrative consults, methodological adaptations, trial and error, and comprehensive efforts to update and improve program delivery and access for linguistic minorities in Québec.

By employing a broad definition of best practices, this report centralizes the perspectives of teachers, volunteers, administrators, and coordinators, underlining their innovativeness and dedication toward the communities they serve.

¹¹ Examples are: removing repeated words; omitting filler words; and shortening long quotes with ellipses.

Adult French-language training in Québec

The Québec government funds a network of adult language training programs across Québec. Free language programs are primarily funded by three government departments: Services Québec; the Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration (MIFI); and the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS). Eligibility for government-funded French-language training differs based on individuals' employment status, immigration status, current French-language proficiency, and regional location.¹²

The majority of publicly-funded language program providers are educational institutions, namely universities, CEGEPs, colleges, and adult education centres. Community organizations, employers, and private language centres are also providers in some cases. Free language training programs are primarily targeted toward immigrants through Québec's Francisation program, though non-immigrants can also access free programs in some cases.¹³

Given the new legislative changes that aim to increase the use of French in Québec, the Québec government has committed to expanding and improving the provision of French-language training services to Quebecers who are unable to communicate in French.

¹² Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022). "Inventory Report: French-language Training for the Workforce in Québec."

¹³ Ibid.

Findings

The following findings summarize the shared responses from subject matter experts who were interviewed on best practices in adult French-language training. Responses are grouped according to these broad sections:

- pedagogical approaches
- program design
- program delivery

In each section, details on the best practices that participants describe as contributing to French-language learning and training success are included. Particular focus is placed on the best practices contributing to the learning success of English speakers in Québec and individuals facing barriers to employment. However, these responses also hold relevance for French-language training for various communities across Québec.

Pedagogical approaches

Interviewees were questioned on the best practices that positively impacted adult language learners' language acquisition. French-language teachers and researchers identified the following pedagogical approaches:

- plurilingualism
- cultural exchange
- confidence building
- lifelong learning

Plurilingualism

Participants indicated that a plurilingual approach is beneficial to successful language learning. The plurilingual approach aims to use the pre-existing language competencies and cultures of learners to advance additional language acquisition in the classroom.¹⁴

Plurilingualism is based on the concept that the linguistic diversity of student bodies in multicultural societies can be used as a tool for increased communication and intercultural education. The approach values even partial knowledge of other languages as “tools for facilitating communication.”¹⁵ Participants described how French-language teachers use English or another primary language to explain various concepts to students, including linguistic concepts, as well as sentence structure and complex cultural ideas. With this method, language learners learn in an educational environment where they feel their primary languages are included and valued. Although plurilingualism emerged as a commonly-used pedagogical approach among educators, few of the French-language teachers who described using this approach were familiar with the specific term. Rather, teachers described inadvertently using a plurilingual approach in response to the growing linguistic and cultural diversity within their classrooms.

¹⁴ Council of Europe. (2023). “Plurilingualism in the Classroom.” Retrieved from: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/plurilingualism-in-the-classroom>

¹⁵ Piccardo, Enrica. (2018). “Plurilingualism: Vision, Conceptualization, and Practices,” in Peter Pericles Trifonas and Themistoklis Aravossitas (Eds), Springer International Handbooks of Education, (New York, NY: Springer International Publishing): 207-226. 10.1007/978-3-319-44694-3_47.

There is increasing research that supports the plurilingual approach as a highly successful model, given how it is student-centred and accommodates a diverse range of learners. Our subject matter experts indicate that this practice is particularly helpful for adult language learners with a firm grasp of complex ideas in another language. This approach ensures that learners build upon pre-existing knowledge by associating new ideas with old ones. This accelerates the improvement of their French skills.

“[Plurilingualism] would mean embracing a view of languages as being tools for communication. That you don't necessarily need to speak every language as if you were a native speaker, that those are part of your tools for communication that you would rely on... There's a celebration of that ability... As a teacher...you would try to draw in your students' linguistic knowledge in the classroom, regardless of where that came from.”

