

# A Course or a Pathway? Addressing French as a Second Language Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Canadian BEd Programs

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## Abstract

Institutions strive to offer programs that address both the needs of the educational system and incorporate current pedagogical research. Creating a program that is relevant, inspiring, and accessible to aspiring French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers, while also equipping them with the skills and knowledge deemed necessary by the education system, is a delicate balancing act. This study reviewed 44 FSL teacher education programs

that lead to professional certification across Canada. Environmental scans drew information from the program websites related to admission requirements, program structure and content, practicum, and graduation criteria. Follow-up interviews with program stakeholders were conducted to verify or clarify the data. The results highlight the inconsistencies that exist among programs for developing FSL educators. We position the ways in which Canadian faculties of education might provide a more holistic “pathway” approach to recruiting, preparing, and retaining emerging FSL teachers.

*Keywords:* French as a second language, teacher education, admission, language proficiency

### **Résumé**

Les établissements qui préparent les futurs enseignants de français langue seconde (FLS) s'efforcent d'offrir des programmes qui répondent à la fois aux besoins du système éducatif et qui intègrent les recherches pédagogiques actuelles. Créer un programme à la fois pertinent, inspirant et accessible aux futurs enseignants de FLS, tout en les dotant des compétences et des connaissances jugées nécessaires par le système scolaire, est un exercice d'équilibre délicat. Cette étude a examiné 44 programmes de formation des enseignants de FLS qui mènent à la certification professionnelle au Canada. Des analyses de l'environnement ont permis de tirer des informations des sites Web des programmes concernant les conditions d'admission, la structure et le contenu du programme, les stages et les critères d'obtention du diplôme. Des entrevues de suivi avec des intervenants des programmes ont été menées pour vérifier ou clarifier les données. Les résultats mettent en évidence les incohérences qui existent entre les programmes de formation des futurs enseignants de FLS. Nous proposons des moyens par lesquels les facultés d'éducation canadiennes pourraient offrir une approche plus holistique de « parcours » pour recruter, préparer et retenir les nouveaux enseignants de FLS.

*Mots clés :* français langue seconde, formation des enseignants, admission, compétence linguistique

## Introduction

Beyond serving as a requirement to teaching certification, faculties of education play a substantial role in preparing and shaping teachers for their careers (Holden & Kitchen, 2019). In the case of second language (L2) teachers, these expectations also include specific considerations for language educators (Borg, 2006). These differences include target language proficiency (Bayliss & Vignola, 2007), pedagogical strategies related to teaching (in) the target language and through plurilingual approaches (Salvatori & MacFarlane, 2009; Wernicke, 2019), and curricular content knowledge (Turnbull, 2011). In Canada, these programs are offered at universities throughout the country, in English-medium (e.g., UBC), French-medium (e.g., UQAM), and bilingual (e.g., Ottawa) institutions (see Table 1). These programs may be offered as concurrent (i.e., allowing teacher candidates to complete both an undergraduate degree and a Bachelor of Education [BEd] in the same period), consecutive (i.e., for candidates who have already completed an undergraduate degree), or direct entry programs (i.e., where candidates can apply directly to the BEd without requiring an undergraduate degree). Yet, the programs are primarily in English-dominant institutions, located in urban settings, and clustered in certain regions (Jack & Nyman, 2019; Smith & Peller, 2020). This uneven geographic distribution of faculties can compound access challenges for recruiting L2 teachers, as the distance between language minority communities and teacher education programs may discourage applicants (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2019).

While there continues to be rich discussion and critique of Canadian BEd programs broadly, in the case of French as a Second Language (FSL) teacher preparation, there is a lack of comprehensive knowledge of these programs beyond each local, institutional context (Wernicke, 2021). Indeed, little is known about what is expected of FSL teacher candidates entering the program (e.g., academic prerequisites, language proficiency), how the program is delivered, the kinds of practicum opportunities provided, and the supports available to these students.

The environmental scan discussed here is part of a larger study on FSL teacher education—Identifying Requirements and Gaps in FSL Teacher Education—which seeks to gain a better understanding of the standards and practices in place across Canada when it comes to FSL teacher preparation, and the implications this has for recruiting and retaining FSL teachers. The overall study was oriented by the questions:

- What are the standards and practices in FSL teacher preparation programs?
- What strengths, challenges, innovations, and opportunities exist in FSL teacher preparation, mentorship, and retention within faculties of education?

The larger project also included data collection through an online questionnaire and focus groups, in addition to the environmental scan that is the focus of this article. This scan involved a comprehensive analysis of the admission, program, and practicum requirements of 44 Canadian faculties of education that offer FSL teacher preparation courses and programs. This research design allowed for the comparison of standards and practices across different regions (eastern, central, and western). The study adopted an intentionally pan-Canadian view (see Table 1 in Appendix) to highlight the fundamental differences and uniqueness of each region with a view to further strengthen teacher education program design and delivery, and improve outcomes in recruitment and retention.

