

## **Some Long Term Lessons From Minority Language Education in Ontario**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper reports on a comparative and longitudinal study of French-language minority access to higher education in Ontario. The province of Ontario provides homogeneous French-language and bilingual 'mixed' schools at the elementary and secondary levels as well as bilingual institutions at the tertiary level. Since 1990, there has been a homogeneous French language college serving the Eastern region of the province, to which was added two new colleges in 1995. While French-language programs are available throughout the province, it remains that English language programs and institutions are usually more accessible both geographically and regarding the depth and variety of programs.

Experience has shown that in this particular minority language setting, it is the offer of minority language educational services that creates the demand, rather than the converse. Thus, the provision of French-medium programs is followed by an increase in minority enrollments and the preference for French-medium programs, even though English-medium programs are more numerous and more convenient. The reduction of French-medium programs is followed by the decline of minority enrollments, even though Francophones are clearly bilingual and in many cases even more at ease in the majority language than in their mother tongue.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article rend compte d'une recherche comparative et longitudinale effectuée en Ontario. L'Ontario assure des enseignements en français dans des écoles homogènes et des écoles "mixtes" au niveaux élémentaire et secondaire, de même que dans des établissements bilingues au niveau tertiaire. Depuis 1990, il existe également un collège de langue française desservant l'Est de la province, auquel on a ajouté en 1995 deux nouveaux collèges de langue française desservant, respectivement, le Nord-Est et le Nord-Ouest, puis le Centre et le Sud-Ouest. S'il est vrai que les programmes en langue française sont disponibles partout sur le territoire, il n'en demeure pas moins que les programmes en langue anglaise sont plus accessibles et du point de vue géographique et du point de vue de leur ampleur et leur intensité.

L'expérience a démontré qu'en ce qui concerne l'enseignement en langue minoritaire, c'est *l'offre* des programmes en français qui crée la demande plutôt que l'inverse. Ainsi, la prestation des programmes en français est suivie par une augmentation de l'inscription francophone, surtout dans les programmes offerts en français, même si les programmes en anglais sont en général plus nombreux et plus accessibles. La réduction des programmes en français est suivie par une réduction de l'effectif francophone, même si, en général, les francophones de l'Ontario sont manifestement bilingues et souvent plus à l'aise en anglais qu'en français.

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## INTRODUCTION

It was more than thirty years ago that the then Premier of Ontario, John Robarts, declared before the assembled representatives of the French-language community of the province that his Conservative government was prepared to provide legal status for French-language education, thus regularizing a situation that had existed at the primary level since the 17th century. The government was even prepared to provide for secondary education in French, provided that the new French-language secondary schools were located in the public, rather than the separate schools of the province (Robarts, 1967).<sup>1</sup> The change of public policy from those earlier years of the 20th century in which the provincial government had actively sought to suppress education in French and the period of benign neglect beginning with the Merchant Report of 1927

was no doubt influenced by the burgeoning spirit of nationalism in Québec and the resultant threat to Canadian unity. It was also the result of the spirit of the times which saw unequal access to educational resources as a scandal and an economic liability (Marginson, 1997).

At the end of the 1960s the burning issue for Francophone leaders was that of the public funding of French-language secondary schools. There had always been significant numbers of French-language elementary schools which, because of the British North America Act, enjoyed a certain measure of constitutional protection given that the quasi-totality of French-language elementary schools were separate schools (Godbout, 1972; Martel, 1991). At the time of the Robarts address there were some 93,000 pupils enrolled in 389 French-language Roman Catholic elementary schools and an additional 2,500 in French-language public elementary schools. University level access appeared to be ensured by the institutions then, and still, engaged in providing programs in French: the University of Ottawa, Laurentian University of Sudbury, to which was added not long after Glendon College at York University in Toronto. At the time, however, the few private French-language secondary schools were disappearing rapidly and the secondary level was seen as the weak link in the chain (Bordeleau, 1983a; Bordeleau, Lallier, & Lalonde, 1980). Some 8,700 students took *français* and a few other subjects in French in some 40 public secondary schools of the province (Robarts, 1967). Once that chain were reestablished, it was felt that access to post-secondary studies would quite normally fall into place.

