



Executive Summaries of Masters Research

Francophone Minority Student Achievement on Grade 12 Exams in a Rural British Columbia High School

Roger Lagasse,
M.Ed. Thesis, UBC, 2005

Author Biographical Information.

Name: Roger Lagassé
Current Occupation: School Principal, BC School District No. 93
(Conseil Scolaire Francophone)
Universities attended: B.A., U of Manitoba; B.Ed., U of Calgary, M.Ed.: UBC
Other: Aboriginal Education Coordinator for B.C. School District 93

E-mail: roger_lagasse@csf.bc.ca

Abstract

Only about half of the Francophone students eligible for Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 23) mandated official language minority education enrol in Francophone schools. Some parents worry that if their children attend the Francophone program they may not develop strong enough English skills to compete in the Anglo-dominant work environment. B.C. Grade 12 French, English and Math Provincial exam results were examined to determine whether students attending BC's Francophone schools achieved lower exam scores relative to the general Anglophone student population.

Exam scores from Section 23 students in the Francophone Programme and Section 23 students not in the Francophone Programme at Chatelech Secondary were collected for the years 2000 to 2005. The data do not indicate any disadvantage to participating in the Francophone programme. If anything, Francophone school graduates demonstrate, on the whole, higher scores than the BC average in English and Math. Strategies to encourage participation are discussed.



Executive Summaries of Masters Research

Francophone Minority Student Achievement on Grade 12 Exams in a Rural British Columbia High School

Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine B.C. Francophone student achievement as measured on Grade 12 Provincial Exams in French, English and Math and to compare the results with the general student population to determine whether participation in bilingual education is associated with higher or lower achievement overall or whether there is no effect. Francophone students' marks on provincial examinations at Chatelech Secondary (Francophone) were tabulated over five years from 2000 to 2005 and the results were graphed for comparison. The exam marks of Section 23 students registered in the Francophone program and eligible students registered in English-only programmes were compared. Provincial comparisons were obtained by examining the results of Francophone students in School District No. 93 (Conseil Scolaire Francophone) relative to the provincial averages.

Although the Francophone program group achieved higher averages in English and Math, the difference between Canadian Charter of Rights Section 23 eligible students enrolled in the Francophone programme at Chatelech Secondary and those not enrolled in the Francophone programme is not statistically significant. ($P > 0,050$) The French exam results cannot be compared because the two groups wrote different exams.

The Francophone Programme students at Chatelech Secondary do not appear to be disadvantaged in terms of their English and Math Provincial Exam achievement over the past five years. Their average English and Math scores and participation rates actually surpass the provincial rate. While it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from such a small sample (N=27 Francophone students in the Francophone program, N=28 Francophone students in the Anglophone Program) these results are consistent with district average exam results covering other Francophone schools in the Province. Francophone students in the CSF district surpass the provincial norms in Math and English. Other studies from provinces in Canada and from states in the US have also found no disadvantage and even a slight advantage to bilingual education.

Parents at Chatelech considering enrolling their children in the Conseil Scolaire Francophone's schools will be encouraged to know that the data do not indicate any disadvantage to participating in the Francophone programme in terms of English and Math success. Français Langue Première (FRALP) test scores are very low at Chatelech however, probably due to the relatively limited amount of time in French in the last 3 years of secondary schooling. Other factors are also at play including the lack of Francophone infrastructure in the community where little French is spoken outside the school. OECD assessments also allude to the lack of community infrastructure for official language minorities outside of Québec as possibly influencing some French Reading outcomes at the national level (Council of Ministers of Education 2003:97).



Executive Summaries of Masters Research

The design of the FRALP tests themselves may be an issue. Tests appear to be too difficult for the setting. It is essential that designers of exams aimed at assessing the abilities of Francophone minority students outside of Québec take into account the context in which minorities live. In the past few years, I have seen French Language Arts tests aimed at Francophone minority children that were far too difficult. One Grade Seven Francophone teacher at a local elementary school, who graduated from a Francophone university in Québec and moved to BC to teach in CSF schools, commented that provincial Foundation Skills Assessment tests she had to administer to her Gr. 7's would have been considered too lengthy even for a class of Francophone students in Québec! Perhaps the Ministry of Education ought to employ teachers experienced in and understanding of official language minority settings as consultants when designing these tests.

In order to increase enrolment of Section 23 students in minority Francophone schools, particularly at the secondary level, the CSF has already implemented some of the recommendations that could be drawn from Lemoine's study of attrition in BC's Francophone secondary schools. With the introduction of the *Passeport communautaire francophone*, students from Grade 8 to 12 have access to a variety of special experiences aimed at helping them develop a greater sense of community with other Francophones at the provincial and inter-provincial levels. Extra-curricular sports, cultural and outdoor education activities at the district level are being instituted in order to provide enriching experiences normally not available in French at the community level.

Improved bussing, increased quantity and variety of teaching resources, more professional development opportunities for teachers and greater sensitization of teachers to the particular cultural and linguistic context of the Francophone community in British Columbia are also strategies which could have a positive impact on recruitment and retention of students in the minority Francophone schools in the province.