

# INCREASING THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CONTENT ON FRANCOPHONE MINORITY SCHOOL BOARDS' WEBSITES IN CANADA: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY (2008-2016) IN SUPPORT OF NON-FRENCH-SPEAKING PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

JULES ROCQUE *Université de Saint-Boniface*

**ABSTRACT.** This paper focuses on the results of a longitudinal study examining the English-language content of Francophone minority school boards' websites throughout Canada, mindful of the changing profile of the boards' parental population. A document analysis research approach was used to analyse how the content destined for a non-French-speaking audience has evolved, enabling the audience to have access to new and pertinent information. It was observed that the majority of boards in Western Canada and Ontario have increased the presence of English on their websites. Atlantic Canada (with the exception of New Brunswick) has followed this trend. It is worth noting that other languages and content areas have shown up on the web sites, confirming the changing demographics of Francophone minority communities in Canada.

**AUGMENTER LE CONTENU EN ANGLAIS DES SITES WEB DES CONSEILS SCOLAIRES FRANCOPHONES MINORITAIRES AU CANADA : UNE ÉTUDE LONGITUDINALE (2008-2016) À L'APPUI DES PARENTS ET DES TUTEURS QUI NE PARLENT PAS FRANÇAIS**

**RÉSUMÉ.** Ce texte présente les résultats d'une étude longitudinale portant sur le contenu anglais des sites Web des conseils scolaires de langue française en milieux minoritaires partout au Canada, reconnaissant l'évolution du profil langagier de la situation familiale des conseils. Une approche de recherche documentaire a été utilisée pour analyser l'évolution du contenu destiné à un public non francophone, permettant à ce public d'avoir accès à de nouvelles informations pertinentes en anglais. Il a été observé que la majorité des conseils scolaires de l'Ouest canadien et de l'Ontario ont accru la présence de l'anglais sur leurs sites Web. Le Canada atlantique (à l'exception du Nouveau-Brunswick) a suivi cette tendance. Il est à noter que d'autres langues et contenus variés sont apparus sur les sites Web, confirmant ainsi l'évolution démographique des communautés francophones en situation minoritaire au Canada.

**F**rancophone minority schools are the most important institutions in ensuring the vitality of French-language communities in Canada as they provide a “privileged place of language socialization for full development of linguistic competence and an identity building factor” for the students in

attendance (Landry, Allard & Deveau, 2010, p. 35). However, the schools cannot act alone. They require critical allies, namely parents. The demographic profile of this group who is sending children to Francophone minority schools, or is considering this option, has changed since the 1980s. Moving from a more traditional French-speaking parent (endogamous) family, where French was essentially the home language, to a greater diversity of mixed unions (exogamous),<sup>1</sup> English has become the language most often used in the household (Allen & Cartwright, 2004; Landry, 2010; Landry, Deveau & Allard, 2006; Rocque, 2006a; Vézina & Houle, 2014). As English has become the lingua franca, the school is the institutional cornerstone of language and culture in Francophone minority communities, as demonstrated and supported in Landry et al.'s (2010) leading work in the area of vitality of Francophone communities in minority settings in Canada.

Over the course of the following longitudinal study (2008–2016),<sup>2</sup> Francophone minority school boards in Canada have responded to changes by including more English-language content on their websites. The present study that is the subject of this article shows a positive trend in the direction of a continued increase in English-language content on Francophone minority school board websites. This trend will undoubtedly reduce the level of frustration of some non-French-speaking parents who have often felt excluded from their child's school life and, by extension, their education, all the while enhancing communication with the school (MacPhee, 2018). Gaining support from both parents in the home while developing a better understanding of the school's mandate<sup>3</sup> are essential components of Francophone minority school boards' mission.

In order to better understand the impact of the changing demographics on communication policies and procedures and to explore the response from Francophone minority school boards throughout Canada, we (four research assistants and the author of this study) examined websites from the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones (FNCSF) every second year during the springtime in order to see the progression of English content over time. The FNCSF is a Canadian school board organisation representing 28 Francophone minority school boards, 160,000 students in 700 schools in Francophone and Acadian communities living outside Quebec.<sup>4</sup> The FNCSF provides a unified political voice and a collaborative leadership approach enabling all Francophone minority school boards to contribute to the vitality and sustainability of French-language schools and communities in Canada.

In order to better understand the complexities of Francophone minority education and its changing demographics, we will introduce the conceptual framework for the study, then proceed to the research question and objectives. Subsequently, the method, findings, and discussion will be

presented. Implications for policy makers at the school board level will be addressed prior to the conclusion.

## CONTEXT

We cannot speak about Francophone education in Canada without evoking the constitutional guarantees that protect Francophone minority communities outside of Quebec. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), and, more precisely, Section 23, “was a true catalyst, enabling Francophone minority communities to take charge of instruction” (Landry et al., 2010, p. 19) in their Francophone schools.<sup>5</sup> “The general purpose of section 23 is to preserve and promote the two official languages of Canada and their respective cultures, by ensuring that each language flourishes, as far as possible, in provinces where it is not spoken by the majority of the population” (*Mahe v. Alberta*, 1990, para. 5). The FNCSF contributes directly to the general purpose of the Charter.

Among the students attending Francophone minority schools, a growing number of children come from mixed unions. These interlinguistic and intercultural unions have increased over the years. In 2001, 42% of Francophone school-aged children came from mixed unions (Landry et al., 2010). In 2006, the overall national percentage rose to 66%. During the same period, New Brunswick was 32% and Ontario, 68%, while, in other provinces and territories, the percentage ranged from 72% to 94%, confirming varying regional differences. This trend is continuing, as reported recently by Ontario’s Francophone minority school boards (Duchaine, 2015).

Generally speaking, within families composed of mixed unions, the English language becomes the dominant *lingua franca* within the home, thus curbing the transmission of French from one generation to the next (Landry et al., 2010). Despite this reality, when the Francophone parent of a mixed union “speaks French to the child most often at home, and the child is educated in French..., in Grade 12, that child’s French proficiency and Francophone identity cannot be distinguished from those of a child having two Francophone parents” (Landry et al., 2010, pp. 25–26). When parents are aware of this, they can contribute to the fundamental mandate and purpose of Francophone education by gaining a better understanding of their role in supporting their child’s education (*Mahe v. Alberta*, 1990, para. 31).