Meanwhile, the Ontario government was setting up a system of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology which was to take place, by and large, outside the purview of Franco-Ontarian leaders. They were more preoccupied with the issue of secondary schools and, in any case, the creation of a technological form of tertiary education was quite unfamiliar to them. Franco-Ontarian educators were thus late in understanding the importance of the college phenomenon. As a result, six of the colleges in various regions of the province were given a bilingual mandate some time after the period of the new secondary schools (Algonquin College in Ottawa was the only college to be founded with a bilingual mandate) and were to provide varying degrees of French-language programs (ACORD, 1989, août; ACORD, 1989, avril) until the founding in 1990 of La Cité collégiale, a unilingual francophone institution operating in the Eastern region of the province. At that time

Algonquin college lost its bilingual mandate and, with the creation of Le Collège Boréal serving the Northeast and the Northwestern regions and Le Collège des Grands Lacs serving the Central and Southwestern regions in 1995, the rest of the bilingual colleges lost their mandate to serve the Francophone population in their respective regions.

As of 1994–1995 there were 69,385 students enrolled in French-language elementary schools (reflecting the rapid decline in school age population among Ontario francophones) in the province and 28,510 enrolled in secondary schools, for a total of 97,898 students. This represented 4.7% of total enrollments in publicly funded schools of Ontario. In 1993, the last year for which we have reliable demo-linguistic data for most of the colleges, French-language enrollments in the colleges stood at 4,442, representing 3.7% of the total college enrollment. University enrollments stood at 6,203 in 1994, representing 3.02% of total undergraduate enrollments. Both signal a significant drop in relation to the elementary and secondary school proportions of total enrollments (Frenette & Quazi, 1996, pp. 154, 163).

Unfortunately, these are not entirely comparable data. The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training does not collect enrollment data in elementary and secondary schools according to mother tongue, but rather in terms of the language of instruction. Thus it is impossible to determine what proportion of the school population is of French mother tongue and what proportion has a legal right to minority-language education under the provisions of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights, but is not French-speaking.<sup>2</sup> Nor is it possible to determine what proportion of Francophones are enrolled in English language schools. It is only when students arrive at the postsecondary level that official statistics are able to discern the mother tongue of students, and even then there are problems of interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

While the issue of equal opportunity has not been lost upon the Franco-Ontarian community and lies in the background of this paper, the major issue which is addressed by this article are the lessons learned from the enrollment patterns and participation rates of Francophones in relation to varying changes in the institutional offer of courses and programs in French during the period since the creation of French-language secondary schools.

The completion of the link to postsecondary education in French during the early 1970s moved Ontario Francophones from a context of no

choice, that is, education in English, to one of choice, that is education in English or French, but it did not constrain them to enroll in French-language programs. Given that than 92.5% of Ontario Francophones in the age group 15-19 are functionally bilingual (Dallaire & Lachapelle, *s.d.*, p. 18), and that in many cases English is their dominant language of communication, in most cases schooling in English can be considered an attractive alternative, particularly in those areas of the province where Francophones are a small portion of the population and French-language schools are widely dispersed and thus not nearly as accessible as the local English-language institutions. Thus actual program choices become a powerful indicator of minority-language rationality.

## THE STUDY

This paper reports on highlights of a longitudinal (15-25 years depending upon level) and comparative (between Ontario Francophones and non-Francophones) study that examined postsecondary enrollment data and participation rates according to type of institution (French/English/mixed) attended at the secondary level. Data are examined for full-time secondary and postsecondary students but cursory analysis only is provided for part-time students at the undergraduate level. System-wide data regarding part-time enrollments by first language is not available at the college level. The enrollment data are examined with a view to discerning the lessons to be learned for the understanding of minority language rationality in relation to various institutional arrangements made at the secondary and postsecondary levels over the past fifteen to twenty-five years. The varying patterns of response to secondary and postsecondary institutional arrangements, depending on the context, reveal different aspects of minority language rationality.

