



Postsecondary Decision Making Among French- speaking Students in Ontario: Exploring Pathways to Bilingual and English-language Institutions

Rachel Courts, Laura Gallant and
Alexandra MacFarlane

Published by:

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
88 Queens Quay West, Suite 2500
Toronto, ON, M5J 0B8, Canada

Phone: (416) 212-3893 | Fax: (416) 212-3899

Web: www.heqco.ca | **E-mail:** info@heqco.ca

Cite this publication in the following format:

Courts, R., Gallant, L. & MacFarlane, A. (2025) *Postsecondary Decision Making Among French-speaking Students in Ontario: Exploring Pathways to Bilingual and English-language Institutions*. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Acknowledgements

HEQCO team members Alana Button and Bianca Modi contributed to the development of this report.

Higher Education
Quality Council
of Ontario



An agency of the Government of Ontario

The opinions expressed in this research document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or official policies of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario or other agencies or organizations that may have provided support, financial or otherwise, for this project. © King's Printer for Ontario, 2025.



Table of Contents

Background	7
Research Questions and Methodology	10
Findings and Discussion	11
Conclusion	16
References.....	18
Appendix A: College Applicant Survey and Postsecondary Enrolment Data Analysis Methods	25
College Applicant Survey Data	25
Postsecondary Enrolment Data	25
Appendix B: Sample Characteristics	27
Appendix C: Additional Tables and Figures	29



List of Tables

Table 1 <i>Enrolment of students with French or English and French Mother Tongue(s) by Institution Language</i>	26
Table 2 <i>Characteristics of Survey Sample</i>	27
Table 3 <i>Language(s) that Respondents Used Regularly at Home in Their Final Year of High School</i>	29
Table 4 <i>Types of French-language Education that Respondents Were Enrolled in During High School</i>	29

List of Figures

Figure 1 <i>Confidence to Pursue PSE in French-language High School Education</i>	12
Figure 2 <i>Preferred Language of Postsecondary Instruction by French-language High School Education</i>	13
Figure 3 <i>Factors that Influenced Respondents' Decision to Attend Bilingual and English Institutions</i>	15
Figure 4 <i>Language of Selected Postsecondary Program and Institution</i>	30
Figure 5 <i>Factors that Most Influenced Respondents' Decision to Attend Bilingual and English Institutions</i>	31



Ontario's postsecondary education (PSE) system includes French-language institutions and programs that serve the province's Francophone communities. Bilingual universities first emerged in the 1960s, followed by the creation of French-language colleges in the 1990s.¹ This set of options provided limited French-language programs, with very few at the graduate level, and few locations for Francophone students seeking French-language PSE (Arnold et al., 2013). These limitations sparked discussion about the expansion of French-language postsecondary offerings (Chouinard, 2021), particularly in the form of French-language universities in northern, central and southwestern Ontario (Campbell, 2024; R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017; Stranges, 2021).

Since 2021, French-language PSE offerings have shifted to include two French-language universities.² In addition to these options, students can pursue PSE in French at two French-language colleges³ and six bilingual universities or university campuses⁴ (Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security, 2023). This collection of institutions spans the province and delivers a wide range of credentials and programs that may be of interest to both Francophone⁵ and French-speaking⁶ populations, which comprise 5.6% and 11.1% of Ontarians respectively (Office of the

¹ Established in 1960, Laurentian University was the first public bilingual university in Ontario (Laurentian University, n.d.). Collège La Cité, which opened in 1990, was the first public French-language college in Ontario (Ontario Colleges, n.d.).

² Université de l'Ontario français opened in 2021, and Université de Hearst became a standalone university in 2022 (Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security, 2020; Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security, 2022). While there was also a reduction in French-language PSE programs during this period (CBC News, 2021), the Université de Sudbury, a French-language university formerly federated with Laurentian University, entered a partnership with the University of Ottawa in 2024 to deliver French-language programs in northern Ontario (Dufour, 2024).

³ These include Collège La Cité and Collège Boréal.

⁴ These include Laurentian University, University of Ottawa, Saint Paul University (affiliated with University of Ottawa), Glendon Campus at York University, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at University of Toronto and Royal Military College. Dominican University College (affiliated with Carleton University) closed in 2024, bringing the count of bilingual universities or university campuses from seven to six.

⁵ "Francophone" refers to "a person whose mother tongue is French or whose mother tongue is neither French, nor English, but who has a particular knowledge of French and uses French at home" (Ministry of Francophone Affairs, 2022, p. 7). The Government of Ontario adopted and has used this definition since 2009 (Ministry of Francophone Affairs, 2022).

⁶ "French-speaking" is broader than but inclusive of "Francophone" and refers to a person who can conduct a conversation in French only or in both English and French. This corresponds with Statistics Canada's definition for knowledge of official languages, which "refers to whether the person can conduct a conversation in English only, French only, in both or in neither language" (Statistics Canada, 2022).



Commissioner of Official Languages, 2024). Little information, however, is available to understand the type of PSE that French-speaking students in Ontario seek and pursue.

Previous research found students who attended French-language high schools as well as those who attended French immersion and extended French programs at English-language high schools tended to prefer bilingual institutions for their postsecondary studies (Allard et al., 2009; R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017), though English-language institutions were also a popular preference for many of these students (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017). Other research examining academic pathways showed pursuing French-language education (i.e., attending a French-language or bilingual school) from elementary to postsecondary was common among most (58%) postsecondary graduates who have French as a mother tongue in Ontario (Lemyre, 2025). Enrolment data offer further insight at the postsecondary level: from 2018-19 to 2022-23, about 52% of students with French or English and French as a mother tongue⁷ enrolled at bilingual institutions, followed by 28% at English-language institutions and 20% at French-language institutions.⁸ While there is some research that explores the influences that shape Ontario students' postsecondary preferences, limited data and up-to-date research are available to understand why French-speaking students may pursue bilingual and English-language postsecondary pathways.

To address this gap, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) surveyed French speakers who attended bilingual and English-language institutions in Ontario about their postsecondary decision making. This approach allowed us to hear directly from past or current students and learn about their experiences leading up to selecting these institutions. This report presents findings about respondents' French-language education pathways prior to PSE and the factors that shaped their decision to attend bilingual or English-language institutions.⁹ Many respondents described feeling confident to pursue PSE in French but ultimately decided to attend an English-language or bilingual institution because of the institution's program offerings. These findings offer insights that can assist postsecondary institutions and the Ontario government in

⁷ Mother tongue is defined as the "languages first spoken by the student and still understood" (Government of Ontario, 2024).

⁸ See Appendix A for a detailed methodology of postsecondary enrolment data analysis.

⁹ While this report focuses on French-speaking students who chose to attend bilingual and English-language institutions, the next phase of this research will explore the decisions of students who selected French-language institutions to provide a comprehensive understanding of student pathways.



making informed decisions that support the diverse education needs of French-speaking students.