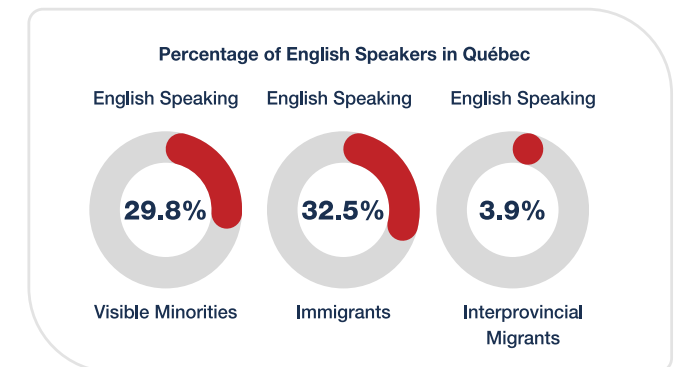
– Researcher

Cultural Exchange

Participants recounted that most individuals seeking French-language training are immigrants and English speakers who grew up in Québec or the rest of Canada. Teaching approaches that recognize the cultural diversity of participants while sharing key aspects of French Québécois culture are highlighted as successful models. This approach is based on the principle of cultural exchange, which involves the exchange of ideas, traditions, and knowledge between cultural groups.¹⁶

The English-speaking community is Québec's largest linguistic minority community, representing 14.9% of the province's population.¹⁷ It is also the most ethnoculturally diverse official language minority community in Canada. Roughly 29.8% of English speakers are visible minorities, 32.9% are immigrants, and 3.9% are interprovincial migrants.¹⁸

Cultural exchange takes many forms. In one example, a French-language teacher recalled how they assigned Franco-Québécois films, newspapers, television shows, and books in class in order to develop lessons surrounding pop culture narratives. These lessons were paired with open discussions that invited students to share aspects of their own cultural identity and experiences. In a second example, a teacher of immigrant learners described explicitly inquiring about the culture and life of their students in order to develop pedagogy focusing on relevant interests. Interviewees noted how these types of practices create bridges of cross-cultural empathy and enhance learning opportunities.



¹⁶ Schauer, Gila A. (2021). “Measuring intercultural competence,” in Paula Winke and Tineke Brunfaut (Eds), The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Language Testing. (Routledge).

¹⁷ PERT adaptation from Statistics Canada, custom tabulation, Census, 2016.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Case study - Intercultural Twinning

Intercultural Twinning is a program that started at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) in the early 2000s.¹⁹ It developed based on studies demonstrating that immigrants lack exposure to a host country's culture, which can impede integration.

The program has three primary principles: emphasizing the egalitarian status of all individual participants; ensuring collaborative learning activities; and providing institutional support.²⁰ Its objectives are to raise awareness of cultural diversity, encourage immigrants to practice French, and develop linguistic competencies related to newcomers' professional fields.²¹

The program encourages linguistic and cultural exchanges between immigrants and Québécois by pairing the French-language learner with a volunteer francophone "mentor."²² The francophone mentor helps with homework, participates in program activities, and develops projects with the learner, all under teacher supervision. While supporting students in their coursework is one of the intended goals, another goal is practicing applied French-language abilities and performing cultural bridging exercises in a collaborative setting. Through this process, mentors are sensitized to the difficulty of learning a new language, and learners gain insight into Franco-Québécois culture, concepts, and ideas. The program helps with the development of cross-cultural understanding between individuals and creates an empathy bridge that opens up society to the integration of new language speakers.²³

Twinning programs generally take place in adult education centres, colleges, CEGEPs, or universities. Each institutional program determines eligibility. The program is primarily targeted toward immigrants and newcomers to Québec, though it has been implemented with non-immigrant anglophone and allophone speakers. All language skills are targeted, including oral production and comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing skills, at various levels.

The program is wide-reaching across Québec and is responsible for nearly 15,000 pairings. It has expanded to a global reach and created partnerships with international institutions in Australia, France, Japan, Mexico, and the United States.²⁴ Qualitative studies report participants having a positive learning experience, willingness to continue with the program,²⁵ increased empathy, and improved writing and reading skills.²⁶

Informal versions of intercultural twinning programs exist across Québec targeted towards newcomers.²⁷ These programs are deployed in various casual formats, including conversational cafés²⁸ or social events such as cooking classes or young family programs.²⁹ These programs usually prioritize social acclimatization for new immigrants.