## **Literature Review**

Although L2 teacher education research has promoted dialogic practices that are enmeshed with classroom realities, how this is reflected in teacher education programs remains underexplored (Johnson, 2015). Indeed, in the Canadian context, numerous challenges and gaps have been identified relating to the preparation (Arnott & Vignola, 2018; Huhn et al., 2021), mentorship (Kastelan-Sikora, 2013; Muhling, 2016), and the retention of FSL teachers (Masson et al., 2019; Swanson, 2012) within specific institutional and regional contexts (for more information on second language education in Canada generally, see Early et al., 2017).

A significant challenge for FSL teachers, many of whom are learners of the language, is to increase and maintain their target language proficiency, as it requires regular opportunities for them to engage in meaningful communication in that language (Borg, 2006). Efforts to support language teacher candidates to develop their proficiency as they prepare for the profession have tended to focus on measuring proficiency for the purposes of program admission (Salvatori, 2009). Early work in this area by Bayliss and Vignola (2000, 2007) in Ontario highlighted that aspiring FSL teachers must therefore begin improving their proficiency long before they consider applying to teacher education pro-

grams. As much as these language proficiency requirements support the success of these teachers as they enter the profession, it can also greatly diminish the number of potentially qualified applicants to these programs.

Alternatively, not all language teacher education programs in Canada require any language proficiency assessments upon admission, and instead rely on grade point averages (GPAs; Masson, Spiliotopoulos, et al., 2021). Such approaches may overlook that teachers' investment in their professional practice requires support that extends throughout the teacher education program (Arnott & Vignola, 2018) and takes into account professional identity and sense of belonging (Masson, 2018; Wernicke, 2017). A lack of recognition for this development can contribute to attrition and retention issues both in the program and the profession.

Similarly, a lack of mentorship is a recognized barrier to language teachers' development and engagement in the profession (Jack & Nyman, 2019), both during and after teacher education. While fostering a culture of collaborative professionalism is fundamental to supporting L2 teachers' professional practices (Jacquet & Dagenais, 2010; Kristmanson et al., 2011; Wernicke, in press) and a key component to lifelong professional learning for teachers of all disciplines (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016), L2 teachers report feelings of isolation, disconnection, and a lack of interaction with experienced colleagues (Masson, 2018). This is augmented by challenges associated with addressing gaps in teacher education, such as inadequate time, underdeveloped partnerships with other stakeholders, availability of candidates and teacher educators, and a lack of institutional support for FSL programming (Jack & Nyman, 2019).

## **Methodology**

The website scans focused on the first research question regarding the standards (both linguistic and curricular) and practices in French teacher education programs. The assumption is that a comparative content and thematic analysis of program standards and requirements across regions and institutions would reveal consistent patterns, noteworthy variability, as well as important gaps in program design and delivery. Data were gathered in spring of 2021 by scanning publicly available information online using a standardized website scan template. Environmental scans (Nagi et al., 2020) were initially conducted for all institutions offering a BEd, or equivalent degree (e.g., Master of Teaching), in

Canada that led to teacher certification. A total of 60 Canadian institutions, including private and faith-based universities, were identified via the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (n.d.) and other lists of Canadian faculties of education (e.g., Smith & Peller, 2020). We identified 19 faculties that did not offer any FSL specialization, and these were removed from the count. We considered programs that offered any kind of dedicated courses and streams that prepare teacher candidates to teach in any FSL program (i.e., Core French, French Immersion, Intensive French, etc.) as having an FSL specialization. In total, 44 university scans of FSL programs (10 eastern, 23 central, 11 western) were completed by the authors. In one case, notable differences were found between two satellite and main campus programs in the Western region (University of Alberta Campus St. Jean and UBC Okanagan). These were therefore counted as separate entries.

Regions were divided based on geographical location across the FSL Teacher Education Consortium (see Table 1 in Appendix). The methodological approach was anchored within a pragmatic paradigm (Mertens, 2020), and the methods and tools were developed to gather information for content analysis about the faculties of education across Canada that offer FSL teacher preparation. All tools and procedures were collaboratively negotiated within and across the teams in the FSL Teacher Education Consortium and applied in the same way throughout each region to support consistent and comprehensive data collection and analysis procedures.

The information in these templates was then compiled into a spreadsheet for comparison. Following this, stakeholders at each institution were contacted in order to verify or provide clarification on the accuracy of the scan. These stakeholders included faculty members, deans and other faculty leadership, support staff, and non-tenure-track course instructors; sometimes multiple stakeholders were included in the conversations to provide further detail. Stakeholders were identified using the information provided on each institutions' website. The respective website scan document was shared with the stakeholder, and in some cases, follow-up conversations via video conference were arranged as part of the member-check process. Confirmations were received from 31 of the 44 institutions (eight eastern, 19 central, five western); we retained all data for the analysis, providing the caveat that not everything was verified by stakeholders. Each institution was sent the request for information three times, including reaching out to the dean or program offices when it was difficult to make contact with someone working in the FSL program. Once information was updated with the help of stakeholders, the teams ana-

lyzed the data they compiled for their region based on the four sections of the template: admission requirements, program information, practicum-specific information, and graduation requirements.