The question which has guided this research is not so much that of determining why Francophone participation is lower than that of majority non-Francophones as that of interpreting the behaviour, as revealed in program choices, of those Francophones who do succeed in reaching the postsecondary level. In other words, the research question posed in this study is not so much 'Why do Francophones demonstrate a lower participation rate than non-Francophones' but rather, 'What do their program choices reveal about the relationship between minority Francophones and educational institutions?'

## Research on equal opportunities for minority francophones

Studies on equal opportunity to higher education for minority Francophones have derived from two dominant research traditions in North America. The first tradition provides an analysis of educational and professional aspirations in which student aspirations are deemed to point to a motivation to take the means required to realize those aspirations and in which that same motivation is shown to vary according to gender, SES and ethnicity. These studies follow upon the famous Wisconsin studies in the 1960s (Sewell, Haller, & Ohlendorf, 1970; Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969) and were replicated and refined at both national and provincial levels in Canada during the period immediately following the American studies. Beginning with a major nationwide study (Breton, McDonald, & Richer, 1972) which was conducted at a time when unilingual French-language public secondary schools were not yet in existence, researchers noticed that minority Francophones throughout Canada appeared to have inordinately “unrealistic” aspirations, or to be more precise, that their aspirations were clearly “more unrealistic” than those of their majority-language compatriots (Porter, Porter, & Blishen, 1982).

During the 1970s this tradition of research gave rise to a number of surveys in which student aspirations were studied with regard to the preferred language of instruction of postsecondary programs (English/French/bilingual) and to the preferred type of postsecondary institution (English/bilingual). These aspirations were deemed to represent minority ‘needs’ in regard to postsecondary programs and institutions and showed, not surprisingly, that students’ preferences extended to the dominant pattern then existing in postsecondary institutions, that is, to bilingual programs within the context of bilingual institutions. In any case, students indicated that the primary criterion for their postsecondary choices was the quality of postsecondary programs, not the language of instruction (Bordeleau, 1983a; Bordeleau, 1983b; Bordeleau & Desjardins, 1976; Bordeleau & Gervais, 1976).

An interesting insight was provided by one study conducted in the Eastern region of the province (Desjardins & Fu, 1977) which found that the type of institution deemed to correspond to minority needs varied according to the status of respondents. Part-time college students preferred English-language institutions and programs, whereas full-time students preferred bilingual institutions and programs. But a survey of

Francophone spokespersons in the region revealed a preference for unilingual French programs and institutions. In other words, the more tenuous the respondents' relationship to postsecondary education (the case of part-time students) the more they were inclined to opt for programs and institutions in the language of the majority. The stronger the relationship of respondents to postsecondary education, (the case of activists in the community, many of whom had completed postsecondary studies) the more they were inclined to opt for programs and institutions in the language of the minority. This finding is consistent with Porter et al. (1982) who noted that lower SES French-language secondary students were over-represented in English-language secondary schools, whereas the SES distribution in French-language secondary schools was quite similar to that of majority-language schools. It seems, then, that the weaker the socioeconomic link to postsecondary institutions, the more minority-language students tended to look upon education in the language of the linguistic majority as the key to social mobility.

Recent research in this tradition (Laflamme & Dennie, 1990) has returned to the theme of unrealistic aspirations only to take another tack, namely that students' aspirations should not be considered unrealistic; rather, it is schools which should be accused of not responding adequately to the legitimate aspirations of minority Francophones. While the conclusion is to be considered a valid one in the context of correlational studies, as this one is, it does not explain how the schools could be successful in creating the unrealistic aspirations and unsuccessful in responding to them.

In summary, the research on educational aspirations of minority Francophones has consistently found a tendency to idealism in relation to educational and professional aspirations, and a tendency to pragmatism in relation to the desired language of postsecondary programs and institutions. The idealism is demonstrated by minority Francophones' tendency to overestimate their ultimate career trajectory and the studies required to achieve them. The pragmatism is highlighted by the tendency to prefer the dominant organizational pattern of the time, that is, bilingual programs and institutions at the postsecondary level. At the time of the earlier surveys, unilingual French-language institutions were a relatively new phenomenon at the secondary level and non-existent at the postsecondary level in Ontario.