Background

Both the Ontario and Canadian governments have demonstrated support for Francophone communities and French-language PSE. In 2024, the province announced funding for the Francophone Community Grants Program, which involves projects that support French-language services and Francophone entrepreneurs (Ministry of Francophone Affairs, 2024).¹⁰ At the federal level, the Government of Canada launched an action plan in 2023 to promote Canada's official languages. This plan includes a *Policy on Francophone Immigration*, which aims to support the immigration and settlement of French-speaking immigrants in Francophone minority communities, as well as funding for minority-language K–12 education, K–12 French second-language programs and minority-language postsecondary institutions (Canadian Heritage, 2023). In 2025, the Canadian government announced a \$1.4 billion investment in official languages education, of which over \$100 million will be allocated at the postsecondary level (Canadian Heritage, 2025). The provincial and federal government have also jointly supported French-language education through an agreement that provides funding for minority-language education and second official-language instruction (Ministry of Education, 2022a), some of which has assisted Collège Boréal in expanding its campus and program offerings in 2025 (Mazloun, 2025).

In Ontario, French-language education begins long before PSE but takes different forms based on whether students attend schools governed by French-language or English-language school boards.¹¹ At schools in French-language school boards,¹² French is

¹⁰ Some projects involve partnerships with French-language postsecondary institutions. For example, Sofifran, a community organization, will receive funding to deliver a three-day event that promotes Franco-Ontarian authors in collaboration with school boards, Brock University, Collège Boréal and other partners.

¹¹ Enrolment data for French-language school boards and French-as-a-second language (FSL) programs in English-language school boards were accessed using the Government of Ontario's Open Data Catalogue (ODC). The datasets include enrolment at elementary and secondary schools in public and Catholic school boards. Suppressed cells (i.e., those with less than 10 counts) were counted as 10 in our analyses. At the time of analysis, the ODC marked files from 2018-19 to 2021-22 as final and those from 2022-23 as preliminary.

¹² In Ontario, there are 12 French-language school boards as well as the Consortium Centre Jules-Léger,



the language of instruction for all subjects except those dedicated to learning other languages (Ministry of Education, 2022c). These schools serve students whose parents are French-language rights-holders as specified in section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Ministry of Education, 2022c). From 2018-19 to 2022-23, an average of 5.5% of K–12 students were enrolled at schools in French-language school boards, with little change over the five-year period (Government of Ontario, 2024b). From 2018-19 to 2020-21, enrolment rose from 111,035 to 113,095 students, representing an increase from 5.4% to 5.6% of total enrolment, and slightly declined to 111,995 students, or 5.5% of total enrolment, in 2022-23 (Government of Ontario, 2024b).

Students enrolled at schools in English-language school boards learn French through French as a second language (FSL) programs, which, depending on the school board, may include core French, extended French or French immersion. Students at these schools must study French from Grades 4 to 8 and earn a minimum of one FSL credit in high school (Ministry of Education, 2022b). From 2018-19 to 2022-23, an average of 72.7% of K–12 students in FSL programs were enrolled in core French, a program where students learn French as a subject for at least 600 hours by Grade 8 and earn one credit in high school (Ministry of Education, 2022b; Government of Ontario, 2024a). Enrolment in core French programs fluctuated over the five-year period but peaked at 72.9% of total FSL enrolment in 2021-22 and remained at this level in 2022-23, despite the real number of students declining from 750,945 to 741,425 over these years (Government of Ontario, 2024a). Students in extended French programs also learn French as a subject and take at least one additional subject that is taught in French (Ministry of Education, 2022b). During the same period, an average of 2.9% of K–12 students in FSL programs were enrolled in extended French, with enrolments declining from 33,110 to 25,775 students from 2018-19 to 2022-23, representing a decrease from 3.2% to 2.5% of total FSL enrolment (Government of Ontario, 2024a).

French immersion is a particularly sought-after program where students learn French as a subject and two or more other subjects through French-language instruction (Ministry of Education, 2022b). From 2018-19 to 2022-23, an average of 24.4% of K–12 students in FSL programs were enrolled in French immersion (Government of Ontario, 2024a).

the latter of which comprises “a provincial school, a demonstration school and consultation services” (Ministry of Education 2022c).



From 2018-19 to 2019-20, enrolment in French immersion rose from 246,165 to 252,700 students, representing an increase from 24.1% to 24.5% of total FSL enrolment, and mostly remained at this level until 2022-23, despite the real number of students falling to 249,180 (Government of Ontario, 2024a). Many parents or guardians favour this pathway for their children due to the perceived benefits associated with bilingualism, including improved employment prospects and earnings (Barrett DeWiele & Edgerton, 2021; Kornik, 2016; Sachdeva, 2022), strengthened critical and creative-thinking skills (Ministry of Education, 2022b) and appreciation of French culture (Ministry of Education, 2022b). Not all French immersion students may reap these benefits, though, as only slightly more than one-third continue in the program to Grade 12 (Canadian Parents for French Ontario, 2020). Among those that do continue, some still report not using French after graduation and a lack of confidence to speak French (Schafer, 2013; Vanderveen, 2015).

Students who participated in various forms of French-language education in high schools in English and French school boards report different preferences for and perceptions about their postsecondary studies. Previous research found students who attended high school in French school boards largely preferred bilingual institutions for PSE (Allard et al., 2009; R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017). This preference for bilingual institutions was also true for students who attended French immersion and extended French programs at high schools in English school boards (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017). Beyond this preference, findings related to the next preferred institution type vary. Allard et al. (2009) found a greater proportion of students attending French-language high schools in Ontario preferred French-language (20%) over English-language (9%) institutions, while R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2017) reported a greater preference for English-language (20%) over French-language (13%) institutions among students attending French-language high schools.¹³ The latter study also found a similar preference for English-language (27%) over French-language (1%) institutions among students who pursued French immersion and extended French programs at high schools in English-language school boards (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017).¹⁴ While there are no bilingual colleges in Ontario, college applicant survey data from 2024 highlight similar preferences: most applicants who

¹³ This study also reported 16% of respondents did not have a preference and 3% did not know (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017).

¹⁴ This study also reported 14% of respondents did not have a preference and 2% did not know (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017).



attended French-language high schools (54%), as well as French immersion (81%) and extended French (77%) programs at English-language high schools, preferred English-language over French-language colleges.¹⁵

Considerations related to program offerings and institution location play a key role in French-speaking students' decision to pursue PSE in French. Previous research found that a lack of courses available in French, costs associated with living near a French-language institution and distance to a French-language institution were factors that influenced the decisions of high school students who attended schools in French-language school boards as well as those in French immersion and extended French programs in English-language school boards (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017). Students who attended English-language high schools also reported concerns about their confidence to communicate in French, while those who attended French-language high schools cited a lack of program and institution reputation as factors they considered (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017). Beyond French-speaking students, program offerings also influence the postsecondary choices of students more broadly, as many students in Ontario apply and transfer to institutions based on the availability of specific programs (Lang, 2009; Pander-Scott, 2009). While previous research offers insight into the postsecondary preferences of French-speaking high school students, it remains unclear how these preferences correspond with students' actual postsecondary decisions and the factors that shape these choices.

Research Questions and Methodology

Our research was guided by the following questions:

- What factors shape the postsecondary pathways of French-speaking students who choose to attend English-language or bilingual postsecondary institutions?
- Which factors are most influential?