The teams used content and thematic analysis procedures (Saldaña, 2021) to examine commonalities and differences among programs within their assigned regions. Content analysis involved examining numerical information, while thematic analysis involved considering what areas of teacher preparation (e.g., courses, practica) were included, and the manner in which it was delivered at each institution. Local contextual factors were taken into consideration in reporting the findings. The program scans were analyzed for descriptive statistics in SPSS to assess trends and (in)consistencies. Data on different scales (e.g., admission GPA, course credits) were converted to a common unit, using institutional conversion charts whenever possible. Data from the website scans and subsequent member-check interviews were analyzed using qualitative data analysis procedures (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Following this, the syntheses were analyzed in order to determine the main overarching findings (points of intersection and diversion) across regions. A final analysis of the website data involved an interpretive step where the research question was revisited and recommendations and implications were proposed.

## **Results and Discussion**

Here, we provide a critical synthesis and discussion of the data gathered as part of this project. The information is divided and based on the four areas in the website scan: admission requirements, program information, practicum-specific information, and graduation requirements. We begin each subsection by defining or clarifying the terms, presenting the relevant data from a pan-Canadian and region-specific perspective. We then unpack the importance and implications of the findings within each subsection, given the diverse components within each program area. Recommendations and wonderings are also integrated throughout the subsections.

## Admission Requirements

Although admission requirements vary across the country, criteria such as prior grades and some indication of French language proficiency do appear to be considered for entry into almost all teacher education programs in the country. While the variation within these criteria is evident, many programs emphasize the importance of some indicator of academic and linguistic competence.

**Minimum GPA.** The minimum GPAs required to gain admission into the programs could be presented as a letter grade (e.g., “B-”), a percentage (e.g., “mid to low 80s” or “70%”), or a GPA on varying scales (e.g., “2.7 on a 4.0 scale”). GPA scales included 4.0, 4.3, 4.33, 4.5, 10-, and 12-point. Multiple stakeholders noted that the minimum GPAs stated on the websites were commonly higher for FSL programs given the competitive nature of admission. However, the year-to-year variability of the GPAs, and inconsistent stakeholder knowledge of the FSL-specific GPA levels, meant we were required to use the general website information.

The most commonly listed GPA requirement was 70%, generally equivalent to a “B” or 2.7/4.0 ( $n = 17$ ). These GPAs ranged from as low as 60%, to as high as 89% ( $M = 0.68$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ). In the eastern regions, a qualifying GPA ranged from 2.3–3.0 on a 4.3 scale. Similarly, when listed, GPA requirements in the western region were between 2.33–3.0 on a 4.5 scale. In the central region, GPAs in the programs in Manitoba were reported as 2.5/4.5 (a C+). In Saskatchewan, GPAs ranged from 60% to 70%, with higher averages required for the concurrent programs. In Ontario, most programs posted their GPA minimum as 70%, B or B- range, or 2.7/4.0, although higher GPA requirements ranged from 75% to 89%. In Quebec, GPA requirements ranged from 65% to 80%.

Twelve institutions across the country relied primarily on GPAs for admission, rather than language proficiency, though they may be supported by other non-academic assessments (e.g., letters of support) which might take language into account. Stakeholders were divided on whether students who did not meet the GPA threshold would still be eligible for admission given the demand for FSL teachers. Some programs made concessions for those with the required language proficiency, but fell short of the GPA cutoff, while others were unable to do so given the demand for seats in their FSL program. This meant these programs would prioritize GPA over language proficiency. Further, most institutions offering consecutive programs did not appear to take into consideration whether



a student had pursued a degree program in a discipline (i.e., biology) in a French-medium program, or had majored in French.

GPA's are noted as the most common admission requirement in Canadian teacher education (Holden & Kitchen, 2016). Yet, research has long speculated that prior grades are not a reliable predictor of pedagogical competence (see Ackley et al., 2007; Casey & Childs, 2011). For language programs in particular, GPA's are also not a reliable indicator of students' language proficiency as they represent the composite score of potentially many different criteria (Dewaele, 2007). Especially in the institutions which did not test for language proficiency (see section below), this trend heavily weighs the GPA over the applicant's language ability, motivation, and their general potential as an educator—all of which are key to an FSL teacher candidate's success (Masson, Battistuzzi, & Bastien, 2021; Salvatori & MacFarlane, 2009). When considering that these programs may certify teachers across FSL, French immersion, and even francophone contexts, focusing on the GPA instead of language proficiency is still a potential barrier for widening participation in French teacher education in Canada (Jack & Nyman, 2019).

***French language proficiency assessments.*** Language proficiency assessments were noted whenever admission criteria extended beyond the completion of previous French courses (e.g., Grade 12 FSL, or a number of undergraduate French courses) or prior French-medium education (e.g., transcript from a francophone high school or university). These assessments broadly fit into either international, standardized written and oral examinations (e.g., DELF/DALF, TCF, TFI<sup>1</sup>) or in-house equivalencies. Thirty-one programs (70%) required a language proficiency assessment. Fourteen of these programs use a standardized test, whereas 15 require students to complete a test that is administered within the institution (i.e., conducted in-house). Two institutions allowed for either standardized or in-house tests. Ten central and three western institutions did not seem to require a French language assessment at all in their admissions process.