Parents, schools, educational organizations, and community members must all work closely together in order to achieve the mandate of the Francophone minority school (Alberta Learning, 2001; Cormier, 2011; Landry, 2003; Rocque, 2006a; Rocque & Taylor, 2011). The FNCSF has a lot to gain by sharing information in English with non-French-speaking members of mixed unions who, through communication in their preferred language, will better understand their role as a parent in a minority setting. This, in turn, raises

their awareness as they seek to support the school mandate (MacPhee, 2018; Rocque, 2006a, 2006b, 2015; Rocque & Taylor, 2011). A better understanding can only contribute to building stronger family-school-community partnerships that are vital to the development of Francophone minority communities (Landry et al., 2010).

It is important to note that there has been hesitation in the past within the Francophone education community to anglicize the educational system that was put in place (MacPhee, 2018; Rocque, 2006a, 2006b) “to correct... the progressive erosion of minority official language groups and to give effect to the concept of the ‘equal partnership’ of the two official language groups in the context of education and to actively encourage both languages to flourish” (*Mahe v. Alberta*, 1990, para. 35). History helps us understand this hesitation. Francophone minorities in Canada faced numerous challenges in attempting to maintain their language and culture. In education, their rights have not always been respected. For instance, legislated “guarantees [to French-language education in section 23 of the Manitoba Act in 1870] were illegally abrogated in 1890 but revived in 1979 as a result of the celebrated *Forest* case” (Jourdain, 2002). Many other judicial battles were fought and won at the Supreme Court, leading to the creation of minority Francophone school boards (FNCSF) throughout the country in the mid-1990s and clarifying the scope of the governance by and for right-holders of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Power & Foucher, 2004; Rocque, 2009). These decisions also specified the provincial and territorial governments’ obligations to provide adequate public funding while imposing “the positive obligation of enacting precise legislative schemes [allowing for] the quality of education provided to the minority language group” (*Mahe v. Alberta*, 1990). We feel, however, that increasing the presence of English on websites with a specific and strategic content destined to accommodate non-French speaking parents of mixed unions may contribute to building stronger relationships with these potential natural allies, therefore supporting the mandate and mission of this education system as specified in the court challenges.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The groundwork for this study is based on minority language literature studies (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977; Landry & Allard, 1997; Landry et al., 2010; Rocque, 2006a, 2006b, 2015; Rocque & Taylor, 2011). In order to better understand the language dynamics between two intergroup communities and behaviors that influence the language choices of the minority French-language speakers evolving in an English dominant milieu, the author has chosen to present three prominent concepts from the literature in this field: ethnolinguistic vitality, additive bilingualism, and *francité familioscolaire* (the use of French at home and in the school).

### *Ethnolinguistic vitality*

Giles et al. (1977) were the first to study interrelationships among various cultural and linguistic groups focusing on structural and situational variables “which often dictate the sociopsychological climate in which [intergroup] relations occur” (p. 308). Landry and Allard (1997) have suggested that, in order for minority groups to continue to exist and develop as distinctive groups, such as Francophones in Canada (outside of Quebec), a strong ethnolinguistic vitality must be present. This is determined by three critical structural factors: status (socio-historical and economic), demographics (numbers of speakers, birthrate, mixed unions), and institutional support (educational, political, government services, media, sports, cultural). According to Landry et al., (2010), “[t]he more these structural factors encourage the use of [French], the higher the chances that the members of the group will use their language within society” (p. 43). The risk of a permanent linguistic assimilation into the English majority is therefore reduced when strong structural factors are in place, again as demonstrated by Landry et al.’s (2010) research: “There is a direct link between the ethnolinguistic vitality of communities and the linguistic assimilation of Francophones or, at least, a drop in the Frenchness of their behaviours and attitudes” (p. 55). Consequently, the stronger the ethnolinguistic vitality factors of the minority language community, “the more its members will view their language as legitimate and socially recognized and, therefore, the more willing they will be to speak it” (Landry et al., 2010, p. 44). This concept helps us understand the hesitation that some members of the Francophone education community may have in anglicizing its websites, as the presence of English would seem to diminish the vitality of the minority language community. This concern is addressed later in the article.

### *Additive bilingualism*

Lambert’s (1975) influential work studied the impact of various factors in learning a new language, such as motivation, attitudes, and culture. His early studies “dealt with bilinguals using two languages, both of which have social value and respect in their respective settings” (p. 67). The use of French and English in Montreal illustrated how both groups would “add a second socially relevant language to one’s repertoire of skill. In no case would the learning of the second language portend the dropping or the replacement of the other” (p. 67). Lambert (1975) referred to this as an “*additive* form of bilingualism” (p. 67). This remains a key element of the mandate of Francophone minority schools today.

Francophone minority education settings seek to contribute to building language skills, amongst others, ensuring that any prior acquired language is not diminished. Non-French-speaking parents wanting to support their child’s

Francophone education can be reassured that the majority language is not threatened as their child will be exposed to the minority language at school. It is however critical that the home also provide a place for the minority language. This brings us to the concept of *francité familioscolaire*.

### **Francité familioscolaire**

Landry and Allard (1997) have proposed the concept of *francité familioscolaire* in studying additive bilingualism of Francophones living in English dominant settings. Essentially, *francité familioscolaire* refers to “the optimal use of French within the family and at school” (Landry et al., 2010, p. 70). When mixed unions ensure the presence of French at home, and display a positive and supportive attitude towards the use of the minority language, even as they send their children to the Francophone school, they are contributing to the acquisition and development of French-language competencies for their child by supporting the school’s dual mandate: providing quality education and allowing their children to develop their human potential, and contributing to the revitalization and development of Francophone communities. Both parents, once aware, can therefore contribute to an additive bilingualism.

In order for Francophone minority school boards to successfully work towards achieving their dual mandate, it is important to solidify the partnerships it is developing with all its parents, including non-French-speaking parents and guardians (MacPhee, 2018). This can help support efforts already being made in the area of strong ethnolinguistic vitality factors and *francité familioscolaire*.