The second dominant research tradition is that of educational and occupational attainment studies which have consistently shown a gap between Francophones and non-Francophones, but a gap the characteristics of which are evolving rapidly. Earlier studies (D'Costa, 1971) showed that in Ontario, the educational attainment of Francophones was extremely low. This was particularly evident in those regions of the province in which Francophones are concentrated, that is, in the Northern regions which are heavily dependent on mining and forest industries and in the Eastern region (excluding the Ottawa Federal capital region) which is largely agriculture-based.

Yet as early as 1977 the comparative study of the *Fédération des Francophones Hors-Québec* (FFHQ, 1977) revealed that although there was a wide gap in educational attainments between Francophones and non-Francophones, the difference in income was minimal. This was to a large extent attributable to the fact the Federal Capital in Ottawa and the Provincial Capital in Toronto attract large numbers of Francophones from outside the province, particularly of Québec Francophones. More recent studies have shown that although there are still large regional disparities, the average income of Ontario Francophones is very close to that of Ontario Anglophones (males = \$24,491 vs \$25,417; females = \$13,491 vs. \$13,549) (Bernard, 1990, p. 277). Janet Stern has even suggested that according to the 1986 census Ontario Francophones demonstrate a level of educational attainment which is roughly equivalent to that of non-Francophones (Stern, 1990). A recent study (Savas, 1992) which attempted to demonstrate that Ontario Francophones required special treatment as a designated minority, showed that they were generally as successful as the general population in translating their educational investment into similar occupation and income benefits; some systemic barriers appeared to exist for the relatively less educated, i.e., the older Francophone population. The same study was unable to show systemic disadvantage even when the data were broken down by region. Indeed, in some categories of occupations Savas (1992) found that Francophones had a distinct advantage over visible minorities or native groups.

For our purposes, however, attainment studies are somewhat unsatisfactory because they do not take account of interprovincial migration and of Francophone immigration. Ontario Francophones are extremely mobile: censuses from 1971 to 1991 reveal that the combined arrival and



departure of Francophones to and from Ontario reaches 13% of the total Francophone population (Bernard, 1990, pp. 28, 172-174). As mentioned previously, the expansion of French-language services in the provincial and federal governments has had the effect of attracting a significant portion of highly trained Francophones to civil service positions in both the provincial and federal governments, such that average educational and revenue attainments mask the effects of the provincial educational system on Ontario Francophones. Out-of-province Francophone immigrants who are attracted by the career possibilities in Ontario can be presumed to have studied elsewhere than in Ontario.

Thus attainment studies, while showing some minimal differences in educational attainment, income level and occupational structure between Francophones and non-Francophones depending on level of analysis, are not nearly precise enough to explain differential patterns of access to higher education.

For all of these reasons we decided to study the progression of Francophones through secondary and postsecondary levels in order to determine, if not the impact of the Ontario educational system on minority Francophones, rather, the relationship between them and the educational services which were made available to them. The purpose of the study was to examine the actual program preferences of minority Francophones at the secondary (since 1967), college (from 1983 to 1993) and undergraduate (from 1979 to 1995) levels. The varying time frames correspond to the availability of enrollment data on Ontario Francophones.

The focus on enrollment data ensures that the focus is on student choices rather than to an expression of preferences in survey conditions which might tend to elicit what are perceived to be 'correct' responses. In addition, enrollment data would focus attention only on those minority-language students who have come into contact with the educational system in the province, excluding those who had studied elsewhere. Nonetheless, the use of enrollment data in these conditions focuses attention on a relatively privileged proportion of minority-language students at the postsecondary level, that is, full-time students in postsecondary programs, leaving aside part-time students who are proportionately more numerous among Francophones,<sup>4</sup> and others who are not enrolled in postsecondary programs at all.