Minimum linguistic standards—the equivalent of an Upper Intermediate (B2) level on the CEFR scale—were similar across most institutions. More specifically, in the east, the two main standardized assessments are the OPI, based on the ACTFL scale,

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1 Common tests included: DELF (Diplôme d'études en langue française), DALF (Diplôme approfondi de langue française), TCF (Test de connaissance du français), TFI (Test de français international), TEF (Test d'évaluation de français), and OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview).

and the DELF assessment. B2.1 appears to be the minimum standard for entry into the FSL specialization while Intermediate Plus seems to be the minimum OPI standard for taking FSL courses. However, a minimum of Advanced (or B2.2) is usually required for an FSL practicum in a non-immersion classroom, and an Advanced Plus (C1) for a French immersion placement. Somewhat similarly, in the west, requirements ranged from DELF B1 or equivalent for the elementary core French level, to DALF C1 or equivalent for secondary French immersion or francophone schools. Showing the greatest variety, the standardized tests accepted in the central region included a score of 785/990 on the TFI, or a level of B2 to C1 on the written and oral tests of the TEF, TCF, or DELF/DALF. OPIs may also be used to assess students in interview-only exams.

Despite this, only six institutions use this information to allow students to register in intensive French and French immersion teaching streams. If students in these institutions perform above the B2, they will be able to conduct their practicum in these more linguistically advanced settings. Some universities ( $n = 13$ ) required an Advanced Plus (C1) level to be placed in French immersion, and others ( $n = 3$ ) used the C1 level for placement in francophone schools. In other programs, students' language proficiency and perceived ability to work in intensive, immersion, or francophone settings is either left to the student to self-select or determined informally based on the judgement of course instructors.

Despite some general consistency across the country about the minimum level of proficiency (B2, Advanced) required to teach in FSL programs, there are some notable variations and caveats to this apparent rule of thumb. For example, as previously noted, some institutions may espouse a desired standard but do not necessarily require any admissions testing. Additionally, some institutions might accept a B1 student into course work in FSL but require a minimum of B2 for a practicum in an FSL environment. The rationale cited for this particular decision is the idea that these institutions believe that B1 provides a good linguistic base on which to enhance language proficiency and therefore there is a commitment at the teacher education level to encourage this professional linguistic growth. However, without a solid linguistic foundation, teacher candidates may not be set up for success in their program, placing them at a disadvantage (Bayliss & Vignola, 2007). In one eastern program, if the student is not able to achieve this proficiency level during the program, they can still do their practicum in English (if elementary) or in their second teachable area (if secondary), thus giving these students a methodological concentration in FSL, but not the FSL specialization and certification. Moreover, some institutions indi-

cated that there are lower language standards for an FSL practicum in core or intensive French (B2) than for French immersion (C1). This approach may perpetuate the perception that core and intensive French are “lesser” FSL programs (see Knouzi & Mady, 2014).

One additional noteworthy finding relates to the difficulty stakeholders reported in finding FSL teacher candidates who have both subject matter expertise (e.g., mathematics, sciences) and adequate language proficiency. Some institutions no longer require French courses, only adequate language proficiency, for teacher candidates who are destined for subject area teaching in French immersion. One institution that requires either a French degree or a French major is actually reconsidering this requirement for those who do not want to teach French language arts in immersion, but rather teach specific subjects in French, especially math and science. Because of an urgent need for qualified French immersion teachers in general, and for these disciplines in particular, initial teacher education (ITE) programs must find creative solutions throughout the experience to prepare teacher candidates to meet these demands.

## Program Information

Institutions stated the length of the programs in various ways—such as terms, semesters, months, or (academic) years. To support comparison, we have chosen to use semesters as a common denominator. Of the 62 FSL programs<sup>2</sup>, 66% ( $n = 41$ ) of the programs were classified as consecutive programs, and most were around two years ( $M = 1.85$ ;  $SD = 0.65$ ). Thirty percent ( $n = 19$ ) were concurrent programs, most commonly five years long ( $M = 5.18$ ;  $SD = 0.36$ ), but could extend to six years to provide Honours designation in the non-BEd degree. In addition, 3% ( $n = 2$ ) were direct entry programs—where students only receive a BEd degree, without the need for a prior or concurrent undergraduate degree, but are certified to teach.

***FSL specialization courses.*** The number of required FSL-specific theory and methodology courses, and whether these courses were offered in French, was inconsistent. Most institutions have one or two semester-long courses ( $M = 2.4$ ,  $SD = 2.13$ ), while some programs in Quebec have as many as nine or 12. In institutions with only one or two courses, these courses are general, all-encompassing introductions to teaching a second

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2 As nine universities offered multiple program models, the number of programs is therefore larger than the number of institutions. This difference is only relevant to this section.

language. The number of available courses is, undoubtedly, constrained by the length of the program (i.e., the opportunities within a six-year program will outnumber those of an 11-month program); yet, the tendency for programs to offer only a few FSL courses regardless of length begs further scrutiny. As a note, FSL courses were usually offered in addition to the standard program requirements; FSL teacher candidates therefore obtain more than the standard credit count, and complete more coursework than their peers.