¹⁵ Among college applicant survey respondents, 21% of those who attended a French-language high school, 17% of those who attended a French immersion program and 13% of those who attended an extended French program indicated no preference. See Appendix A for detailed methodology of college applicant survey data analysis.



HEQCO developed a survey that Academica Group¹⁶ administered to Ontario French speakers in March 2024. The survey inquired about individuals' French-language experiences and high school education, postsecondary preferences and decisions, factors that influenced their postsecondary decision making and sociodemographic characteristics. Questions asked respondents to reflect on the time when they first considered their options for PSE (i.e., during or after their final year of high school) to understand students' initial postsecondary preferences and decisions. To ensure respondents could accurately recall this time, survey participation was limited to individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. Additional screening questions were also used to ensure participants could conduct a conversation in French in their final year of high school and first attended a public postsecondary institution in Ontario after high school. The survey was available in English and French and received 216 responses. Appendix B presents a breakdown of sample characteristics. The sample includes French speakers, of which 25% indicated French as a language they spoke regularly at home during their final year of high school and 17% indicated they attended a French-language high school.¹⁷ While the sample may include Francophones, the survey did not specifically inquire about this nor about respondents' mother tongue language(s), as the goal of the survey was to elicit responses from French speakers more broadly. Stata 18 was used to analyze and summarize the survey data and Excel to visualize findings. Since participation in the survey was voluntary and the sample was not representative, survey findings were not generalized beyond the sample.

Findings and Discussion

Respondents to our survey reported various levels of French-language exposure and use prior to PSE. In their final year of high school, 25% of respondents spoke French regularly at home, but nearly all (98%) participated in some form of French-language education during high school beyond what is mandatory.¹⁸ Many (39%) indicated they

¹⁶ Academica Group is a higher education research and consulting group in Canada (Academica Group, n.d.).

¹⁷ See Tables 2 and 3 in Appendix C for languages that respondents regularly used at home and their participation in French-language education in high school.

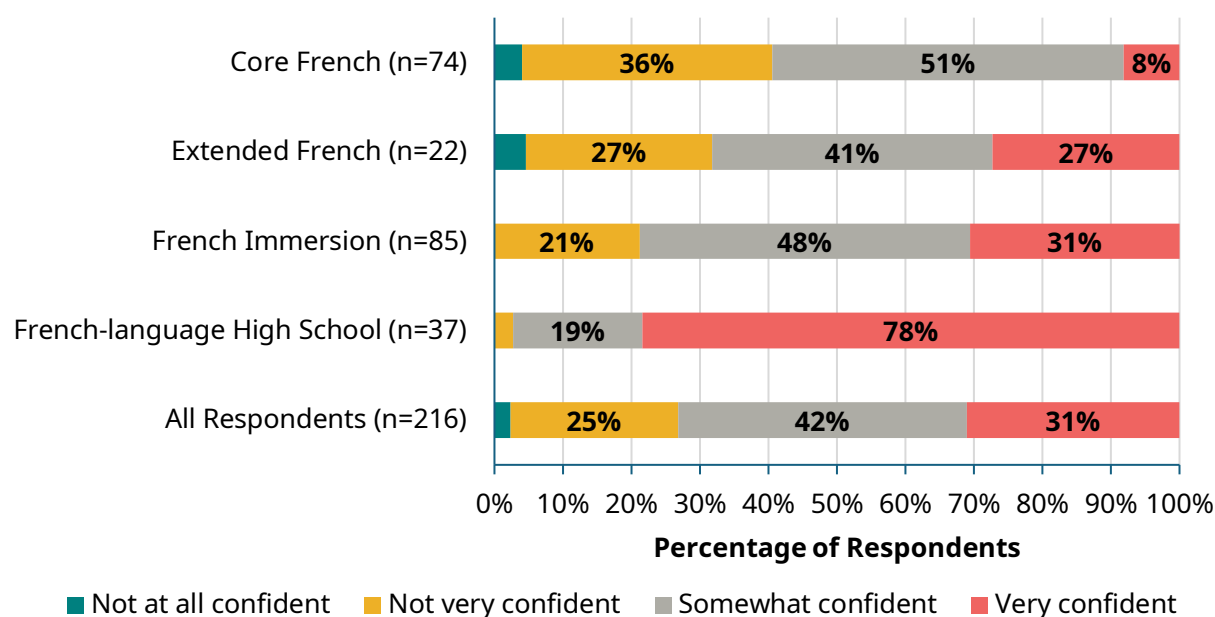
¹⁸ See Tables 2 and 3 in Appendix C. While all respondents could conduct a conversation in French during their final year of high school, it is possible they learned and used French in settings outside high school. This may explain why the percentage of respondents who participated in some form of French-language education in high school does not equal 100%. For example, respondents may have attended a



were enrolled in French immersion, and slightly fewer (34%) were enrolled in core French after Grade 9. We asked respondents about their confidence to pursue PSE in French to understand how they perceived their French-language capabilities. Thinking back to their final year of high school, most respondents (73%) reported they felt very or somewhat confident to pursue PSE in French in either a bilingual or entirely French program (Figure 1). This was true regardless of respondents' previous French-language education, though those with greater exposure to French in high school reported higher levels of confidence: 97% of those who attended French-language high schools reported feeling very or somewhat confident compared to 79% who participated in French immersion, 68% who participated in extended French and 59% who participated in core French programs.

Figure 1

Confidence to Pursue PSE in French-language High School Education



Note: This figure presents responses to the question, "In your final year of high school, how confident were you in your abilities to pursue postsecondary education in French (either in a bilingual or entirely French program)?" Responses are presented for the overall sample and by type of French-language high school education.

high school outside Ontario, where French was not a language of instruction, or attended an English-language high school in Ontario and only studied in the core French program in Grade 9.