## FINDINGS

### Progression Through Secondary School

Immediately upon the creation of French-language secondary schools in 1969, the enrollment in French-language schools<sup>5</sup> and French-language units of instruction in bilingual 'mixed' schools rose quite rapidly, such that by 1973 the proportion of students remaining in school three years after entry into secondary school reached the level of English-language schools of the province. After 1973 the pattern of increases in both English-language and French-language schools were similar, suggesting that they were subject to the same general influences over time. Over the following 20 years the retention rate in French-language schools in some cases slightly exceeded that of English-language schools. Thus it appeared at the time that Francophones would soon realize the goal of equal access at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

Within a very short time, however, a certain anomaly emerged. Ontario had maintained grade 13, an extra transitional year between the secondary and postsecondary level. This transitional year was an obligatory feature in the program of students intending to go to university, and was not obligatory, but highly recommended for some of the more prestigious college programs. Immediately upon the creation of French-language secondary schools the transition rate from grade 9 through grade 13 stabilized at a level that ranged between 25% and 38% less than that of English-language schools (Frenette & Quazi, 1990), even though the transition rate from grade 9 through grade 12 was in some cases as previously noted higher than that of English-language schools.

By 1990 the grade 13 phenomenon was being phased out, at least theoretically, only to be replaced by Ontario Academic Credits, that is, advanced courses at the grade 12 level which could be taken at the grade 12 level or, if the student were to so choose, during an additional year of studies. The resulting configuration of enrollments renders it impossible to compare the enrollment data with previous enrollments at the grade 13 level. On the other hand, the configuration allows a comparison of grade 12 enrollments according to numbers of courses enrolled at the OAC level.

The distribution of enrollments has stayed remarkably consistent during the 1990s. Almost half of Francophone enrollments in grade 12 are not enrolled in any Ontario Academic Credit courses, which effectively

Table 1  
**Distribution of French-medium and English-medium enrollments according to number of Ontario Academic Credits, 1991, 1993, 1995**

|      | <u>French and mixed schools</u> |          |         |        | <u>English schools</u> |          |         |         |
|------|---------------------------------|----------|---------|--------|------------------------|----------|---------|---------|
|      | no OACs                         | 1-5 OACs | 6+ OACs | Total  | no OACs                | 1-5 OACs | 6+ OACs | Total   |
| 1991 | 4,407                           | 2,906    | 1,860   | 9,173  | 78,890                 | 81,727   | 57,800  | 218,417 |
| %    | 48.0                            | 31.7     | 20.3    | 100.0  | 36.1                   | 37.4     | 26.5    | 100.0   |
| 1993 | 4,918                           | 3,029    | 2,126   | 10,073 | 88,217                 | 88,468   | 62,861  | 239,546 |
| %    | 48.8                            | 30.1     | 21.1    | 100.0  | 36.8                   | 36.9     | 26.2    | 100.0   |
| 1995 | 4,552                           | 2,578    | 1,854   | 8,984  | 91,099                 | 87,495   | 59,357  | 237,951 |
| %    | 50.7                            | 28.7     | 20.6    | 100.0  | 38.3                   | 36.8     | 24.9    | 100.0   |

Source: Ontario: Education Statistics, diverse

means that they are in no position to begin university studies the following year. By contrast, grade 12 enrollments in the same category in English language schools is somewhat less, standing at 38.3% in 1995. Only 20.6% of grade 12 enrollments in French-language schools comprise six OACs or more. This does not mean that only one-fifth of grade 12 students are capable of going on to undergraduate studies, since many in the middle category (1 to 6 OACs) are taking OACs for a second year. It does suggest, however, that Francophones are somewhat slower to position themselves in the final year of secondary school for further studies at the undergraduate level.

### **Transition Rates to University**

The transition rate of minority Francophones<sup>6</sup> from the final year of secondary to first year of undergraduate programs is consistently lower than that of non-Francophones, as mentioned previously. But what is more interesting from the perspective adopted here is the variable transition rates of Francophones according to type of institution attended at the secondary level.