Not all institutions differentiated between FSL and French immersion. Some institutions ( $n = 5$ ) offer more specialization in terms of teaching FSL (i.e., core French or intensive French), which prepares teachers to teach the language as a subject, or French immersion, which prepares teachers to teach content in French. However, the approach of the majority of institutions is to offer FSL methods courses that focus on literacies in French across the various programs and curricula.

Whether these FSL-specific courses, or any others in the program, are taught in French also varied. This information was largely clarified by program stakeholders, as website course descriptions were often in English and did not indicate the language of instruction. Several stakeholders explained that whether any courses in the program were taught in French was subject to the availability of a proficient sessional instructor, and therefore not guaranteed. Very few English-medium institutions offered courses in French on how to teach specific content areas (e.g., math, science, social studies, etc.), relying instead on the English-language course equivalences despite differences in curriculum. There was some evidence of collaboration among instructors working in FSL and their colleagues specializing in a particular content area in order to offer French immersion specialists more insights into this particular teaching context—however, this was largely voluntary work of those instructors, rather than being initiated by the institution.

In the eastern region, students in the elementary stream typically either had two or three FSL-specific courses taught in French. Similarly, students in the secondary stream were required to take one to three FSL methods courses; however, many consecutive programs in the eastern region offered three courses in FSL to their secondary specialists. One eastern university did not have any FSL courses. In contrast, almost half of the universities ( $n = 6$ ) in the western region did not have FSL-specific teacher education programs; rather, the program design generally involved one theory or methodology course—often described as a “second” or “modern” language education course—which can involve the preparation of teachers in languages in addition to French. Where the

option existed (e.g., the Faculté St. Jean), the FSL theory or methodology course was an integrated requirement of the degree program. The number of required FSL theory and methodology courses in the central region, outside of Quebec, commonly ranged between one and three courses. Nine programs required one course, and seven programs required two courses. Eight programs required a different number of courses for the various FSL streams (i.e., core, immersion), with fewer courses required for core teachers.

These trends highlight the inconsistent instruction of FSL methodology or curriculum courses in French across the country. Outside of francophone institutions, the FSL methodology course(s) might be the only course(s) that students receive in French during their ITE. There is, therefore, with the exception of Francophone institutions, a lack of discipline-specific courses taught in French apparent in the data. With only very few exceptions, most anglophone institutions reported only being able to offer FSL courses in French, due to the availability of French-speaking instructors or demand within the program. These findings are consistent with recent research on French teacher education and professional learning in and through content-based instruction (Le Bouthillier et al., 2022, Cammarata & Cavanagh, 2018; Cammarata et al., 2018). Moreover, we remarked that, in contrast to programs with only one FSL course, the programs with three or more courses had the liberty to explore different aspects of language education in greater depth, including: teaching methods, language modalities, assessment, inclusive education, and the contextualization of second language education in minority settings. Furthermore, we also noted frequent reliance on contract instructors to cover FSL courses. Although we acknowledge that sessional instructors can bring professional expertise and experience into the programs, stakeholders reported this has also limited opportunities for advocacy, stability, and consistency of the FSL specialization, and has diminished its perception within the larger ITE program. Such feelings of being overlooked are well-established in FSL literature (e.g., Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Smith & Arnott, 2021).

***Co-curricular and other supports.*** Nine of the 44 institutions reported providing co-curricular offerings beyond coursework intended to support emerging language teachers. Notable initiatives within a few institutions included cohorts for FSL teachers ( $n = 2$ ), workshops related to FSL education ( $n = 3$ ), study abroad ( $n = 1$ ), mentorship between pre- and in-service teachers beyond the practicum ( $n = 1$ ), and encouraging students to submit assignments in French in certain general courses ( $n = 1$ ). Most activities ( $n = 5$ ) were designed to bolster students' language competence and confidence.

In the eastern region, some ( $n = 4$ ) English-medium institutions paired pre-service teachers seeking a French specialization with a practicum supervisor who is proficient in French who could also serve as a linguistic mentor. Community placements were available in five of the 10 faculties where students may complete sub-specializations in other areas by taking an additional practicum course. In terms of linguistic supports: two universities offered certificates to those completing coursework and/or a practicum focused on FSL teaching; three faculties have introduced additional non-credit opportunities to strengthen students' French language; and, one of the francophone universities offered additional support to students for whom French is an additional language. Only three universities in the eastern region did not identify linguistic supports that were over and above the courses in French.

In contrast, only three institutions in the western region offer additional credit-bearing and non-credit bearing coursework, such as a French for Professional Oral Communication language course, and additional weekend or evening workshops and tutorials throughout the year. In the central region, one institution offers peer support, social activities, and communities of inquiry for teacher candidates in an FSL cohort. There, activities include networking opportunities in the field of FSL, workshops targeting L2 methods, and supporting FSL lesson planning. Another central institution provides an ongoing learning series which intersects FSL and Indigenous education with the support of an Elder.