The reality of the dominance of the English language, both in Francophone minority communities and within Francophone homes, requires the FNCSF and its school communities to look for ways of enhancing dialogue between schools and all homes. The FNCSF must seek ways to welcome and support all parents while raising awareness of the role of the non-French-speaking parents in Francophone minority education (Landry, 2003; Landry et al., 2010; MacPhee, 2018; Rocque 2006a; 2006b; Rocque, 2011; Rocque, 2015; Rocque & Taylor, 2011). Websites are tools that can contribute to the strengthening of the school-parent partnership (Karsenti, Larose & Garnier, 2002; Miller, Adsit & Miller, 2005). By providing minimal, essential English content, readily available to non-French-speaking parents and guardians, communication can be improved.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES**

This longitudinal study seeks to understand how the FNCSF has evolved in the area of responding to the changing needs of non-French-speaking parents and guardians who have chosen to send their children to Francophone minority schools in Canada. The three major objectives arising from this

research question were:

- to trace the progression of the presence of hyperlinks, tabs, and buttons in English on the FNCSF school boards' websites leading to information and resources for non-French-speaking parents or guardians;
- to note if hyperlinks, tabs or buttons are located on the front page of the website, are functional, and are linked to relevant content;
- to analyse the English-language content and take inventory of the type of information available.

The increased presence of English content, buttons, tools, and diverse information on the school boards' websites would indicate which adjustments the FNCSF is making to its communication practices in an attempt to reach parents of mixed unions that represent the changing demographics of Francophone minority communities in Canada.

## **METHOD**

A document analysis research approach was used in this study. Document analysis "is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). This analytic procedure was selected as it allowed the research team to identify, to document, and to organise the data collected on the English-language content and tools on the websites (Labuschagne, 2003). The research started in 2008. Every second year following, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016, the content of the 28 FNCSF websites was examined using a semi-open-ended grid created by the author with pre-identified criteria (see Appendix). The focus was to determine the English-language content on the websites intended for a non-French-speaking audience. The researcher and the four assistants<sup>6</sup> approached the analysis of the websites as if they understood or spoke very little or no French. The data gathered was available directly on the website, which acted as a respondent or an informant providing relevant information on the research topic (O'Leary, 2014).

We first reviewed the Francophone minority school board's websites, looking for obvious English content destined for a non-French-speaking audience (i.e.: "English", "More Info.", etc.). Once this information was found, we would click and explore the pathways while recording the type of information available. This allowed us to examine the data (English content on websites) while gaining a better understanding of the nature of the content destined for a targeted non-French-speaking audience, thus supporting a qualitative document analysis method, consisting of examining and interpreting data to gain understanding, as described in Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Rapley (2007).

As we discovered during our study, the evaluation grid of pre-determined criteria used to analyse the content could be adapted over time, illustrating the flexibility and adaptability of the qualitative document analysis approach allowing the research team to “discover insights relevant to the research problem” (Merriam, 1988, p. 118). The research team decided that new categories (criteria) would be added once information in English of a new sort relevant to our audience was detected on at least five different websites. The following new categories were added as the study proceeded:

- 2012: information on the history of the local education authority;
- 2014: information on immigration and newly arrived citizens/parents;
- 2016: information on pre-school programs and services.

Although it is not possible to establish trends over time in the newly added categories, it is important to see how content destined for a non-French speaking audience has evolved over time.

### *Sampling of Francophone minority school boards*

A purposive sampling method was used in this study allowing the researcher to choose school boards in a representative way (Beaudry & Miller, 2016). As the number of school boards was limited, all school boards were selected from both Western (7/7) and Atlantic provinces (6/6). In Ontario, the province with the largest number of Francophone minority school boards, a representative sampling (75%) was obtained by choosing 3/4 of the public school boards and 6/8 of Catholic school boards (represented by a ‘+’ beside the names in Figure 2). The researchers took into account urban/rural representation and the number of students enrolled, ensuring small, medium, and large school boards were represented in both groups. Due to the very small number of students registered in the three territorial Francophone minority school boards (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut), their results have been eliminated from this article. The total number of schools and student population for the three regions for the 2017-2018 school year were as follows:

- Western Canada: 118 schools, 21,270 students;
- Ontario: 322 schools, 88,590 students;
- Atlantic Canada: 126 schools, 35,970 students.

## FINDINGS

The findings help us better understand how the English-language content in the FNCSF’s websites has evolved over the 8-year period of the study. That content has become more present, as indicated by additional hyperlinks, tabs, and buttons located on the front pages of the websites in English,

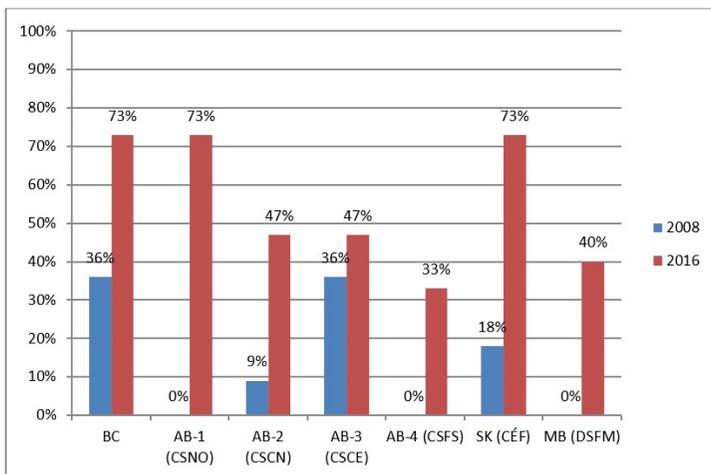
demonstrating a recognition by the local school authorities of the need to offer more information about the workings, mission, and mandate of their boards to non-French-speaking parents and guardians who send their children to Francophone minority schools, or who are contemplating doing so. The addition of information provided in English helps support the parents as natural allies and as critical partners in education even if they do not speak French.

**English Criteria in Websites (2008 and 2016)**

Data gathered in 2008 and 2016 will be presented and compared within three separate regions in order to facilitate the presentation and limit the content in each figure: Western Canada, Ontario, and Atlantic Canada.

To establish the percentages in Figures 1, 2, and 3, the total number of pre-identified criteria observed in each website was divided by the total number possible (2008=x/11 criteria and 2016=x/15 criteria). The 15 pre-identified criteria are presented in more detail for school boards in each region in the second part of the findings (Figures 4, 5, and 6).