¹⁹ Intercultural Twinning. "Intercultural Twinning for students," (accessed 2023, March 8). UQAM.

Retrieved from: <https://jumelagesinterculturels.uqam.ca/en/>

²⁰ Deraïche, Myra. (2014). "Les jumelages interculturels. Portrait d'une pratique dans une classe de FLS pour immigrants," *Revue de l'Association québécoise des enseignants de français langue seconde*, 35(1): 93-107.

²¹ Intercultural Twinning. "Pedagogical Approach," (accessed 2023, March 8). UQAM.

Retrieved from: <https://jumelagesinterculturels.uqam.ca/en/pedagogical-approach/>

²² Deraïche, Myra. (2014); Zapata, María Elena et Nicole Carignan. (2012) "Les jumelages linguistiques : Une expérience d'interculturalité à Montréal, Multiculturalisme, interculturalisme et la compréhension interculturelle entre les communautés et les intervenants," *Canadian Diversity / Diversité canadienne*, 9(2): 52-56; Deraïche, Myra, et Marie-Cécile Guillot. (2015). "Jumelage interculturel et pédagogie universitaire," *Numéro thématique de la revue Alterstice*, 8: 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rdlc.375>

²³ Deraïche. (2014).

²⁴ García, Ofelia. (2022). "Foreword: Intercultural Twinning and Twinning," in Nicole Carigan, Suzanne Springer, Myra Deraïche, and Marie-Cécile Guillot (Eds.), *Intercultural Twinning: A commitment for a pluralistic society*: xiii-xvii. <https://brill.com/display/title/63386?language=en>

²⁵ Deraïche. (2014).

²⁶ Maizonniaux, Christele, et Myra Deraïche. (2018). "Simplement partager, sans questions: Empathie et émotion dans un projet télécollaboratif centré sur l'autobiographie," *Le Langage et l'Homme*, 53(2): 85-101. <https://researchnow.flinders.edu.au/en/publications/simplement-partager-sans-questions-empathie-et-%C3%A9motion-dans-un-pr>

²⁷ As of the publication of this report, there are 104 programmes on the Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration's website.

Some of these programmes are inactive. <https://services.immigration-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/fr/services-offerts.php#criteres>

²⁸ Carrefour Jeunesse - Emploi Abitibi-Est. "Jumelage interculturel," (accessed 2023, April 20). Retrieved from: <https://www.carrefouremploiabitiere.com/l-inter-cafe>

²⁹ Carrefour emploi Lotbinière. "L'inter-Café," (accessed 2023, April 20). Retrieved from: <http://www.cjeae.qc.ca/decouvrir/jumelage-interculturel>

Lifelong Learning

The lifelong learning approach considers the language learning window as an individual's entire life.³⁰ This allows language learning to accompany individuals through all life stages, including childhood, work years, and old age. This approach creates opportunities for individuals to practice French in their respective communities and helps prevent the deterioration of French language abilities over time, as well as intergenerational loss of language competency. It is also helpful for French-language learners that have some knowledge of French but have not had the opportunity to practice their French in adulthood.

Research participants offered examples of lifelong learning-oriented programs such as French conversation courses, cultural events hosted in French for language learners, language buddy programs, book clubs, and workforce initiatives that emphasize advancing one's French communication skills. These diverse learning opportunities tend to be more accessible and flexible since they can be provided outside the classroom. They can also be delivered by various providers, including community learning centres, libraries, cultural associations and regional organizations.

"People will lose their skills, their written skills, and their reading skills and even their conversational skills...what they need is French-language courses that build on what they picked up in French immersion and what they picked up in the school system in French, but build it up through the lifespan. [And] with French-language courses that could be taught in the regions."