Although language proficiency was a concern for many ITE stakeholders, there was a notable lack of varied co-curricular offerings and supports specific to FSL. Most ITEs saw basic pedagogical training as their focus or felt that there was not enough time, especially in consecutive programs, to also focus on language. In addition to time constraints, there seemed to be other barriers to adding targeted FSL professional learning in the French language to the ITE programs that warrant further exploration. One of the considerations that stemmed from these findings is for the institutions to liaise with national FSL organizations (ACPI, CPF, CASLT) to provide relevant training and resources to FSL teachers. Stakeholders noted that it was more challenging to engage students in co-curricular activities in consecutive ITE programs that are less than a year long. Students in these intensive programs have heavy schedules and numerous assignments. With this type of program design, future research may wish to consider whether co-curricular activities that are specifically targeted at supporting teacher candidates during their practicum have increased uptake.

One important finding is the growing importance that ITEs placed on providing support and language development opportunities beyond the admission requirement. As mentioned, initiatives such as co-curricular weekly language improvement sessions as well as extracurricular activities that encourage the use of French have been uncovered in these data. This promising practice speaks to the important role that ITEs can play in not only the pedagogical growth journey of teacher candidates, but also in their linguistic development (Le Bouthillier et al., 2022; Bayliss & Vignola, 2007). These data have led us to propose that ITE programs could reframe language proficiency requirements as more developmental, encouraging participation from teacher candidates with diverse linguistic backgrounds (Byrd-Clark et al, 2014; Faez, 2011; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). Although we advocate for reinforcing some initial linguistic standard as a baseline, teacher candidates would benefit from ongoing access and engagement in French as part of their professional development, rather than a unified “checkbox” admission standard.

## **Practicum**

The amount of time students spend in their practice teaching settings could be calculated in hours, days, or weeks. This information was infrequently posted on program websites, and was not always known by our contacts. Conversion between the units was complicated by the ways in which fractions of days or weeks were considered by the institutions (i.e., is a “half day” or a “partial week” the same across universities?). We therefore chose to approximate aspects of the practicum as a percentage of the program’s overall practicum length. As previously mentioned, in large part, the French proficiency levels required for practicum were the same as, or slightly higher than, the proficiency levels required for program admission.

The length of practicum often ranged from 15 to 26 weeks. These weeks may be divided over two to five placements. Particularly important for this study, the amount of time students spend in a language-focused classroom for their practice teaching varied considerably. The most common ( $n = 12$ ) allocation was for students to spend 25% of their practicum in language settings, although the average is higher overall ( $M = 0.55$ ,  $SD = 0.30$ ). Other programs aimed for 50% ( $n = 9$ ), and even 100% ( $n = 10$ ) of practica in FSL in order to immerse students in relevant contexts. Many stakeholders were honest in stating that the percentage of time in FSL was not guaranteed, or were unaware of a minimum requirement, as placements depended on the availability of partner teachers. It was



therefore possible, and reportedly had occurred in some institutions, that FSL teachers could complete their programs and be certified despite having no practice teaching experience in an FSL classroom.

In the east, four faculties, including the two francophone institutions, offered programs that include practicum placements fully in French. Most students in an FSL specialty need a minimum 50% of their practicum in French. However, especially for French immersion at the elementary level, 100% of the practicum is usually in French. In the west, most programs at the elementary level offer 80 to 100% of the practicum in French. At the secondary level, the practicum can be 50% in French (depending on the other teachable subject) to 100% in French. The central region average ranged from 25–30%, with only one placement in FSL being expected/guaranteed. Four central programs guaranteed 40–50% of practicum time in FSL, and three guaranteed 100%.

The findings from this theme again suggest that there is great diversity in terms of amount of exposure to FSL during the practicum experience. Although it might seem evident that the more time teacher candidates are exposed to and using the French language, the more beneficial it will be when they begin their careers as FSL teachers, there are obvious benefits to having varied practicum experiences (i.e., in different teachable areas or at different grade levels). Future research may consider whether 25% is sufficient to orient these students to the L2 classroom. Given trends in the hiring of FSL teachers (i.e., high demand as well as an inability to transition out of FSL even if the teacher wants to—see Jack & Nyman, 2019), it would seem desirable to offer the majority of placements and practicum time in FSL settings. Given the widely accepted impactful nature of practica in the early professional development of teachers (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2006), it is crucial that aspiring FSL teachers maximize relevant field experiences in ITE. It has long been established that the practicum not only provides a context for pedagogical learning for FSL teachers, it also provides needed linguistic learning (Ullman & Hainsworth, 1991; Masson, Battistuzzi, & Bastien, 2021). Working collaboratively with schools and school boards to ensure both pedagogical and linguistic scaffolding during the practicum experience would indeed contribute positively to the professional growth of FSL teacher candidates. As underscored by Kastelan-Sikora (2013), Masson (2018), and Wernicke (in press), thoughtful and intentional supports for both the pedagogical and language skills of beginning FSL teachers can set them on a path more conducive to career success and, hopefully, retention.