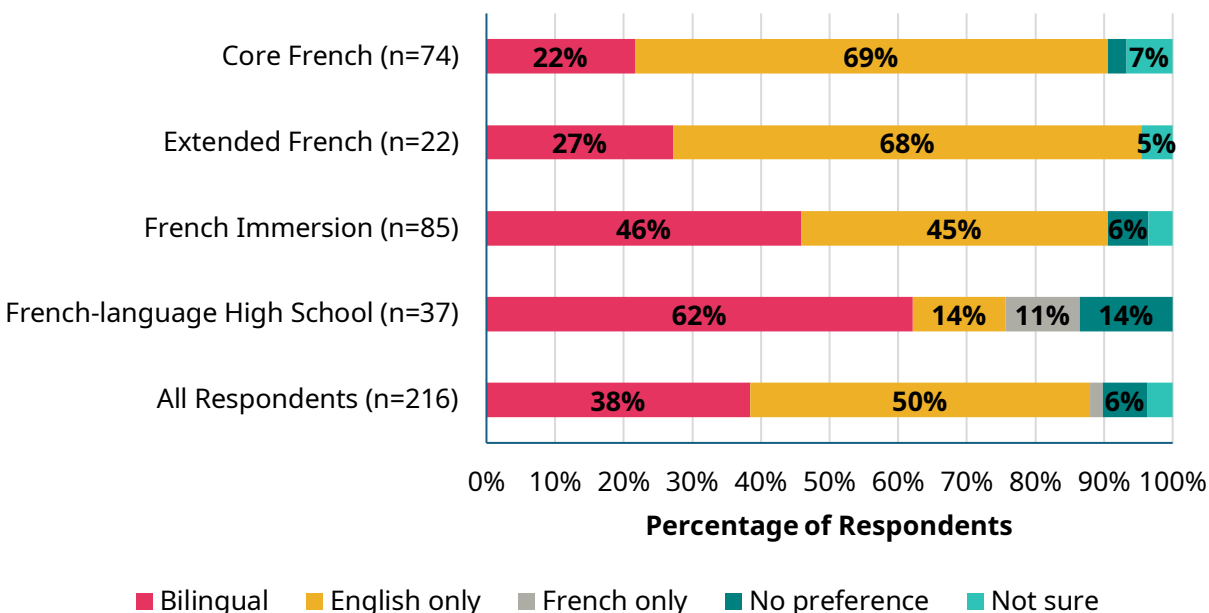


Respondents could indicate participation in multiple types of French-language high school education and may be represented across more than one category. Due to low response rates, this figure does not break out percentages for respondents who indicated they were enrolled in another or no French-language education program in high school, though these respondents are included in the “All Respondents” category.

When respondents first considered their options for PSE, many (38%) reported they preferred bilingual instruction for their studies (Figure 2). Respondents with greater exposure to French in high school were more likely to prefer bilingual instruction for PSE: 62% of those who were enrolled at a French-language high school and 46% of those who were enrolled in a French immersion program reported this preference, compared to only 27% and 22% of those who were enrolled in extended French and core French programs, respectively. While previous research found a larger proportion of high school students (i.e., those who attended schools in French-language school boards as well as those in French immersion and extended French programs at schools in English-language school boards) preferred bilingual compared to English-language institutions (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017), our findings, which also include students who participated in core French beyond Grade 9, illustrate the opposite: half of the respondents in our sample preferred English-language instruction for their postsecondary studies.

Figure 2

Preferred Language of Postsecondary Instruction by French-language High School Education



Note: This figure presents responses to the question, “Think back to when you were first considering your postsecondary education options. What language(s) of instruction did you prefer for your postsecondary studies?” Responses are presented for the overall sample and by type of French-language high school education. Respondents could indicate participation in multiple types of French-language high school education and may be represented across more than one category. Due to low response rates, this figure does not break out percentages for respondents who indicated they were enrolled in another or no French-language education program in high school, though these respondents are included in the “All Respondents” category.

Respondents’ initial preference for bilingual postsecondary instruction did not extend to their actual decisions: only 16% of respondents selected a bilingual program, and 18% selected a bilingual institution.¹⁹ Most respondents chose to pursue an English-language program (81%) and attend an English-language institution (82%).²⁰ This selection of English-language postsecondary pathways diverges from postsecondary enrolment trends, which showed most students with French or English and French as a mother tongue enrolled at bilingual institutions from 2018-19 to 2022-23 (Government of Ontario, 2024c).²¹ Our sample, however, encompasses a broader range of French-speaking students and illustrates variation within student pathways. This demonstrates that the definition used to describe the French-speaking student population (and how inclusive or exclusive this definition is) impacts the insights that can be garnered from available data.

To understand why respondents selected English-only and bilingual institutions, we asked about the factors that influenced their decision. For most respondents (76%) who attended English-only institutions, program offerings were an influential factor in their decision making (Figure 3), with 37% reporting it as the most influential factor.²² This was also true for those who decided to attend bilingual institutions (79%) and is the case for postsecondary students in general (Lang, 2009; Pander-Scott, 2009). Among respondents who attended bilingual institutions, a larger proportion (82%) indicated that having an opportunity to study in English and French was an important factor in their decision making, with 29% citing it as the most influential factor.²³ This opportunity for bilingual studies, however, may be a perception rather than reality: in a previous study,

¹⁹ See Figure 4 in Appendix C for the language of the program and institution type that respondents selected for their postsecondary studies.

²⁰ While institution type is based on the institution’s primary language, we acknowledge that some English-language institutions may offer programs in other languages, including French.

²¹ See Appendix A for a detailed methodology of enrolment data analysis.

²² See Figure 5 in Appendix C for the factors that respondents selected as most influential in their decision to attend an English-language institution.

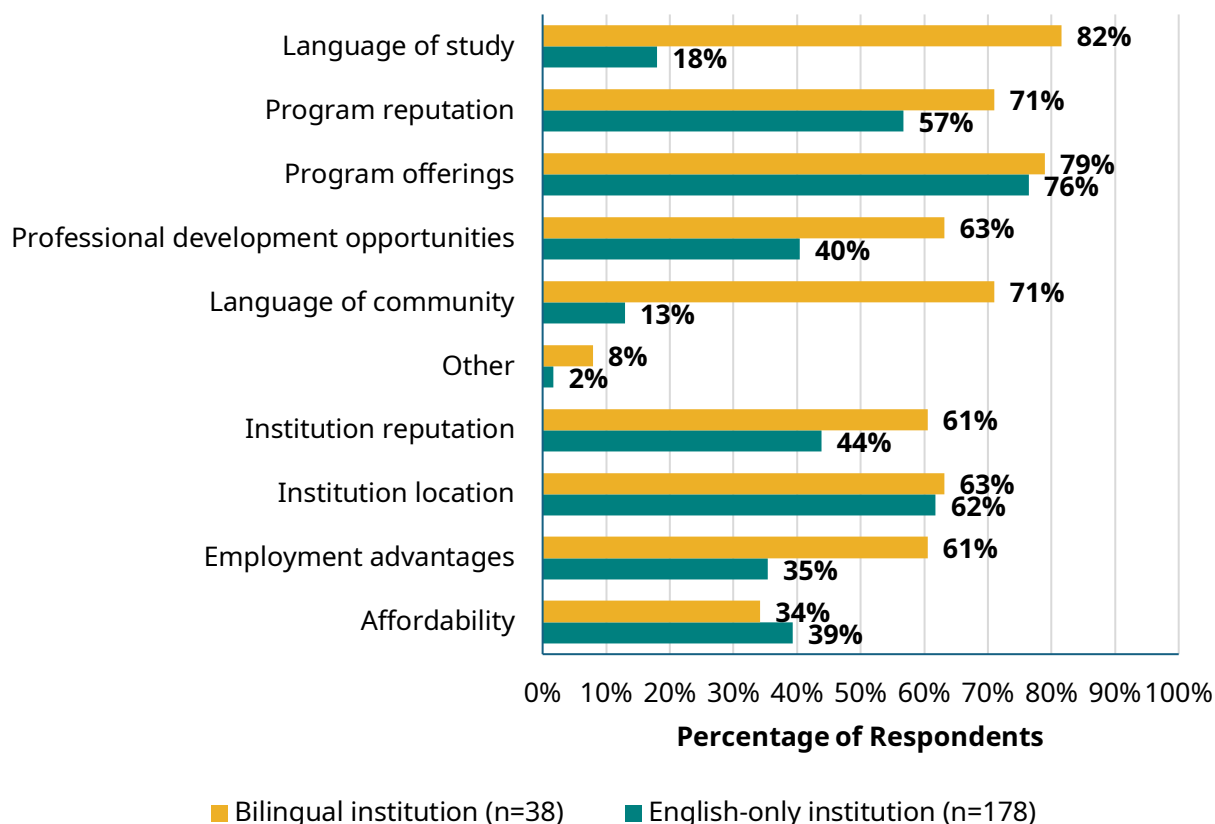
²³ See Figure 5 in Appendix C for the factors that respondents selected as most influential decision to attend a bilingual institution.



students attending bilingual institutions reported limited French-language courses and academic resources at these institutions (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017).