**Western Canada.** Figure 1 allows us to compare the percentages of the English-language criteria identified in websites from the first data-gathering of the longitudinal study in 2008 with the last in 2016. Significant increases are noted in almost all school boards, ranging from the modest increase of 11% (36% to 47%) in AB-3 to a more dramatic 73% increase in AB-1 (0% to 73%).



**FIGURE 1. Percentage of English criteria identified in websites of Francophone minority school boards in Western Canada (2008 and 2016)**

Three school boards have distinguished themselves from the others with regards to their increase since 2008: British Columbia (BC), Alberta (AB-1

CSNO), and Saskatchewan. If we look more critically, a few observations can be made.

Firstly, the BC Francophone school board has seen a significant increase in student population over the course of a 5-year period (2011-2016). By noting the type of information available on its website, it is fair to say that this school board has been strategically attempting to increase its means of communication with non-French-speaking parents and guardians, who are now well represented in their overall population, by providing them with a wide array of information in English. Since 2008, information on who to contact if they do not speak French, what services are available to them, who is admissible to a Francophone minority school, what the transportation policy is, what daycare, preschool, and other special services are available, and what the BC Ministry of Education prescribes regarding the type of curriculum for secondary schools are now all available in English. Furthermore, the Francophone school board's mission is also available in English.

Secondly, the Alberta (AB-1 CSNO) school board has also extended a hand to its non-French-speaking parents and guardians, moving from 0% of English content in their website in 2008 to 73% in 2016. A contact name, number, and email address are now available to people seeking more information in English about the school board. Furthermore, a broad spectrum of content is now easily accessible online, ranging from press releases, eligibility criteria for admissions, registration forms, and preschool programs to a school-year calendar, testimonials from satisfied parents along with links to various provincial programs and community services.

Thirdly, the Saskatchewan school board has also seen a substantial increase in its English-language website content going from 18% in 2008 to 73% in 2016. Similar types of information as previously mentioned are now available to a non-French-speaking clientele in this province (Figures 4, 5, and 6). Two links worth mentioning that are specific to this board and that illustrate the type of information supporting the objectives of this study are: 1) an explanation of the differences between Francophone minority education and French Immersion programs, and 2) a series of parent newsletters destined for intercultural or "exogamous" couples underlining "[t]he importance of parental involvement in children's education" (Conseil des écoles francsaskoises [CEF], 2016).

**Ontario.** Figure 2 allows us to compare the percentages of the English-language criteria identified on websites of the selected school boards in Ontario over the same two years as the previous region (2008 and 2016). Significant increases are also noted in a majority of school boards, ranging from the smallest increase of 15% (18% to 33% in CSCFN+) to a dramatic 84%

increase in CECCE+. It is worth noting that this school board, the largest amongst the FNCSEF, has the highest percentage of pre-identified criteria present on their website in the whole country (14/15; 93%). Although increases vary over the course of the 8-year period, English-language content is clearly becoming more present on the selected Ontario Francophone minority school boards' websites as the years progress.

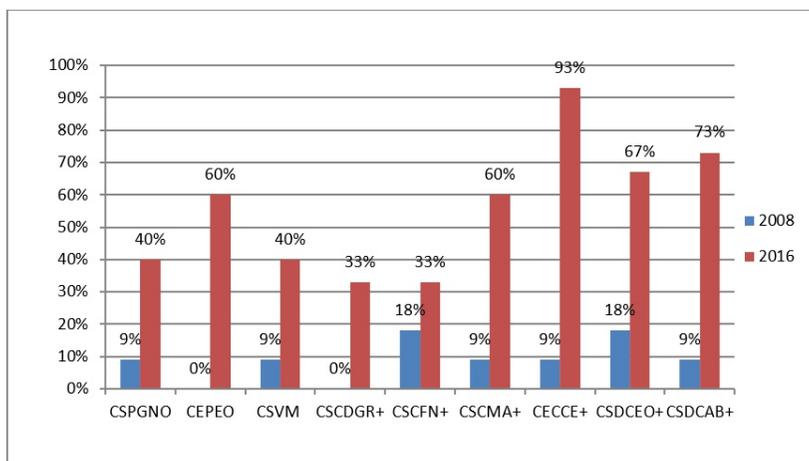


FIGURE 2. *Percentage of English criteria identified in websites of selected Francophone minority school boards in Ontario, Canada (2008 and 2016)*

As we analyse the data of the Ontario region, many similarities to the Western school boards are found. Certain particularities are worth underlining as they broaden the target audience and include other languages. As space is limited, we will focus on two Catholic boards (one small urban/rural and one larger urban) along with the largest public urban school board, giving us a general idea of some of the English content in these websites.

A first observation, which corresponds to a newer criterion added to the grid in 2014, “Newcomers,” has materialized on the CSCMA+ Ontario school board’s website. There is a four-page PDF publication in French along with one page in Swahili, a language spoken mainly in the Kenya-Tanzania-Congo region of Africa. It welcomes newcomers into the area and informs them of some essential services offered in their schools and district in partnership with the Government of Canada (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship). Along the same lines, one can also find on this website documentation available in English, Arabic, and Spanish, recognizing the diversity of newly arrived families: “[s]ettlement workers are in our schools to orient and accompany students and their family by helping them to become better acquainted to life in Canada and to integrate into their new environment” (MonAvenir, 2018).

A second and final observation is found in the largest public Francophone minority school board in Ontario (CEPEO). Information for newcomers under “Support Program For New Arrivals” and a “Cultural Immersion Camp” offering a summer French skills development opportunity for children from 4 to 12 years old is available in English. A “Vendor Application” form is also available on this site, encouraging entrepreneurs to contact the board as “[d]oing Business with the Conseil des écoles publiques de l’Est de l’Ontario” (CEPEO, 2018) is on the agenda. This English content represents an example of how one school board is expanding its communication effort beyond parents and guardians by addressing the business community.

The presence of data not specifically related to the pre-identified criterion analysed in this study, namely Swahili-language content for immigrants and cultural immersion camps, illustrate how the FNCSF school boards are adapting their websites to respond to the changing needs of the clientele that is already sending their children to their schools or is contemplating doing so.