–Researcher

Confidence-building

Participants highlighted the importance of confidence-building as a central approach to teaching French. This approach emerges from the recognition by teachers that a lack of confidence can significantly prevent potential language learners from practicing and advancing their French-language competencies. Research demonstrates that confidence is an important aspect of language learning; it allows students to feel comfortable participating in class discussions, demonstrate interest in lessons, and decrease their anxiety with respect to language learning.³¹ Programs that place a strong emphasis on building confidence can improve learning outcomes by helping participants better utilize their existing French skills and be active participants in the learning process. Programs apply a variety of methods to encourage and support the confidence of participants, such as interactive learning activities and placing learners in scenarios where they must improvise in French. For example, language learners can build job-related confidence by practicing scenarios where they contact employers, interview for a job and engage in work meetings. Teachers insist that instilling confidence in language learners is foundational as it promotes the continued and ongoing development of French skills that can be applied in various contexts.

³⁰ Burns, Robert. (2002). *Adult Learner at Work: The challenges of lifelong education in the new millennium* (2nd ed.). (London: Routledge.)

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003134213>

³¹ Akbari, Omidullah and Javed Sahibzada. (2020). "Students' Self-Confidence and Its Impacts on Their Learning Process," *American International Journal of Social Science Research*, 5(1): 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.46281/aijssr.v5i1.462>

“We really try to...break the barrier, because often they’re just so shy and it shows...The more we put them in a situation where they can explore [speaking French], the better. I feel like the stress level goes down and then we can really see a real progression...They become more confident after that.”

–French-language teacher

Program Design

Language teachers and researchers detailed a range of teaching techniques and tools that could be integrated into the design of programs. These program design elements are noted as contributing to improved French language acquisition among adult learners. Interviewees identified these best practices as contributing to language learning success:

- flexible learning environments
- learning technology
- work-integrated programs

Flexible learning environments

Interviewees indicated the importance of flexible learning environments to accommodate various adult learners. While some language learners are able – and prefer – to attend in-person classes, the development of online and hybrid learning environments allows programs to accommodate more learners.

Online and hybrid learning

The Government of Québec funds full-time and part-time online courses, which are usually delivered through postsecondary educational institutions and adult education centres. These online courses typically require learners to have access to a stable internet connection and the necessary equipment to participate in classes. Hybrid courses allow educators to develop a tailored mix of in-person and online activities, which was highlighted as beneficial by some teachers.

Subject matter experts highlighted the successes of online and hybrid learning, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has accelerated the adoption of virtual learning. Some French-language courses that shifted to virtual learning during the pandemic have remained virtual despite the easing of public health restrictions. The benefits of online language learning include expanding access for those with mobility impairments, health limitations, busy work schedules, or other considerations. Additionally, online learning enables the participation of those living in rural or remote communities that are far from learning centres. Interviewees also described how online learning could offer meaningful socialization to adults who cannot attend in-person classes.

In-person learning

Subject matter experts indicated the importance of maintaining in-person language learning programs

despite the shifts toward online learning. In-person learning encourages active participation among learners, which teachers identified as an essential component for higher rates of language proficiency. Participants highlighted some of the pedagogical and social advantages of in-person learning: it facilitates teachers’ monitoring and tracking of student progress in real-time, allowing them to make curriculum modifications if needed; and it can foster confidence among students who are reluctant to interact online. In-person socialization can also reduce the sense of isolation among adult learners and increase motivation among educators who prefer to interact with students in a classroom environment.

Use of learning technology

Participants indicated that the use of learning technology has increasingly become an important part of French-language training programs. Teachers of adult language learners regularly integrate technology, such as online testing tools, into language learning. More recently, technological tools such as mobile apps, learning software and games have expanded the ability for educators to deliver and test teaching material. Software specifically designed for second language acquisition can be incorporated into the curriculum and encourages student engagement by offering a variety of learning methods. Kahoot, Babbel, and Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) software are examples of learning software teachers reported using to improve students’ language acquisition. Platforms and creativity software, such as Moodle and Canvas, are also used by educators to accommodate various learners.