Figure 3

Factors that Influenced Respondents' Decision to Attend Bilingual and English Institutions



Note: This figure presents responses by institution language to the question, “Which of the following factors were influential in your decision to attend an English-only/bilingual institution? Select all that apply.” Responses are presented for the total number of respondents by the primary language(s) of the institution they attended.

In addition to program availability, program reputation was an influential factor for most respondents who attended English-only and bilingual institutions (57% and 71%). This connects to previous research that found students who attended French-language high schools as well as those in French immersion and extended French programs in English-language high schools reported a lack of desired courses in French negatively influenced their decision to pursue French-language PSE, with the former group also citing a program’s lack of reputation as a factor (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.,



2017). This consideration of program offerings and reputation underscores the importance of ensuring program names are easy for learners to recognize and understand as they weigh their institutional options (Lajoie, 2024).

Institution location played a role in most students' decision making as well, with 62% and 63% of those who attended English-only and bilingual institutions selecting this factor, respectively. This motivation mirrors findings from a previous study that reported the distance to a French-language institution, and the costs associated with relocating near one, negatively influenced high school students' decision to pursue French-language PSE (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017). Access to Francophone PSE is a well-known challenge, especially in regions such as southwestern Ontario where a lack of access to French-language higher education options limit and prevent students from studying in French (Office of the French Language Services Commissioner, 2012). With only a few French and bilingual institutions in Ontario and 63% of Ontario's French-language and bilingual learners at the University of Ottawa, many students travel a great distance, at a great expense, to access a Francophone PSE (Blue Ribbon Panel on Postsecondary Education Financial Sustainability, 2023). Both program- and location-related considerations are potentially key factors driving French-speaking students to consider English-language and bilingual pathways.

Conclusion

Governments at both the federal and provincial level have dedicated funding to supporting Francophone communities and French-language PSE in Ontario. Given these investments, it is important the Ontario government and postsecondary institutions understand the diversity within the French-speaking student population and the factors that motivate their decisions to pursue different postsecondary pathways. Findings from our research offer insight into the variation among French-speaking learners and their preferences for and pathways to PSE.

Although respondents to our survey chose to attend English-language and bilingual institutions, many reported feeling somewhat or very confident to pursue PSE in French. Program offerings were a key motivation behind respondents' decisions to attend bilingual and English-language institutions. In addition to program offerings, respondents selected English-only and bilingual institutions due to program reputation and institution location. Institutions and government should consider these factors when



engaging in long-term planning to ensure existing and future postsecondary offerings align with the diverse needs of the French-speaking student population. Supporting French-speaking students' postsecondary pathways is particularly important given the high demand for bilingual workers in Ontario's labour market (Conseil des ministres sur la francophonie Canadienne 2023, 2024; Henningsmoen & Rice, 2022), especially in central, southwestern and northern Ontario (R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2017; Southcott, 2019).

The findings of this research illustrate the importance of program offerings for French-speaking students who attended bilingual and English-language institutions but do not offer insight into the types of programs that attracted students to these institutions. Future research should inquire about students' program choices and explore whether students would have opted to attend a French-language institution if it offered their program of choice. Further research is also needed to understand postsecondary decision making among French-speaking students who attend French-language institutions. HEQCO is pursuing this next stage of research. Policy makers and postsecondary institutions would also benefit from a better understanding of which communities in Ontario are underserved and how far students are willing to travel to access bilingual and Francophone institutions, including whether and for what reasons they may pursue PSE options outside Ontario. Future data-collection efforts should encompass a larger number and wider range of French-speaking students (e.g., based on characteristics including mother tongue language, language(s) known, language(s) used at home or previous French-language education) to further explore how postsecondary preferences and decisions may vary within this group. With a more nuanced understanding of students' pathways, postsecondary institutions and government can be better positioned to engage in planning and decision making that supports French-speaking students in Ontario.



References

Academica Group. (n.d.). Meet Academica. <https://academica.ca/about-us/>

Allard, R., Landry, R., & Deveau, K. (2009). *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*. Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities. https://library.carleton.ca/sites/default/files/find/data/surveys/pdf_files/millennium_rs-43_fr_2009-04-29_en.pdf

Arnold, H., Motte, A., & DeClou, L. (2013). *An overview of Francophone postsecondary education participation in Ontario*. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FINAL-At-Issue-Francophone.pdf>

Barrett DeWiele, C. E., & Edgerton, J. D. (2021). Opportunity or inequality? The paradox of French immersion education in Canada. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 45(2), 114–128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1865988>

Blue Ribbon Panel on Postsecondary Education Financial Sustainability. (2023). *Ensuring financial sustainability for Ontario's postsecondary sector*. <https://files.ontario.ca/mcu-ensuring-financial-sustainability-for-ontarios-postsecondary-sector-en-2023-11-14.pdf>

Campbell, I. (2024, February 1). *NDP leader calls on province to fund French university in Sudbury*. CTV News. <https://northernontario.ctvnews.ca/ndp-leader-calls-on-province-to-fund-french-university-in-sudbury-1.6752344>

Canadian Heritage. (2023). *Action plan for official languages 2023-2028*. Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/services/official-languages-bilingualism/official-languages-action-plan/2023-28/OL2023_ActionPlan-eng.pdf

Canadian Heritage. (2025). *Government of Canada invests more than \$1.4 billion to strengthen official languages education across Canada*. Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2025/02/government-of->



[canada-invests-more-than-14-billion-to-strengthen-official-languages-education-across-canada.html](#)

Canadian Parents for French Ontario. (2020). *The state of French second language education in Ontario*. <https://on.cpf.ca/files/2021/02/State-of-FSL-Education-in-Ontario-November-2020.pdf>

CBC News. (2021, April 9). *Laurentian University cuts 100 professors, dozens of programs*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/laurentian-negotiations-insolvency-terminations-restructuring-1.5982114>

Chouinard, S. (2021). *French-language postsecondary education in Ontario: crisis or opportunity?* Northern Policy Institute. https://www.northernpolicy.ca/upload/documents/publications/briefing-notes/briefingnotes_lu_chouinard_en.03.31.2021.pdf

Conseil des ministres sur la francophonie canadienne. (2023). *Exploring Canada's unmet labour demand for bilingual workers in official language minority communities (OLMCs) outside of Quebec*. https://cmfc-mccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023_Exploring-Canadas-Unmet-Labour-Demand-Bilingual-Workers-OLMCs-2.pdf