*Atlantic Canada.* Figure 3 allows us to compare the percentages of the English-language criteria identified on websites of the school boards in Atlantic Canada. Contrary to Western Canada and Ontario, although increases are noted for all of the school boards, most are modest with the exception of Nova Scotia (CSAP) which shows an increase of 60% (from 27% in 2008 to 87% in 2016). It is worth noting that two New Brunswick School Boards (DSFNO and DSFNE) and the Prince Edward Island board have all decided to introduce English-language content at varying degrees since 2008, going from 0% to a range of 7% to 27% in 2016. Generally speaking, English-language content is slowly making its way onto Atlantic Canada’s Francophone minority school boards’ websites as the years progress.

Other than Nova Scotia, the Atlantic Provinces’ school boards appear to be more reluctant to add English to their websites. As we analyse the largest (NB DSFS), smallest (NF/LAB), and medium-sized (NS CSAP) school boards in Atlantic Canada, we highlight some of the more interesting findings.

First, the largest and the smallest boards have very limited content in English, and both have remained essentially that way over the course of the study (18% in 2008 to 20% in 2016). Some general-type information, lining up with our pre-identified criteria, is present: Words of Welcome, FAQ on eligibility to attend a Francophone school, and press releases are all available in English. Secondly, the Nova Scotia board has the second highest percentage of pre-identified English language criteria at 87% (13/15) in the country in 2016, after Ontario’s CECCE+’s 93% (14/15).

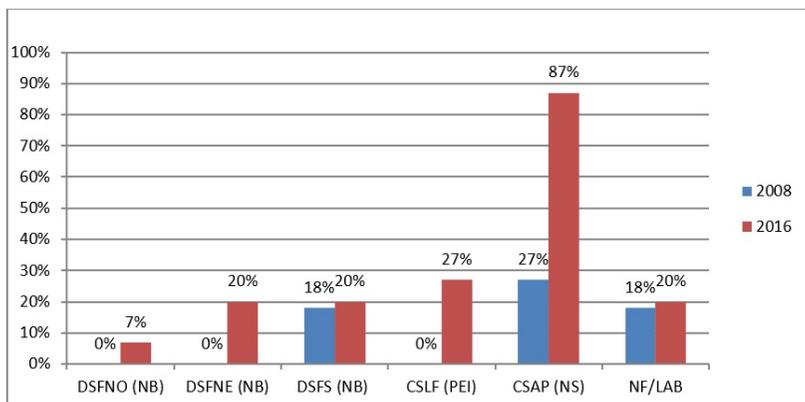


FIGURE 3. Percentage of English criteria identified in websites of Francophone minority school boards in the Atlantic Provinces (2008 and 2016)

### School boards and pre-identified criteria in websites—2008 and 2016

As stated in the Methods section of this article, a dynamic grid was used to analyse the content of the Francophone minority school boards' websites. In the presentation of these findings, we focus on the 15 pre-identified criteria that have been used over the span of this study. Percentages in Figures 4, 5, and 6 were calculated by determining the number of school boards of each region that had the specific criterion on their website and dividing that number by the total number of school boards studied per region. When a criterion has a 100% result (see Figure 4, "Link on Homepage," 2016 results), it indicates that every school board website analysed from that region had English-language content that fell under that heading.

**Western Canada.** Figure 4 allows us to compare the percentage of Francophone minority school boards in Western Canada having pre-identified English criteria on their websites in 2008 and 2016. Increases are noted in all areas with the exception of two: "Role of parents/guardians FL Ed.," remaining at 14% for both years, as well as the school boards' "Language Policy," where the percentage remains the same at 29% for both years. The most significant increase is the "Contact Name & Number" criterion going from 0% in 2008 to 86% in 2016. English-language information is also now more noticeably available in many other areas, namely "Link on Homepage," now present in 100% of Western Canada's Francophone minority school boards' sites, and "Words of Welcome" and "Admission criteria/Application," both increasing dramatically (14% to 86%). The new criteria introduced in 2012, 2014 and 2016 are now on the websites in varying percentages ranging from 14% to 57%.

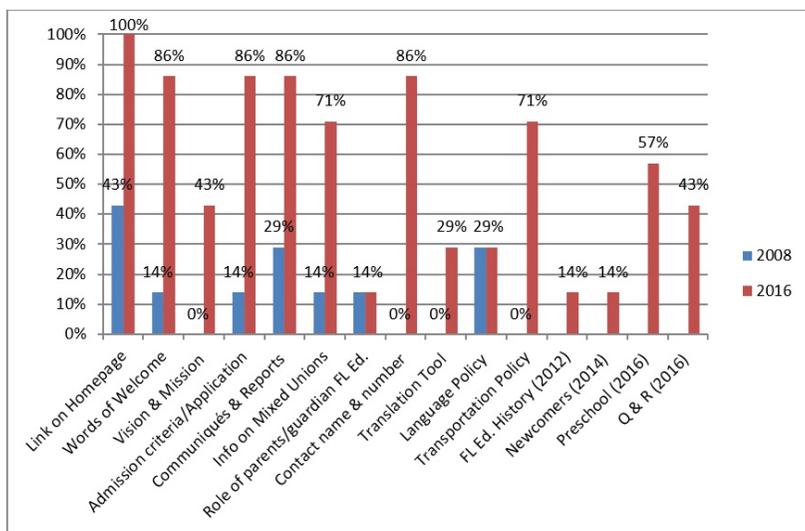


FIGURE 4. Percentage of Francophone minority school boards in Western Canada having pre-identified English criteria in their websites (2008 and 2016)

**Ontario.** In the selected school boards in Ontario, over the span of the study, increases of varying degree are noted for all criteria. The highest increase (89%) concerned the presence of a “Link on Homepage” in 100% of the school boards’ websites in 2016, demonstrating a substantial jump from 11% in 2008. “Words of Welcome” also sits at 100%, representing an increase of 67%. Important equivalent increases worth noting occurred in three other areas, all going from 0% (2008) to 78% (2016): “Vision & Mission,” “Contact Name & Number,” and “Translation Tool”. As was the case in Western Canada (14%), few Ontario boards, only 11%, have chosen to add “FL Ed. History” to their websites. The importance of this content will be discussed later. The interest in “Preschool,” however, is noted in both regions, as both register 55% and above for this new criterion added in 2016. English “Q & A” are also quite present in both Western Canada and Ontario, with over 40% of boards now having this section online.