Approximately 40% of Francophones attending grade 13 of homogeneous French-language schools succeed in enrolling in undergraduate programs the following year. The transition rate varies between 38.5% (1987) and 41.7% (1989) with minimal fluctuation from one year to the next. The transition rate of Francophones attending 'mixed' secondary schools to undergraduate programs is somewhat lower in addition to a much larger dropout rate before grade 13, varying between 31.0% and 30.0% of grade 13 enrollments over a ten year period, but for one exceptional year (1989) which was marked by a one-third decrease of Francophone enrollments in mixed secondary schools and a tripling of 'Ontario scholars,' that is, students who maintain a minimum of 80% average. This anomalous year was in fact a year marked by the reorganization of school boards, the transfer of schools from Public boards to Separate (Catholic) boards, and the closing of a number of mixed schools, such that those students remaining in the mixed schools were clearly a 'happy few' who had managed to survive the higher dropout rates in adverse conditions. The overall pattern of transition rates from mixed schools thus is consistently lower than that from homogeneous French-language schools.

The transition rates of Francophones from English-language schools cannot be calculated because there is no official record of them at the secondary level. However, an indirect manner of examining the quality of secondary school graduates from all three types of institutions is to calculate the proportion of Ontario scholars and the proportion of students admitted to the university and program of first choice (Ontario applicants have three choices in applying to undergraduate programs). According to these criteria, the same gradation appears once again. University applicants from homogeneous French-language secondary schools are more successful than applicants from mixed schools, and the latter are more successful than applicants from unilingual English schools. It would appear then that the more successful of francophones, at least in terms of making the transition to University, are those who attend homogeneous French-language schools.

### **Type of Secondary School Attended and Type of Institution Attended at the Postsecondary Level**

By 1989, fully 80% of Francophone college students had enrolled in bilingual colleges although no more than 55% of them enrolled in programmes delivered in French. The proportion of Francophone university enrollments in bilingual institutions is slightly less, standing at 74% in 1989. It is important to remember that up to 1990, there were only bilingual institutions at the postsecondary level.

No doubt some of this is due to factors such as the proximity of the bilingual institutions to major concentrations of Francophone populations, the history of their relations with the Francophone community, perhaps even their bilingual character. We would argue that the propensity to enroll in bilingual institutions among young Francophones is not so much an approval of the bilingual character of postsecondary institutions per se, but an indication that young Francophones tended to attend those types of institutions in which they are more likely to encounter students of like kind. As further confirmation of this hypothesis, it should be noted that when the Ontario government in conjunction with the Federal government released funds for the creation of the first unilingual French-language postsecondary institution in 1990, la Cité collégiale, college enrollments rose within a two-year period to historic levels in 1983 even while the 18-21 age group was declining further.

In summary, the opening of publicly funded French-language secondary schools at the end of the 1960s was followed by an almost instantaneous increase of enrollments in those same schools. Within a very few years, the retention rate in the minority language schools was almost identical to that of English language schools. However, the transition to postsecondary studies was filtered somewhat by the lower transition rates into the final transitional year (grade 13) and later, into full OAC course selections in the (putatively) final year of secondary school.