Work-integrated programs

Interviewees indicated the importance of work-integrated programs for language learners who are facing employment barriers or seeking to improve their employability. Work-integrated programs have multiple intersecting objectives but typically aim to provide immersive language training while individuals gain work-related experience; this experience can be in the workplace, a work placement, an internship, mentorship or volunteering. Employers are important stakeholders in this framework. They play a significant role in implementing work-integrated language training programs within the workplace and supporting their employees in pursuing language training. Programs have multiple formats, including individuals learning French directly on the job, or taking courses during working hours at the permission of (and at times funded by) the employers. This makes work-integrated language learning an inclusive model that can accommodate students, workers, and job seekers who require workplace-specific vocabulary and language skills.

“Je les sortirais de l’école. Les élèves qui ont vraiment des grandes difficultés au niveau du français, ce n’est plus à l’école qui vont l’apprendre. Que ce soit parascolaire, que ce soit en situation l’emploi, je les sortirai de l’école avec un accompagnateur, avec quelqu’un qui pourrait faire un relais finalement au niveau de la communication. Pas un traducteur, mais juste quelqu’un qui va être capable d’aplanir un peu les obstacles pour faciliter l’acquisition du français... Je les mettrait en situation d’immersion contrôlée... Faudrait sortir de la boîte et penser à un programme qui serait complètement différent.”

–French-language teacher and administrator

“We try to offer one class outside of the computer. We are going to take a walk or go bowling or something like that with the people of the group. So in order to get to know each other. So it helps us to have a sense of belonging to the class.”

–French-language teacher

“If it weren’t for these innovative approaches, then schooling would have stalled, and students would have lost a full year rather than having that year limited by the impediments of a lot of these delivery models. Learning a second language could be done using technologically innovative techniques.”

–School administrator

Case Study - Francisation du Mont Sutton

Francisation du Mont Sutton was a 2016 French-language training program created to address a labour shortage at Mont Sutton, a high tourist area in Québec. The program was designed as a yearlong project: participants enrolled in 10 weeks of intensive French-language courses in the fall, followed by a job opportunity in the winter, 6 weeks of French courses in the spring, and a final job opportunity in the tourism sector during the summer.³² This initiative was jointly funded by the Ministère du Travail, de l’Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. The program was offered to workers with beginner and intermediate proficiencies in French.³³

The project is the result of a partnership between Mont Sutton, Services Québec, the Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC), the Brome-Missisquoi Local Employment Center, and the Eastern Townships School Board.

³² TVA Nouvelles. (2019, Décembre 28). “Apprendre le français tout en travaillant au Mont Sutton.” Retrieved from: <https://www.tvanouvelles.ca/2019/12/28/apprendre-le-francais-tout-en-travaillant-au-mont-sutton>; MONT Sutton. (2020, January 6). “Belle visibilité pour notre programme de francisation.” Retrieved from: <https://montsutton.com/belle-visibilite-pour-notre-programme-de-francisation-en-milieu-de-travail/>

³³ Cabinet du ministre de l’Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. (2019, Novembre 14). “Québec annonce une aide financière de près de 155 000 \$ à Mont SUTTON pour un projet de formation novateur en francisation.” CISION. Retrieved from: <https://www.newswire.ca/fr/news-releases/quebec-annonce-une-aide-financiere-de-pres-de-155-000-a-mont-sutton-pour-un-projet-de-formation-novateur-en-francisation-845539661.html>

Case Study - DIALOGUE FR

DIALOGUE ^{FR} is a free initiative developed by the Association des Sociétés de développement commercial de Montréal (ASDCM) in 2022 to encourage economic development in partnership with the Québec government, the Ville de Montréal, the Cégep du Vieux Montréal, and multiple business associations. It is a pilot project of the ASDCM that offers free French-language training and support to local hospitality businesses. The program was designed for English-speaking and allophone business owners and employees. Participation is voluntary for both employees and employers. Once a business is enrolled in the program, the employer can select times for French-language training courses to take place within the workplace. These courses allow participants to improve their oral comprehension skills and practice their French while they work. Courses range from 30 to 60 minutes, accommodating the business’ and employees’ working schedules and needs.