## **Graduation Requirements**

In general, students graduate from their BEd program after the successful completion of courses, practicum experiences, and maintaining a set GPA. In addition to this, six of the 44 programs reported graduation requirements for FSL teacher candidates beyond the completion of their coursework and practicum placements. Four of these six (two eastern, one central, one western) were solely related to language proficiency, and ensuring that students (still) demonstrate the required mastery. The other two (one eastern, one central) include a “capstone” course—which we understand to be a culminating course at the end of the program that is designed to consolidate and demonstrate student learning—requiring teachers to complete projects that highlight their pedagogical and linguistic skills, and readiness to enter the profession as L2 educators. Stakeholders from other institutions usually considered their FSL courses part of the program, but not necessarily as a “capstone” to the program.

Although there is a lack of research on the topic, we found it interesting that while there were 32 universities requiring entrance language assessments, only four programs had a language proficiency assessment as part of the graduation requirement. We position this finding in light of research that points to the difficulty that school boards report in finding qualified and linguistically adept teachers, even among those with FSL specializations (Jack & Nyman, 2019). Although we certainly do not advocate for testing students at every turn, nor for using language proficiency results as a hard-and-fast rule for success in the program, we wonder about the extent that ITEs are responsible or accountable for teacher candidates’ linguistic competence upon graduation. Initiatives such as the language portfolio or other types of portfolio-based assessment for teachers can provide a more developmental approach toward preparedness and transition upon graduation (Arnott & Vignola, 2018; Christiansen & Laplante, 2004; Turnbull, 2011).

Within a more inquiry-focused framework (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), universities could be further strengthening connections with professionals in local communities and generating their own research within their particular practice contexts. This initiative might serve the purposes of ongoing improvement and address broader social justice goals. Specific to FSL, we position that mentoring networks between districts and the university should be systematic and financially supported, and FSL-focused inquiry projects need to be recognized by both universities and the field. Furthermore, universities

should clarify and explain entrance and graduation requirements to administrators in the field who hire FSL educators, especially in more Anglo-dominant contexts where administrators may not: (i) speak French, (ii) be familiar with standardized language assessments, or (iii) understand second language learning methodologies. For example, a guide has been created by a university program to explain the different levels of language proficiency of the CEFR to administrators, teachers, and parents, in order to contextualize the entrance requirements to teach in the different types of programs (Simon Fraser University, n.d.).

### **Conclusion and Future Directions**

This study provides a much-needed synthesis of current features in the design and delivery of Canadian FSL teacher education programs, drawing on both publicly available data and stakeholder perceptions. Initial teacher preparation programs are part of the life-long learner journey for candidates (Gambhir et al., 2008). Valuing and leveraging prior learning and experiences along with encouraging continued learning and building bridges with other stakeholders are crucial for FSL teacher recruitment and retention (e.g., Masson et al., 2019; Wernicke et al., forthcoming). This study highlights the core features and initiatives in French teacher education, as well as the challenges and inconsistencies that become apparent when reviewing these programs on a national scale. With limited pan-Canadian dialogue to support language minority teacher education, we are advancing regional conversations to generate connection and stability within and across these programs. Without this, we will continue to have a vast discrepancy around the expectations and requirements for FSL teacher education across the country.

Despite the exceptions explored above, we feel compelled to highlight that the most common approach to FSL teacher education across Canadian institutions is to offer a singular “add on” course and to include one FSL practicum experience, rather than integrating these aspects into the teacher education curriculum. In light of the literature that details the challenges of recruiting, preparing, and retaining FSL teachers as they enter the field (e.g., Ewart, 2009; Jack & Nyman, 2019; Masson, 2018; Salvatori, 2009), we argue this “bare minimum” is insufficient for addressing this issue. Current approaches may not adequately address the concern that some FSL teachers may be graduating without the linguistic competence, confidence, and pedagogical knowledge to thrive and

remain in the profession (Jack & Nyman, 2019). ITE programs can provide an excellent venue for not only equipping FSL teacher candidates pedagogically but facilitating the pathway to linguistic development as well.

Although a baseline level of proficiency is necessary in order to set teacher candidates up for success, viewing ITE as a player in linguistic mentorship is also crucial. If language levels are too low, it can put teacher candidates in a precarious position in their practicum and may set them up for later failure. Conversely, if we frame the B1 language level as a positive foundation on which to begin their professional journey toward being an FSL teacher, we can also frame ITE as a highly targeted and contextualized way to embed a focus on language. It might also be wise to consider that although teacher candidates may be able to take some FSL methods courses and engage in co-curricular or extracurricular linguistic improvement sessions, limited language proficiency might preclude an FSL practicum. Finally, if the teacher candidate is ready for an FSL practicum, having a practicum teacher and supervisor who can also serve as linguistic mentors would be an ideal scaffold toward success for beginning FSL teachers.

Stakeholders in this study often recognized the potential to do more, but were stalled in or unsure of how to develop co-curricular and program supports. Limited by resources, the dominant program ITE model is ultimately aimed at generalist teacher education. Often the FSL pedagogy course(s) were perceived to be overlooked by the faculties. Along with the other findings we have presented, this suggests a need to address the way that systemic issues are impacting program delivery, and, as a result, FSL teacher recruitment and retention into teacher education programs. For instance, programmatic design may create the feeling of FSL teacher preparation as an “add-on,” which may not be appealing for new recruits, or system-level hiring decisions may create barriers to fostering programmatic cohesion due to courses being run by sessional instructors. These barriers can restrict the support teacher candidates receive and the attention given to FSL courses in the larger program structure.