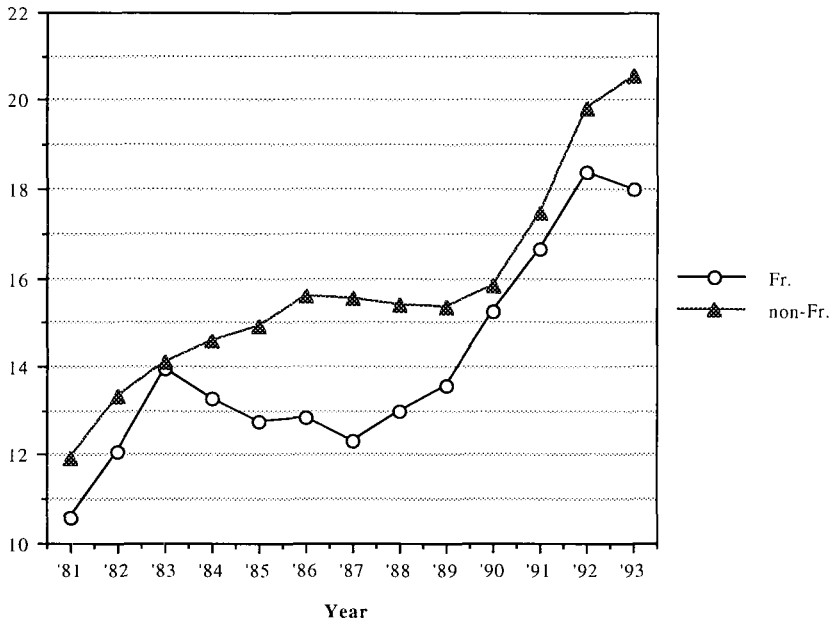
## **ENROLLMENT AND PARTICIPATION AT THE POSTSECONDARY LEVEL**

### **College enrollments and participation rates**

It should be remembered that of the 21 Ontario colleges existing up to the end of the 1980s, only six were designated as bilingual, and only two of those offered substantial programs in French, albeit in numbers which were approximately one third of the number of programs offered in English to non-Francophones. The remaining bilingual colleges offered bilingual programs which tended to favour courses in English (ACORD, 1989).

In addition, the bilingual colleges were tardy in offering even these limited programs in French than were the bilingual universities. The latter were bilingual from their inception, whereas only one college, Algonquin College in Ottawa, was officially bilingual from its inception in 1967. As a result Francophones were slower than the general population in enrolling in one of the community colleges, yet their participation rates (that is, enrollments expressed as a proportion of the age-group 18-21) were only slightly behind those of non-Francophones up until 1983, standing at 13.95% of the Francophone age group 18-21, whereas the non-Francophone participation rate stood at 14.11% of the same age group. Participation rates had increased among Francophones and non-Francophones alike, but at a more rapid rate among Francophones, until 1983, the year following the economic downturn of 1981-1982. Following that period there was a drastic falling off of Francophone enrollments and participation rates. Whereas non-Francophone enrollments declined by 3% from peak to low point between 1983 and 1989, even though participation rates increased slightly because of a smaller age group, Francophone enrollments declined by almost 33% while the participation rate dropped from a high of 13.95% in 1983 to a low of 12.32% in 1987.

**Fig. 1 - Participation rates of Ontario Francophones and non-Francophones, CAATs 1979-1994**



Source: MET/UCIS

Interviews of Francophone college administrators in the bilingual colleges revealed that after the recession, the provincial government had decreased its level of financial support to the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, and as a result, the colleges attempted to realize economies of scale where possible. This meant eliminating under-subscribed courses and programs. In bilingual institutions, the target was often French-medium programs and courses since, by definition, the enrollments were lower in number. This was particularly the case in programs offered in the field of technology. Francophone and non-Francophone administrators alike felt that students in technology would profit from courses in English, since it was agreed that the universal language of technology was English. Indeed, even the Francophone students agreed with the principle, and administrators based their decisions on numerous conversations and the surveys previously mentioned which appeared to indicate a Francophone preference for bilingual programs

and institutions as well as the study of mathematics, science and technology in English.

Yet there followed a very significant decline of Francophone college enrollments, particularly in the field of technology, even though many observers agreed that it was a reasonable suggestion to have Francophones pursue technological studies in English. Additionally, the field of technology is traditionally the one which attracts an overwhelming majority of males, such that to the decline of enrollments at the college level, there was a corresponding decline in participation rates among Francophone males.

The only fields of study to show an increase in enrollments over the ten year period following the economic recession of the early 1980s were those of Business and Health Sciences, fields which had attracted supplementary Ministry funding to compensate for transitional start-up costs but fields which had traditionally attracted larger proportions of female Francophones. As a result, by the end of the decade the proportion of females had reached 58% of total Francophone enrollments.

This situation changed immediately upon the opening of the first French-language college, La Cité collégiale, in 1990. Not only did enrollments reach their previous levels of the early 1980s, but the proportion of males and females returned to their previous levels. There was a slight decline of total Francophone enrollments in 1993 in relation to the previous year, but there is some doubt as to the quality of data provided by some of the colleges in the final year that the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training gathered demo-linguistic data.