A mobile application (DIALOGUE ^{FR}) was developed by education experts for this program to help individuals learn Québec business French. The application contains up to 80 interactive modules along with 5 themes modelled after realistic situations in Québec businesses, such as reading menus and conversations between customers and employees. The application is free for all participants and is also available for free to the public.³⁴

Program delivery

Research participants identified three key areas to improve program delivery. Participants indicated that programs integrating these approaches lead to better learner outcomes and teacher satisfaction:

- supporting teaching personnel
- limiting class sizes
- low user costs

Supporting the education workforce

Interviewees indicated that strong investments in the education workforce help ensure an ongoing supply of qualified teachers to meet the increasing demands for French-language training in Québec. Participants highlighted that there is a lack of resources, as well as burnout and overwork among teachers and administrators alike, especially those working in the public sector. Education personnel with adequate support from their employers are better positioned to deliver quality language training programs.

Additionally, interviewees outlined the importance of providing specific training for French-language teachers of adults, given the unique learning needs of adult language learners.

³⁴ Commerces MTL. “DialogueFR” (2022). Retrieved from: <https://commercesmtl.com/en/services/dialogue-fr>

“The human resource piece is tricky because, at the moment, you do have a lot of requests for French classes, and we struggle to find the right teachers to do it.”

–French-language teacher

“You need the training for how to teach a language. It’s very difficult, especially for adults. And if you don’t have the training on how to do it, just knowing the language doesn’t automatically translate.”

–School administrator

Limited class sizes

For teachers, smaller class sizes allow for close monitoring of the progress and development of each learner. For learners, smaller class sizes can encourage increased participation in class activities. One interviewee emphasized that a one-hour class of 25 students is insufficient for meaningful participation, which is essential for language development. Some teachers noted that class sizes as small as 4-6 students were ideal. They also emphasized the importance of increasing funding for the training of more teachers, as well as program funding, in order for schools to be able to reduce class sizes.

“[It is] better in the small classes for the beginners. For the intermediate people, 20, or 14-15 people, that’s good because we can exchange a lot. The people are able to converse, to have a conversation, that’s a good number to have a rich conversation. But for beginners, of course, it will be easier to have the smaller groups, but it depends if they’re financed. We are stretched thin, and we need to pay our salary.”

–French-language teacher

“One issue is access, and the recommendations we make is to increase, improve access, of course, more resources, more funding so that smaller classes become possible, mostly in the regions where the population is also smaller. [We need] the kind of opportunities that urban areas benefit from, [they] should be available to the regions where these opportunities are a lot more scarce.”

–School administrator

Low user fees

The Québec government funds free French-language programs, however, participants explained how some language learners pay high fees to access more tailored programs that meet their needs such as programs providing job-specific French-language training. Job-specific French-language training programs can cost more due to the smaller class sizes and customized curriculums. These higher costs are a barrier for individuals who cannot afford them. Interviewees outlined the importance of expanding the affordability of specialized and targeted programs for adult learners, particularly programs that help individuals learn French to navigate the labour market.

While some participants advocated for the increased availability of free programs, others advocated for maintaining nominal program user fees. A modest membership cost in certain programs can help with student retention and the completion of programs. This is particularly helpful in promoting consistent attendance and incentivizing busy adult learners.

“[If I could] I would have made it available to them for free. Anything that breaks barriers is very, very important.”

–School administrator

“The cost isn’t so much to offset the actual costs of offering, but people are more likely to consistently come if they have to pay for it. And we see that within the free workshops or the free programs versus the programs that even cost a little bit.”

–School administrator

Discussion

This study explores the perspectives of subject matter experts on the best practices that they believe can improve the landscape of adult French-language training in Québec. The diversity of best practices in this report demonstrates the importance of deploying a multi-pronged approach to improving French-language training in the province. Researchers, teachers, and administrators of programs identified various best practices, with the following being the most common:

- Plurilingualism
- Cultural exchange
- Confidence-building
- Lifelong learning
- Use of learning technology
- Flexible learning environments
- Work-integrated programs
- Supporting the education workforce
- Limited class sizes
- Low user fees

These best practices are based on participants' direct experiences with delivering or researching adult language learning. They are discussed in this section within the context of Québec's current framework of French-language training.