Instead, based on our analysis of the programs and stakeholder feedback, we advocate for more fully developed, holistically minded FSL pathways, which draw on the strengths of initiatives across the country to support and develop FSL teacher candidates. This can include having multiple courses and practicum placements to support understanding of the unique context of the L2 classroom, the associated pedagogy, and the rele-

vant teaching skills; providing co-curricular activities such as workshops, peer groups or cohorts, and mentoring opportunities, which provide linguistic and collegial support and development; as well as connection between pre-service and in-service FSL teachers as they enter the field.

For this to occur, faculties of education need to make significant investments in (re)designing FSL teacher preparation programs that attract new recruits and prepare candidates for successful entry and long-term retention into the profession. One major hurdle we anticipate is a lack of funding, resources, and time allocated to addressing the systemic barriers we highlighted. Targeted funding from provincial and federal agencies to support FSL teacher education programs could be used to:

1. maximize opportunities, both formal and informal, to learn, teach, and speak in French with these teacher education programs;
2. offer positive and collaborative opportunities during in-course, practica, and co-curricular experiences to develop and enhance both linguistic and pedagogical knowledge synergistically;
3. develop a strategic and intentional approach to making both pedagogical and linguistic gains during the teacher education program;
4. implement a culture of career-long professional learning founded in collaboration, within and across teacher education institutions, and between educational stakeholders; and
5. systematically centre FSL teacher identity construction to anticipate the well-documented disenfranchisement of FSL teachers, as well as dispelling myths related to native speaker norms.

While the overarching findings and implications for the study highlight the large degree of variability within and across regions in the areas of language proficiency, program design, practicum, and program supports, the results also echo questions in the research literature: What systemic barriers impede FSL teacher recruitment and retention? What opportunities and support can be developed to address short- and long-term improvements? Where does accountability lie among stakeholders in terms of addressing high teacher attrition rates after graduation?

Turning to the larger context, because we are operating with a system-level crisis, these findings raise serious questions about the ways in which neo-liberal policies—which depend on market-like forces regulating educational decision-making—are sha-

ping program development and delivery (Kumashiro, 2010). With market forces at play when it comes to hiring decisions and course offering decisions, where does social responsibility lie when it comes to making systemic and programmatic changes to FSL teacher education in higher education? University leadership plays a key role in determining where attention, resources, and funding are allocated. Our data has shown that in some institutions, French education is not top of mind amongst the senior leadership, where the real power lies in terms of making meaningful changes to address the FSL teacher shortage. We have learned that when governments do provide more funding for these programs, accountability measures and other quality assurance processes come into play, so this might be something to consider as a consequence of requesting more funding. These remain empirical as well as policy-related questions (Johnson, 2015) that will require additional study and analysis into how programs can address gaps and develop requirements of French language teacher education in the Canadian context.

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## Appendix

**Table 1**

*List of Canadian Universities Reviewed Which Offer FSL Teaching Specialization and Certification (Organized by Geographical Location from East to West)*

Region	University
<b>Eastern Canada</b>	
Newfoundland & Labrador	Memorial
Prince Edward Island	PEI
New Brunswick	Moncton
New Brunswick	St. Thomas
New Brunswick	New Brunswick
New Brunswick	Crandall
Nova Scotia	Acadia
Nova Scotia	Mt. St. Vincent
Nova Scotia	Sainte-Anne
Nova Scotia	St. Francis Xavier
<b>Central Canada</b>	
Quebec	McGill
Quebec	Montréal
Quebec	Québec à Montréal (UQAM)
Ontario	Brock
Ontario	Lakehead
Ontario	Laurentian
Ontario	Nipissing
Ontario	Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)-UToronto
Ontario	Ottawa
Ontario	Queen's
Ontario	Redeemer
Ontario	Trent
Ontario	Tyndale

Ontario	Western
Ontario	Wilfrid Laurier
Ontario	Windsor
Ontario	York - Glendon College
Manitoba	Brandon
Manitoba	Manitoba
Manitoba	Sainte-Boniface
Manitoba	Winnipeg
Saskatchewan	Regina
Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan
<b>Western Canada</b>	
Alberta	Alberta - Edmonton (North Campus)
Alberta	Alberta - Campus St. Jean
Alberta	Calgary
British Columbia	Fraser Valley
British Columbia	Simon Fraser
British Columbia	Thompson Rivers
British Columbia	Trinity Western
British Columbia	British Columbia - Vancouver Campus
British Columbia	British Columbia - Okanagan Campus
British Columbia	Vancouver Island
British Columbia	Victoria

*Notes.* Although teacher education programs are offered in the territories, none of these institutions offer an FSL/L2 teacher specialization, which was the focus of these scans.

Although Laurentian's FSL teacher education program has since been closed, in solidarity and in recognition of the important work this program provided to communities in the area, we have retained the data in our analysis.