Conseil des ministres sur la francophonie canadienne. (2024). *Exploring Canada's unmet labour demand for bilingual workers in official language minority communities (OLMCs) outside of Quebec: 2nd annual report*. https://cmfc-mccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/EN-OLMC_Report_2024_0801.pdf

Dufour, A. (2024, March 14). *University of Sudbury announces partnership with University of Ottawa*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/laurentian-insolvency-diplomas-programs-1.7144031>

Government of Ontario. (2024a). *French as a second language enrolment*. <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/french-as-a-second-language-enrolment>

Government of Ontario. (2024b). *Ontario public schools enrolment*. <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/ontario-public-schools-enrolment>



Government of Ontario. (2024c). *Open SIMS: Strategic information management system*. <https://www.opensims.tcu.gov.on.ca>

Henningsmoen, E., & Rice, F. (2022). *Mapping career pathways for Ontario's Francophone and bilingual workforce insights for post-secondaries, employers, and students*. Information and Communications Technology Council. <https://ictc-ctic.ca/media/649/download>

Kornik, S. (2016, March 24). *Why do parents and their children choose French immersion?* Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/2598088/why-do-parents-and-their-children-choose-french-immersion/>

Lajoie, E. (2024, April 4). « *Si j'avais été là, je n'aurais pas parti l'université avec ces quatre programmes.* » Radio-Canada. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/2062126/universite-ontario-francais-programmes>

Lang, D. W. (2009). Articulation, transfer, and student choice in a binary post-secondary system. *Higher Education*, 57(3), 355–371. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9151-3>

Laurentian University. (n.d.). *History of Laurentian University*. <https://laurentian.ca/our-history>

Lemyre, É. (2025). *Use of official languages at home: An analysis based on the academic path of graduates in Canada*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2025001/article/00005-eng.htm>

Mazloum, T. (2025, April 4). *Collège Boréal expanding campus in Ottawa, increasing access to programs in French*. CTV News. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/ottawa/article/college-boreal-expanding-campus-in-ottawa-increasing-access-to-programs-in-french/>

Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security. (2020, January 22). *Historic agreement for French-language in Ontario*. Ontario Newsroom. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/55432/historic-agreement-for-french-language-in-ontario>

Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security. (2022, March 4). *Ontario establishes new independent universities in Northern Ontario*. Ontario



Newsroom. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001703/ontario-establishes-new-independent-universities-in-northern-ontario>

Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security. (2023). *French-language colleges and universities*. Government of Ontario. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/french-language-colleges-and-universities>

Ministry of Education. (2022a). *French as a second language in Ontario schools*. Government of Ontario. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/french-second-language-ontario-schools>

Ministry of Education. (2022b). *French as a second language programs*. Government of Ontario <https://www.ontario.ca/page/french-second-language-programs>

Ministry of Education. (2022c). *French-language education*. Government of Ontario. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/french-language-education>

Ministry of Francophone Affairs. (2022). *Report on Francophone affairs*. Government of Ontario. <https://files.ontario.ca/mfa-report-on-francophone-affairs-en-2022-04-12.pdf>

Ministry of Francophone Affairs. (2024, July 23). *Francophone community grants program*. Ontario Newsroom. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1004853/francophone-community-grants-program>

OCAS. (n.d.). *About us*. <https://www.ocas.ca/who-we-are/about-us>

Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. (2024). *Snapshot of official languages in Canada*. <https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/tools-resources/snapshots-official-languages-canada#on>

Office of the French Language Services Commissioner. (2012). *The state of French-language postsecondary education in central-southwestern Ontario: No access, no future*. https://csfontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/FLSC_FrenchPostsecondaryEducation.pdf

Ontario Colleges. (n.d.). La Cité. <https://www.ontariocolleges.ca/en/colleges/la-cite?page=1>



- Pander-Scott, B. (2009). *Factors influencing the college choice behaviour of Ontario college applicants* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/305102331/fulltextPDF/E4549F634FC14C3DPQ/1?sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>
- R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2017). *Study for the needs and interests for a French language university in Central and Southwestern Ontario*.
https://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/publications/Malatest_Final_Report_MAESD_FLU_2017.pdf
- Sachdeva, R. (2022, August 23). *Canadians who speak both English and French have higher salaries: Census data*. CTV News.
<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/2022/8/22/canadians-who-speak-both-english-and-french-have-higher-salaries.html>
- Schafer, P. (2013). *Life after French immersion: Grade 12 students' perceptions of continuing to use French after graduation*. [Master's thesis, University of Calgary]. <https://prism.ucalgary.ca/items/d73fd4d8-f63f-4c79-a498-1e3ea8cd2c10>
- Southcott, C. (2019). *Bilingual employment gaps in northwestern Ontario: Quantitative and qualitative analysis*. North Superior Workforce Planning Board.
https://www.nswpb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2019.04.17_FINAL_Bilingual_Employment_Gaps_report-1.pdf
- Statistics Canada. (2022). *Dictionary, census population, 2021 – Knowledge of official languages*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/dict/az/definition-eng.cfm?ID=pop055>
- Stranges, C. (2021, March 16). *University of Sudbury pushes to become French only*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/indigenous-students-french-programs-1.5950805#:~:text=L%27Assembl%C3%A9e%20de%20la%20francophonie%20de%20l%27Ontario%20%28AFO%29%2C%20a>