Pedagogical approaches such as plurilingualism, intercultural exchange, and confidence-building help teachers move beyond the classroom and develop curriculums that are responsive to broader social, cultural, and economic conditions. French-language teachers emphasized that ideal learning environments are the result of training, planning, creativity, and adaptation, with a focus on the real-world application of the language.

Supporting the education workforce emerged as a common concern among educators. Québec's education system is currently facing shortages of French-language teachers. These shortages have various causes, including the challenge of training enough teachers to meet current demands. Typically, French-as-a-second language teacher certification requires an individual to have a four-year Bachelor's degree in Education.³⁵ The length of training can impede the ability to hire and integrate enough teachers to deliver new programs. One way to address the immediate shortages would be for policymakers to collaborate with educators and administrators to explore ways to shorten the

³⁵ The requirement applies to teaching for preschool, elementary school, secondary school, and vocational training. See Government of Québec. (2023). "Becoming a teacher." Retrieved from: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/employment/trades-occupations/exploring-trades-occupations/teaching-general-education-youth-sector-vocational-training-adult-education/becoming-teacher>

timeline for training French-language teachers. This includes implementing rapid-training programs to certify new teachers, particularly those who work with adult populations outside of school environments. Policymakers should also consider expanding the education workforce by integrating other learning support staff into the ecosystem, such as French-language mentors and volunteers who are willing to participate in community French-language training projects. Other initiatives to improve the quality of programs should be introduced, including initiatives that expand the capacity for teachers to exchange pedagogical resources. Currently, the Québec government shares pedagogical resources for teachers and self-learners through its *Références francisation* site³⁶. Such resources provide support and guidelines to French-language teachers, reducing the burden on teachers to develop pedagogical materials for their adult language learners. Interviewees emphasized the need for government funders to provide language schools with the flexibility to innovate in their program design and delivery, as well as support the training ecosystem by increasing salaries and incentives for entry into French-language teaching.

Investments in technologies that accelerate and increase the quality of learning should also be considered. Québec is in need of a technology strategy that can support province-wide French-language training for all residents. This strategy should be developed in collaboration with educators, administrators and communities to ensure that it benefits all stakeholders and provides equitable access to the benefits of technology. For example, teachers discussed the challenges faced by communities in rural and remote regions of Québec that have limited internet infrastructure, impacting their ability to participate in hybrid and online language training programs. A new technology strategy should include improving the access and affordability of high-speed internet, developing French-language training platforms and databases, and investing in digital literacy among Quebecers.

Work-integrated French-language training programs deserve special consideration. These programs offer the most benefits for adult language learners who are in the labour market, as well as youth who are preparing to enter the labour market. This type of work-integrated language training can be used to address existing labour shortages through language training programs for in-demand occupations such as nursing, construction, and services. Québec currently provides subsidies for businesses participating in training for their employees, including French-language training programs.³⁷ While some employers do provide work-integrated language training to their employees, more investments are needed in to the promotion of these programs to encourage more employers to enroll. Industry-specific French-language training programs, such as *DIALOGUE*^{FR}, can be used as models to be adapted to other industries.

Private language schools also have a role to play in the development of work-integrated language training. Private language school teachers described how they currently work with employers across industries to develop sector-specific and industry-specific French-language training curriculums, vocabulary banks, and translated technical manuals for their employees. Although the Québec government provides vocabulary banks and translated materials,³⁸ these resources can be expanded and improved by leveraging the pre-existing knowledge in the private sector.