**Atlantic Canada.** Figure 6 paints a picture of the Atlantic Provinces. With a few exceptions, the region has remained relatively unchanged over the 8-year period of the study. Three criteria presently sit at over 50%: “Link on Homepage” (100%), “Words of Welcome” (67%), and “Communiqués & Reports” (50%). It is worth noting that a key criterion destined to support non-French-speaking parents or guardians with regards to Francophone minority education has not changed in 8 years: “Info on Mixed Unions” remains at 0%. This does raise questions with regards to how far the Atlantic Provinces are willing to extend a helping hand to mixed unions in their

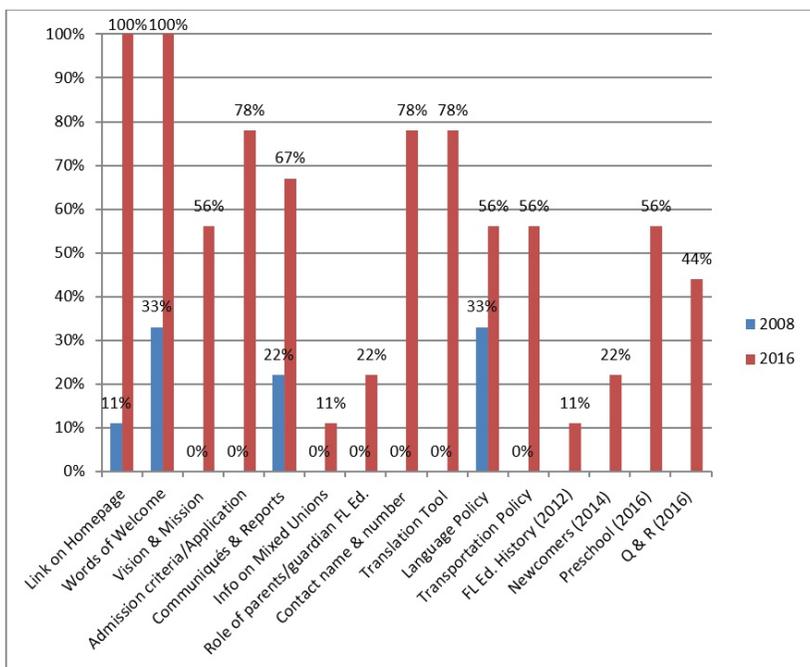


FIGURE 5. Percentage of selected Francophone minority school boards in Ontario having pre-identified English criteria in their websites (2008 and 2016)

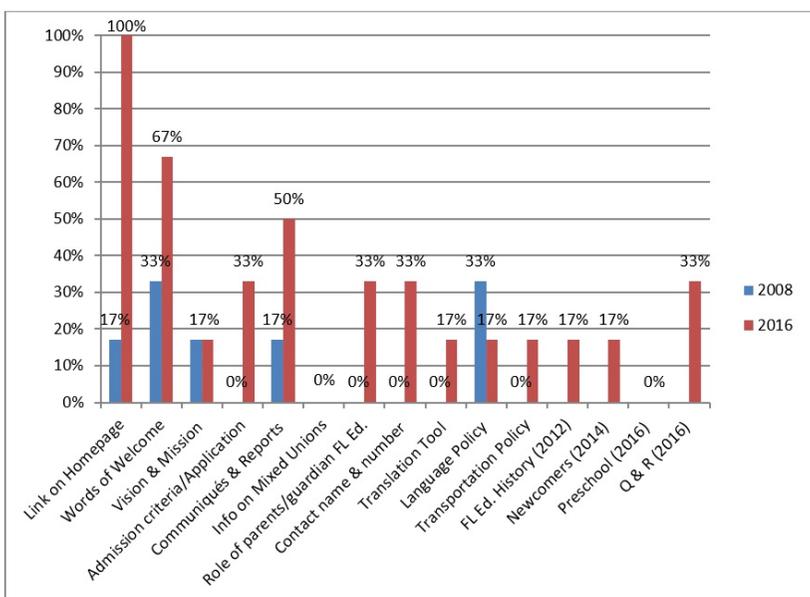


FIGURE 6. Percentage of Francophone minority school boards in Atlantic Canada having pre-identified English criteria in their websites (2008 and 2016)

territory. “Preschool,” a new criterion added in 2016 is not present in the Atlantic Provinces, contrary to Western Canada (57%) and Ontario (56%). Other newer criteria added in 2012, 2014, and 2016 have seen a moderate presence ranging from 17% to 33%.

## DISCUSSION

Our findings indicate an increased presence of English in websites of Francophone minority school boards across Canada over an 8-year period. With the exception of two criteria (“Info on Mixed Unions” and “Preschool”) in one specific region (Atlantic Canada), the pre-identified criteria are present online in all regions, reflecting an important change in the policy and practices of English-language use as an additional communication tool. This is possibly a reflection of the increased presence of mixed-union couples deciding to send their children to Francophone minority schools throughout the country and the desire the boards have to share more information with the non-French speaking parent. The traditional profile of two Francophone parents, both speaking French at home and sending a French-speaking child to the school, is no longer the rule, but the exception (Cormier, 2011; Landry, 2003, 2010; Rocque, 2006a, 2011). Local decision-makers at the school board-level seem to have responded to this change in clientele. The data indicate that there is definitely an attempt to reach out to non-French-speaking parents, recognizing them as important allies in supporting Francophone minority schools.

As stated earlier, in order for a minority language community to not only survive but to thrive, a strong ethno-linguistic vitality must be present (Giles et al., 1977). As the demographics change, the Francophone minority school boards and their schools must seek ways to welcome and inform all parents and members of the community of their role and responsibilities if they wish to support their educational and cultural mandates. This must be done in the language or languages of the parents and guardians who are inquiring about Francophone minority education along with those who have chosen to send their children to the FNCSF’s schools (MacPhee, 2018; Rocque, 2006a, 2006b, 2011, 2015; Rocque & Taylor, 2011).