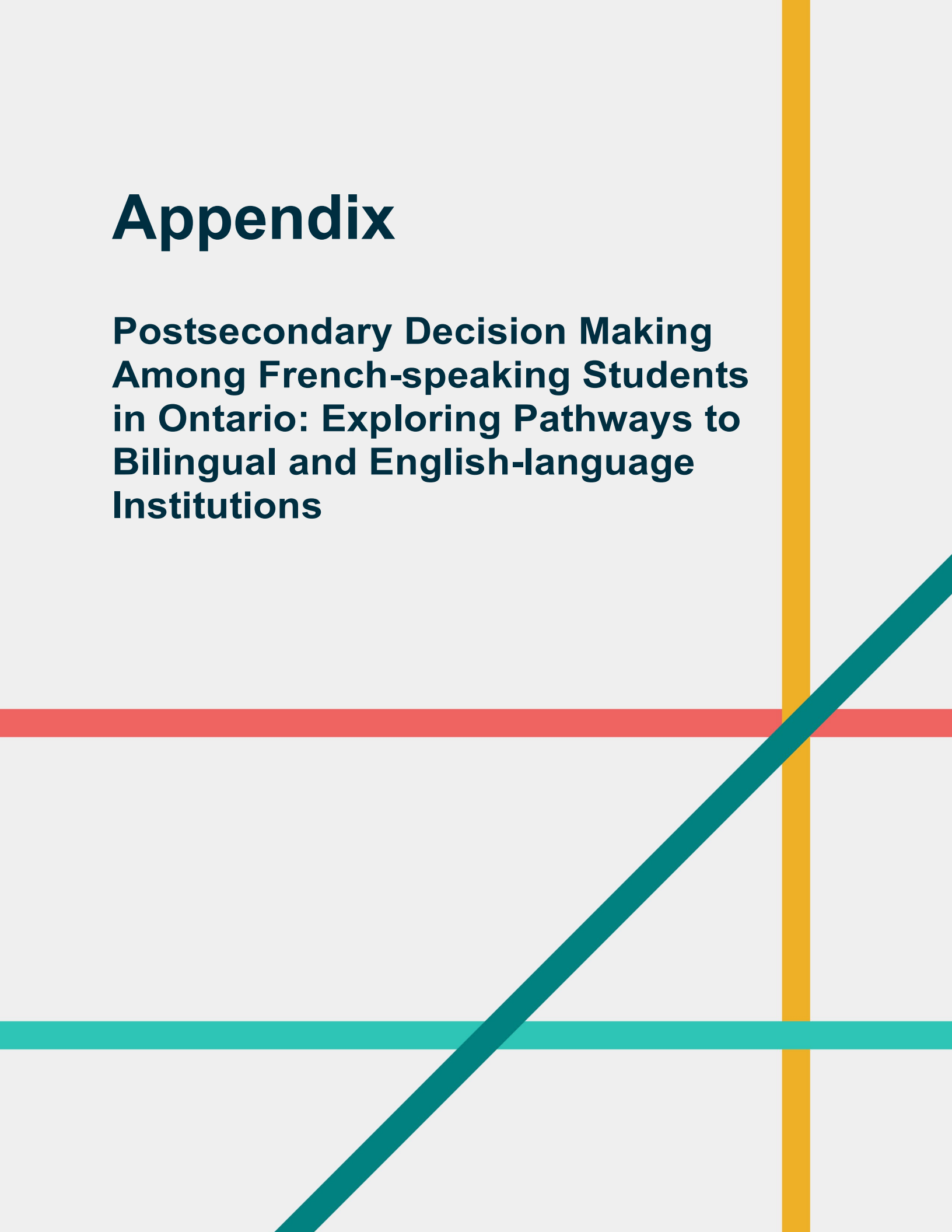


Vanderveen, T. N. (2015). *Life after French immersion: Expectations, motivations, and outcomes of secondary school French immersion programs in the Greater Toronto Area*. [Doctoral dissertation, York University].
<https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/items/fd4ba367-99c6-44af-be9a-50eb0fd735f6>



Appendix

Postsecondary Decision Making Among French-speaking Students in Ontario: Exploring Pathways to Bilingual and English-language Institutions



Appendix A: College Applicant Survey and Postsecondary Enrolment Data Analysis Methods

College applicant and postsecondary enrolment data were analyzed to gain insight into the institutions that French-speaking applicants and students in Ontario consider and select in their decision making.

College Applicant Survey Data

HEQCO partnered with OCAS to receive survey data from the 2024 OCAS Applicant Experience Survey.²⁴ This is a voluntary survey that OCAS conducts annually to gather information about the motivations and experiences of college applicants. The 2024 survey included new questions that were developed in partnership with HEQCO and asked about applicants' participation in French-language education in high school and the college they preferred based on its primary language. OCAS administered the survey in June 2024 and received 10,907 responses. Stata 18 was used to clean and analyze the data using descriptive statistics. The survey received responses from 882 respondents who attended a French-language high school, 463 who attended French immersion and 465 who attended extended French.

Postsecondary Enrolment Data

HEQCO accessed enrolment data using the Open Strategic Information and Management System (SIMS).²⁵ Enrolment data was available through the Postsecondary Enrolment Sandbox (Audited Data), which includes audited data on

²⁴ OCAS is a not-for-profit organization focused on creating new pathways for applicants to explore and connect with Ontario's 24 public colleges, and on delivering tools and services that support college partners (OCAS, n.d.).

²⁵ Open SIMS is a restricted-access portal managed by the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security (Government of Ontario, 2024c). The portal provides data, analyses and reports aimed at supporting evidence-based research and decision making for sector partners.



college and university enrolment at the institution and campus levels. Enrolment data were exported from the portal into Excel using the filter of mother tongue language.²⁶ The exported data included enrolment counts from 2018–2019 to 2022–2023 at colleges and universities for students whose mother tongue language is French or English and French.²⁷ After exporting the data to Excel, institutions were categorized by institution type (college or university) and language (English-language, French-language or bilingual).²⁸ This permitted an analysis of the type and language of institution at which students with French or English and French mother tongues enrolled.

Table 1

Enrolment of students with French or English and French Mother Tongue(s) by Institution Language

Institution Language	2018–19 (n=22,286)	2019–20 (n=22,412)	2020–21 (n=22,450)	2021–22 (n=22,376)	2022–23 (n=19,516)
Bilingual	11,504	11,474	12,050	12,364	9,706
English	6,034	3,278	6,107	5,912	5,796
French	4,748	4,660	4,293	4,100	4,014

Note: The decline in enrolment at bilingual institutions from 2021-22 to 2022-23 mostly reflects changes in enrolment at one institution.

²⁶ Mother tongue is defined as “the languages first spoken by the student and still understood” (Government of Ontario, 2024c). Options for mother tongue include English, French, English and French, other and unknown.

²⁷ Approximately 29% of cells were suppressed in the dataset, where the suppression threshold used is 10.

²⁸ French-language institutions included Collège Boréal, Collège La Cité, Université de Hearst and Université de l’Ontario français. Bilingual institutions included Carleton University–Dominican University College, Laurentian University (all campuses), University of Ottawa (all campuses) and York University–Glendon College.



Appendix B: Sample Characteristics

Table 2

Characteristics of Survey Sample

Characteristic	Percentage of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Gender Identity		
Man	36	78
Woman	55	118
Non-binary and other gender identities ²⁹	5	10
Prefer not to answer	5	10
Race ³⁰		
Black	8	18
East Asian	20	44
Middle Eastern	6	13
South Asian	11	23
Southeast Asian	6	14
White	50	108
Prefer not to answer	6	12
Other ³¹	5	10

²⁹ This category groups respondents who selected non-binary and “I prefer to self-describe” due to the low number of respondents who selected each response option.

³⁰ Respondents could select multiple race options and may be represented across more than one category.

³¹ This category groups respondents who selected Indigenous, Latino/Latina/Latinx or another race category (which respondents could specify if desired) due to the low number of respondents who selected



Disability		
Respondents with disabilities	16	35
Respondents without disabilities	71	153
Not sure	6	12
Prefer not to answer	7	16
Institution Type		
College	11	23
University	89	193
Immigration Status		
Canadian citizen or permanent resident	97	209
International student on a study permit	3	7

n=216

each response option.



Appendix C: Additional Tables and Figures

Table 3

Language(s) that Respondents Used Regularly at Home in Their Final Year of High School

Language	Percentage of Respondents	Number of Respondents
English	91	196
French	25	55
Other	29	63

n=216

Note: Respondents could select multiple language options and may be represented across more than one category.