In order to implement these strategies, cross-sector collaboration between government and the community sector is needed. The best practices described by participants, such as lifelong learning and smaller class sizes, will require the expansion of the availability and eligibility of programming across the province, as well

³⁶ Gouvernement du Québec. (2023). *Références francisation*, (accessed 2023, May 5). Retrieved from: https://referencessfrancisation.immigration-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/moodle_ref/

³⁷ Gouvernement du Québec. (2023). "Aide à la francisation en entreprise," (accessed 2023, May 11). Retrieved from: <https://www.quebec.ca/entreprises-et-travailleurs-autonomes/francisation-entreprise/aide-francisation-entreprise>

³⁸ Gouvernement du Québec. (2023). "Outils pour les personnes apprenantes," Office québécois de la langue française, (accessed 2023, May 11). Retrieved from: <https://vitrinelinguistique.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/ressources-linguistiques/outils-pour-les-personnes-apprenantes>

as the diversification of program types. Governments can leverage the existing networks of regional associations and community organizations that are already delivering various programs to their communities. These organizations can deliver local French-language programs that are informed by community needs. Community French-language training programs should include workforce-oriented language training for the local labour market context, digital literacy training, and the provision of wraparound supports such as childcare and employment services for individuals who face barriers to training and employment. This type of holistic program delivery model is particularly relevant for organizations that are already operating within marginalized communities and are best placed to identify local needs and solutions.

Limitations

This report aims to identify the current best practices in adult French-language training in Québec using qualitative interviews with teachers, administrators and researchers. While these subject matter experts were able to identify best practices based on their experiences and research, this study lacks the perspectives of French-language learners.

Prior research by PERT demonstrates that language learners not only face challenges learning French but also face barriers in finding, accessing, and completing French-language programs.³⁹ PERT's future research will examine the perspectives of language learners navigating Québec's French-language ecosystem.

Additionally, while the recruitment of participants for this study was far-reaching, there are subject matter experts who could not be reached for an interview. Since the interviews took place online, solely participants who could conduct a digital interview are included.

Conclusion

This study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the actions needed to improve the quality and effectiveness of adult French-language training programs in Québec. Through interviews with subject matter experts, ten (10) best practices emerged: plurilingualism, cultural exchange, confidence-building, lifelong learning, use of learning technology, flexible learning environments, work-integrated programs, supporting teaching personnel, limited class sizes, and low user fees.

With the Québec government committing to invest in Québec's adult French-language training ecosystem, there is an opportunity to re-examine the current practices in the design, funding, and implementation of French-language training in Québec. Best practices such as smaller class sizes, use of learning technology and confidence-building are likely unsurprising to teachers and other stakeholders in this ecosystem, but they do provide an indication to policymakers of the priorities of education stakeholders. These best practices also highlight the importance of cross-sector collaboration and the need for significant investments in the infrastructure and people who make adult French-language training possible. Widespread implementation of these strategies holds the potential to make Québec the best place to learn French.

³⁹ See Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022). "2021 Employment Survey of English-Speaking Quebecers & Organizations"; Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022). "Inventory Report: French-language Training for the Workforce in Québec."

Recommendations

Based on the best practices identified by participants, we make the following recommendations to policymakers, program providers, and educators:

1. Increased investments in work-integrated language training programs.

- a. Develop and fund programs for job-specific French-language training and French-language work placement programs.
- b. Incentivize employees and employers to enroll and participate in work-integrated French-language training programs.

2. Increased investments to support the education workforce.

- a. Invest in the recruitment, training and retention of French-language teachers and staff.
- b. Collaborate with the education sector to establish resource centres for French-language teachers to share pedagogy.
- c. Implement rapid-training programs to certify new teachers to deliver adult French-language training.
- d. Integrate French-language mentors and volunteers into the learning ecosystem.

3. Increased collaboration amongst program providers to develop and implement French-language training programs that include plurilingualism, cultural exchange, confidence-building and lifelong learning as main pedagogical approaches.

4. Develop and implement a strategy to better leverage technology to improve learner outcomes.

- a. Increase access to online French-language training content.
- b. Invest in learning technologies to facilitate autonomous learning.
- c. Improve digital literacy among all Quebecers.
- d. Expand high-speed internet infrastructure across Québec.

5. Expansion of the availability of affordable adult French-language training programs in order to lower barriers to accessing programs.

- a. Increase the number of free or low-cost programs in order to lower financial barriers to accessing French-language training.
- b. Set limits for class sizes.
- c. Ensure flexible learning environments by experimenting with in-person, hybrid and online learning options.

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