Furthermore, historical information outlining legal challenges put forth by rights-holding parents throughout the country requesting the Supreme Court intervene following local political decisions to suspend, diminish or discontinue services in Francophone minority regions must be relayed (Rocque, 2008). All parents should understand the particularities of the Francophone minority school’s mandate along with the parental battles of the past in order to guarantee their rights and the necessity of putting in place an educational system that fosters the vitality of Francophone communities. As the FNCSF’s growth hinges on young children who come more and more

from mixed unions, critical “Preschool” information and services should be available on its websites, in English (Landry, 2010).

The concepts of “additive bilingualism” (Lambert, 1975) and “*francité familioscolaire*” (Landry & Allard, 1997) remind us of the necessity of members of Francophone minority communities to have all players on board supporting French at home, in the community, and at school. These natural allies will help children add a second (or third) language to their repertoire as they evolve in an English dominant society. However, two critical conditions are required to achieve this goal: 1) accessing a quality and equitable educational program in a school in which the minority language is used as the language of instruction and by the school administration; and 2) creating a strong partnership between the school and its parents, welcoming them and accompanying them as they seek to better understand and support the dual mandate of Francophone minority schools (Landry & Allard, 1997; MacPhee, 2018; Rocque, 2006a, 2011, 2015). Their support, even as non-French-speaking parents and guardians, can be demonstrated by encouraging French to be part of their family life, by using it at home, by developing and fostering a positive and open attitude towards the French language, and by exposing their children to a wide range of French moments out of school (television, Internet, music, plays, community events, etc.). Their children will thus begin to understand that French is a not only a local school language; it reaches far beyond the classroom walls, extending its voice to more than 300 million speakers throughout the world (France Diplomatie, 2018).

#### ***Increase of English content with functional hyperlinks in websites***

As confirmed above, over the course of the 8-year span of this longitudinal study, there has been an increase in the percentage of English pre-identified criteria in websites of Francophone minority school boards. The increase has varied from 7% (0% in 2008 to 7% in 2016) at the DSFNO in New Brunswick to 84% (9% in 2008 to 93% in 2016) at the CECCE+ in Ontario. The progression of an increased number of hyperlinks, and the visible presence of tabs and buttons on Home pages destined for a non-French-speaking population has also grown. This indicates that having content in English and in languages other than French on a Francophone minority school board website is no longer a discreet “under construction” or exceptional “backroom” situation. It is recognition that the clientele has changed and that mixed unions are important to foster as natural allies. Research in the area of Francophone minority education has clearly demonstrated the importance of having all parents and guardians, including mixed unions, on board, regardless of the language spoken at home. These natural allies will better support the dual mandate which they share with Francophone boards: providing quality education so that their children can develop their human potential, and contributing to the revitalization and

development of their Francophone communities (Landry, 2003; Landry & Allard, 1997). Together with schools and community members, the entire family play a role in supporting the vision, the mission, and the dual mandate of Francophone minority schools in Canada. The level of engagement may also increase as parents and guardians become more aware of their roles while gaining a deeper understanding of the history and the challenges that are particular to Francophone minority education.

## IMPLICATIONS

The findings of our longitudinal study suggest that Francophone minority school boards have increased English and other language content on their websites. However, if these Boards wish to reach out to mixed union parents, guardians, and others who do not speak French but who have children admissible to Francophone education, there is still room for improvement. We would now like to explore briefly why it is important for local authorities (political and administrative) to pursue the conversation with regards to their communication practices.

Past recommendations made (Rocque, 2011, 2015) have yet to be acted upon in all geographical areas. Few school boards have information on the “History of Francophone minority education” (14% in Western Canada, 11% in Ontario, and 17% in Atlantic Canada). This is a critical piece, in our view, which would explain to parents and the general public the foundations, entrenched rights in the Canadian Constitution, and particular mandate with regards to Official Languages in Canada and Francophone minority education (Power & Foucher, 2004).

There are some school boards that seem reluctant to increase their English-language content in spite of demographic changes. For example, one of Alberta’s four school boards located in the southern region of the province along with Manitoba’s only Francophone school board have the lowest percentage of English criteria in 2016 in Western Canada: AB-4 (CSFS) is at 33% while MB (DSFM) is at 40%. Is it a question of principle, French being the official language of the school board? A lack of resources? A display of timid leadership approaches to a sensitive issue? An area that has simply not been identified as a top priority by the boards? These questions can also be raised in four areas in Ontario, as two boards both sit at 33% (CSCDGR+ and CSCFN+) while two others are at 40% (CSPGNO and CSVM). In Atlantic Canada, there tends to be some resistance to including English in websites in New Brunswick and Newfoundland/Labrador. In 2016, percentages were as low as 7% and no higher than 27%, with the one exception being Nova Scotia with a high of 87%.

When one looks at the most recent statistics from the Canadian Census Profile (2016), we may have one piece of information that helps us

understand the hesitation of New Brunswick's school boards: 31.8% of the population has French as the first official language still spoken (Statistics Canada, 2016). This is unique to this province. As such, a large number of people speak French in this geographical area, so citizens may not want to let English "erode" the Francophone presence anymore, including online.

In Manitoba, as in Nova Scotia, however, only 3.2% of the population has identified French as its first official language spoken (Statistics Canada, 2016). Although the percentages are the same, the school boards in these provinces have acted very differently. Manitoba has reached a high of only 40% of English content in its website while Nova Scotia is at 87%. What has prompted one area to act while the other remains hesitant?

Another implication of this research in our view is the impact the school boards' websites may have on newcomers to Canada. As stated earlier, the demographics have changed, and a broadening of admissible parents' Minority Language Education Rights, as per Section 23 of the Charter, has seen an increase in newcomers who have French as a language and want to send their children to these schools. As of 2016, information destined for this clientele on the websites has also been quite limited: 14% in Western Canada, 22% in Ontario, and 17% in Atlantic Canada. To what extent are we informing these parents of their options with regards to Francophone education, contributing to the vitality of official-language Francophone minority communities throughout the country?