Table 4

Types of French-language Education that Respondents Were Enrolled in During High School

French-Language Education	Percentage of Respondents	Number of Respondents
French-language High School	17	37
French Immersion	39	85
Extended French	10	22
Core French	34	74
Other	3	7
None	2	5

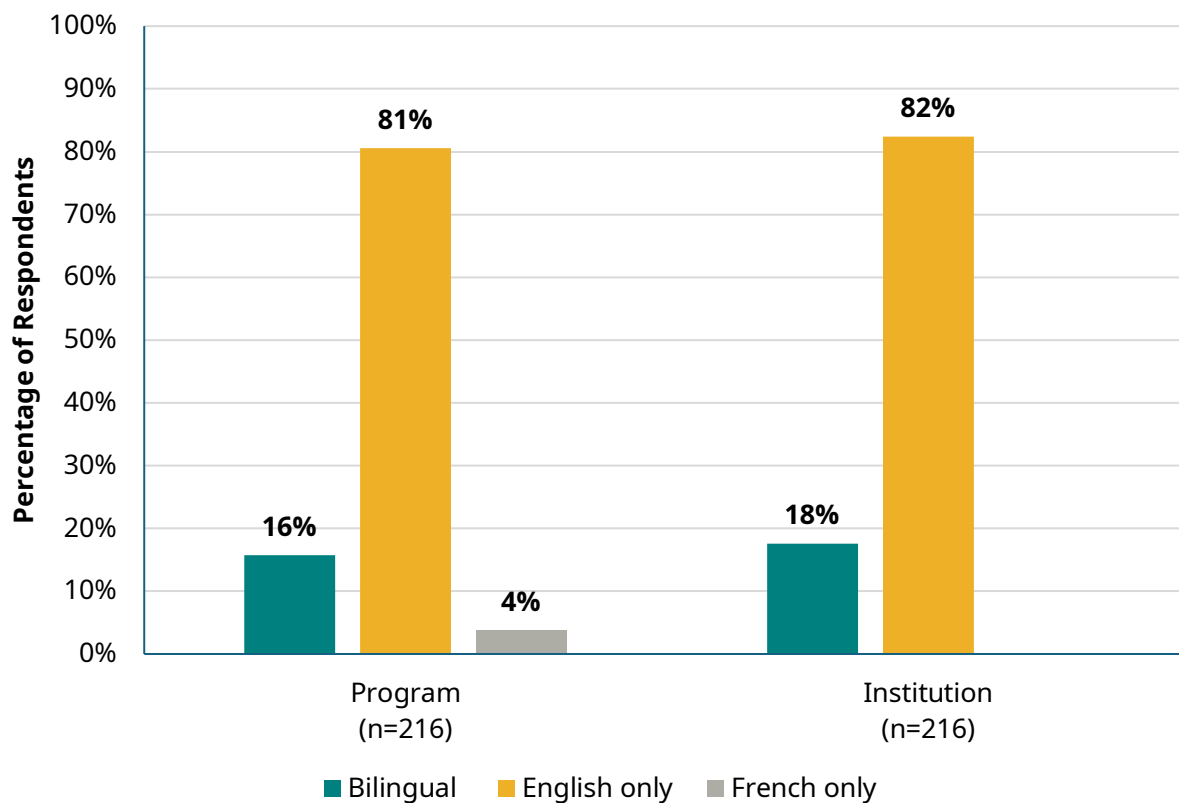
n=216

Note: Respondents could select multiple types of French-language high school education and may be represented across more than one category.



Figure 4

Language of Selected Postsecondary Program and Institution

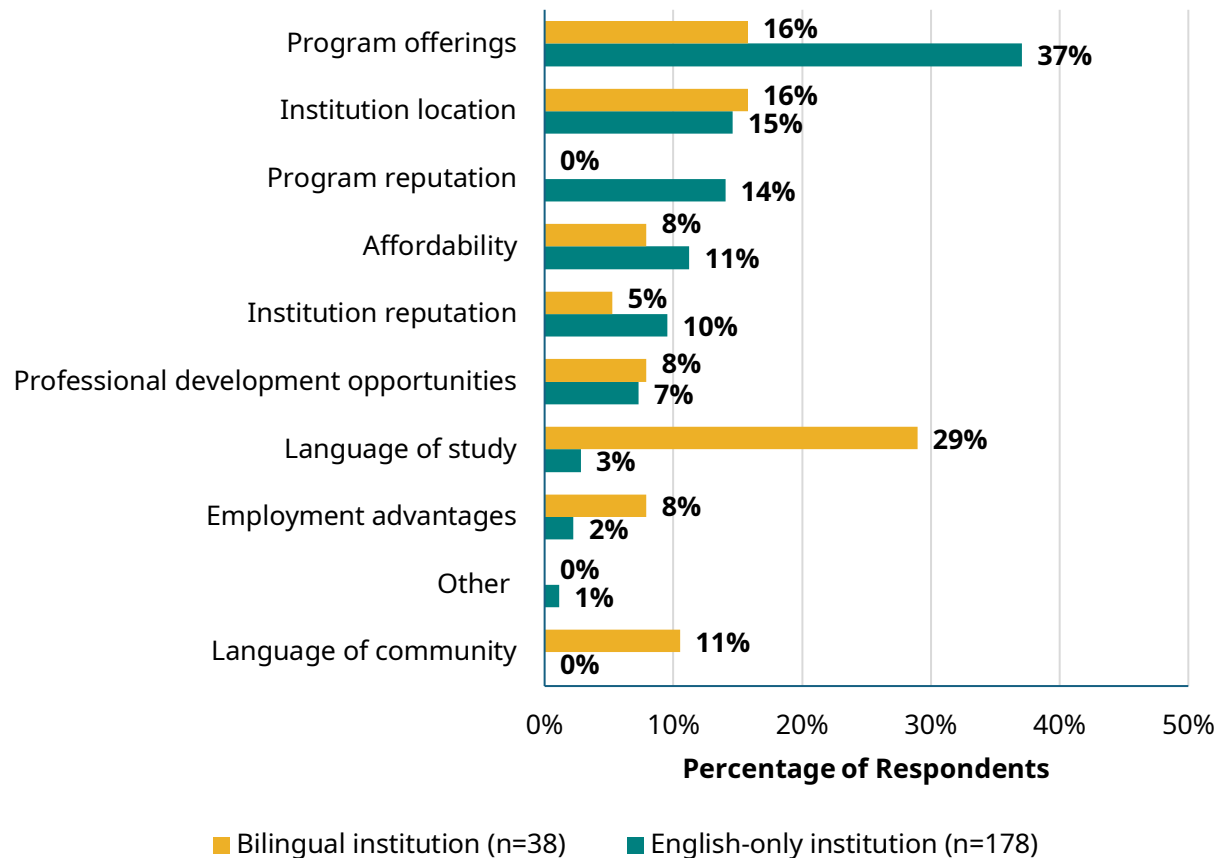


Note: This figure presents the postsecondary program and institution that respondents selected based on the program or institution's primary language(s).



Figure 5

Factors that Most Influenced Respondents' Decision to Attend Bilingual and English Institutions



Note: This figure presents responses by institution language to the question, “Which of the following factors was most influential in your decision to attend an English-only/bilingual institution?” Respondents were only able to select one option and were presented with only those factors they indicated as influential in a previous question.