In order to better understand the motivation behind some of the changes identified in the FNCSF's websites, additional research and critical conversations will be required. Could this be a recognition of the changing linguistic and cultural diversity of Canada's population? Are decision-makers broadening policies and expanding services as a result of a greater acceptance of students and parents arriving to Canada from various French-speaking countries? To what extent is the increasingly competitive and market-oriented schools of choice contributing to the increase of English and other languages on the websites? These are only a few of the questions that will require more attention in order to better understand the complexity of the issue in Francophone minority communities throughout Canada.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present longitudinal study focused on the progression of the presence of English on websites of the FNCSF from 2008 to 2016. Through a document analysis research approach, websites were analysed using pre-identified criteria. The survey of tabs, buttons, and hyperlinks to specific relevant content for non-French-speaking parents and guardians shows that progress has been made in all areas of the country, more so, however, in Western

Canada and Ontario than in Atlantic Canada. In our past publications (Rocque, 2011, 2015), a series of recommendations were made in order to increase the flow of essential, critical information between school boards and non-French speaking parents or guardians. These have yet to be fulfilled completely. Expansion is still required in specific areas such as extending a warm welcome to all while explaining the importance and necessity of having the support of non-French-speaking parents and members of the community as Francophone minority school boards focus on their dual mandate. Building vibrant, ethnolinguistically strong Francophone minority communities will depend in part on the quality of relationships that are being built and will continue to be built between our institutions and our changing demographics. Natural allies are present and local authorities should seek their support as we focus on community and society-based language revitalization efforts (Fishman, 1991; Landry et al., 2010). Schools and school boards on their own will not be able to carry the load. It is our wish that raising awareness by reaching out to all parents, citizens, and newcomers who have Francophone minority education at heart, while reassuring school boards that their mission will not be jeopardized by adding English and other languages to their websites, will help achieve our ultimate goal: the presence of vibrant and vitally diverse Francophone minority communities throughout the country in years to come.

#### NOTES

1. Although the literature often refers to “exogamous couples” (i.e., one Anglophone and one Francophone parent), in this article, we use the term “mixed union,” representing two individuals with different interlinguistic and/or intercultural backgrounds.
2. The 2008 and 2010 as well as the 2012 and 2014 results of this longitudinal study were published in two French-language scholarly publications (Rocque, 2011, 2015). The general framework of these previous publications was adapted in this article in addition to adding the updated 2016 results. Permission was granted from both publishers. These previous publications are available online (<https://doi.org/10.7202/1014043ar>; <https://doi.org/10.7202/1031243ar>).
3. Francophone minority schools essentially have a dual mandate: providing quality education so that all students can develop their human potential, and contributing to the revitalization and development of Francophone communities.
4. The official voice of the 2.7 million Canadians who speak French in minority milieus in Canada is called the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes du Canada (FCFA). In this article, the term “Francophone” minority is meant to be inclusive of all French-speaking regions in Canada outside of Quebec.
5. Francophone minority schools welcome students from parents who “have the right to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in [the French minority language] in that province [or territory]” as defined in section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Canadian Charter, 1982, s 23(1)(b)). These schools have a different mandate from the French immersion schools that are available to parents who want their children to learn French as an additional language.
6. I wish to thank my research assistants for their help with data collection: Madina Coulibaly (2008), Mélanie Dubois (2010), Rhéa Rocque (2012), and Nicolas Gravel (2016).

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## APPENDIX

### *Pre-identified criteria*

The grid used to analyse the websites consisted of 15 pre-identified criteria which are briefly defined below:

1. “*Link on Homepage*” refers to an “English” button on the first page of the website giving access to information about the school board.
2. “*Words of Welcome*” refers to a short word welcoming non-French-speaking people to the School board and inviting them to “contact us” for more information.
3. “*Vision & Mission*” refers to information about the dual mandate of the school board.
4. “*Admission criteria/Application*” refers to information about admission criteria along with an application form available on-line.
5. “*Communiqués & Reports*” refers to any information the School board wants to share with its readership.
6. “*Info on Mixed Unions*” refers to general information for parents and guardians with different interlinguistic/intercultural backgrounds.
7. “*Role of parents/guardian FL. Ed.*” refers to information directed to mixed unions on how they can contribute to the success of the dual mandate of Francophone minority education.
8. “*Contact name & number*” refers to the resource-person to contact for mixed unions.
9. “*Translation Tool*” refers to an online tool that can translate text from French to another language of choice.
10. “*Language Policy*” refers to the School board’s policy regarding the use of French as the main administrative and teaching language and circumstances/conditions for the use of other languages.
11. “*Transportation Policy*” refers to the policy with regards to school bus transportation services.
12. “*FL. Ed. History*” refers to information on the history of the Francophone minority school system (introduced in 2012).
13. “*Newcomers*” refers to people who have recently arrived to Canada and who want information about Francophone minority education (introduced in 2014).

14. “*Preschool*” refers to information about early childhood education (introduced in 2016).
15. “*Q & R*” refers to general information for people who want to know more about Francophone minority education (introduced in 2016).

JULES ROCQUE has been teaching graduate studies at the Faculty of Education at the Université de Saint-Boniface since 2006. He has held several positions: teacher, principal, consultant, superintendent, trainer, and researcher. He has worked in French Immersion (Manitoba), in English (Baffin Island, Nunavut), and in French (Manitoba and Alberta). He is interested in minority Francophone education in Canada and recognizes the importance of natural allies, including parents, in carrying out the school's mandate. In 2011, he edited a book on the principal and pedagogical leadership in Francophone minority communities. Since 2012, he has been working closely with his counterparts in Haiti to support the development of local leadership capacities in education. [jrocque@ustboniface.ca](mailto:jrocque@ustboniface.ca)

JULES ROCQUE enseigne aux études supérieures à la faculté d'éducation à l'Université de Saint-Boniface depuis 2006. Il a occupé plusieurs postes : enseignant, directeur d'école, conseiller pédagogique, directeur général, formateur et chercheur. Il a travaillé en immersion française (Manitoba), en anglais (Terre de Baffin, Nunavut) et en français (Manitoba et Alberta). Il s'intéresse à l'éducation en milieu francophone minoritaire au Canada et reconnaît l'importance des alliés naturels, notamment les parents, dans la réalisation du mandat de l'école. En 2011, il a assuré la direction d'un livre sur la direction d'école et le leadership pédagogique en milieu francophone minoritaire. Depuis 2012, il travaille en étroite collaboration avec ses homologues en Haïti à soutenir le développement des capacités locales des directions d'école. [jrocque@ustboniface.ca](mailto:jrocque@ustboniface.ca)