In short, the pattern of enrollments at the college level reveals an initial increase during the late 1970s and early 1980s, by which time the participation rate of Francophones almost matched that of non-Francophone students. Following the recession of 1982 and the resulting decrease in program offerings, the overall enrollments and participation rates decreased dramatically, only to find their previous levels in 1990 with the opening of the first French-language CAAT.

### **College Programme Choices**

During the latter part of the 1980s, before the opening of La Cité collégiale, the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities attempted to redress the situation by funding a number of new program initiatives in French in the bilingual colleges of the province.



Detailed examination of Francophone enrollments by program in those bilingual institutions is revelatory of a specific enrollment pattern. Generally speaking, programs are available first in English and Francophone enrollments in the English-medium program are uniformly low. When an equivalent program is offered in French, as resulted from the funding initiatives, a curious phenomenon occurred. For the first year or perhaps two, Francophone enrollments in the French-medium program increased very slightly as if recording a 'wait time,' after which they increased very rapidly. After a few years of existence, the French-medium programs attracted much larger numbers of minority-language enrollments, and the vast majority of Francophones enrolled in the French-medium programs. The proportion of Francophones enrolled in the alternative French-medium program varied between 75% and 93% in the bilingual colleges, with most of the programs recording in the upper ranges (Frenette & Quazi, 1990, pp. 228-37).

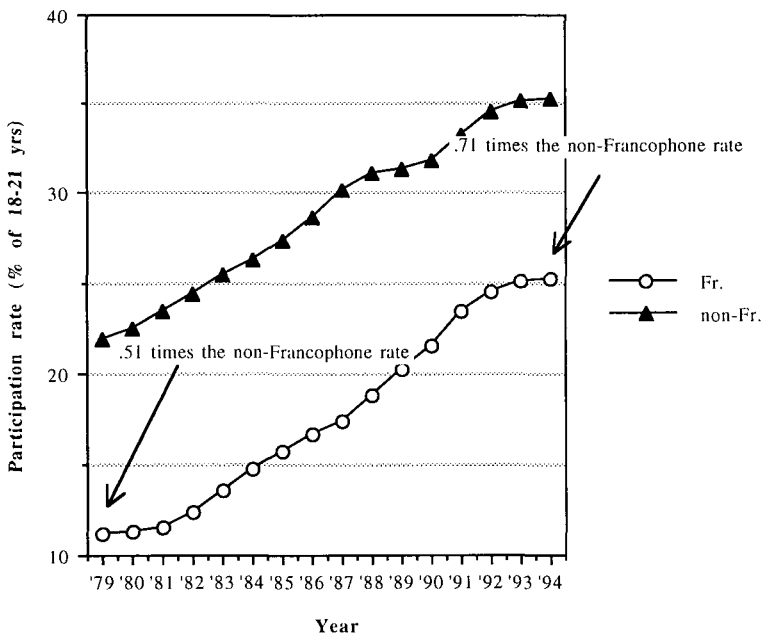
The 'wait-time' phenomenon appears to be at odds with the functioning of postsecondary institutions and in particular with that of the community colleges. Ontario CAATs have a mandate to 'respond to the needs of the community' which typically signifies that programs are offered in response to a specific regional need. If the need is not demonstrated in the form of enrollments, programs are dropped almost instantly. Yet minority enrollment behaviour appears to indicate a wait-and-see attitude, such that enrollments begin to increase only when there appears to be a stable offer of programs in French. This would explain the drop in College participation rates following the reorganization of programs in 1983. Minority college students noticed the decline in program offerings in French, and subsequently withdrew from the postsecondary 'market'. It was only after provincial government intervention in the late 1980s that the bilingual colleges began to increase program offerings in French, and enrollments began to rise again.

Thus, the institutional logic of postsecondary institutions requires that minority students demonstrate a demand for French-medium programs before the supply of the same be provided, but the logic of the minority student is quite the opposite, that is, the demand for French-medium programs (in the form of enrollments) is shown to be a response to the supply of the same. It would appear then that in a minority context, it is the *supply* of educational services which creates the *demand* rather than the contrary.

## Undergraduate Enrollments and Participation Rates

Total enrollments of Francophones at the undergraduate level had indeed increased in the period following the opening of French-language secondary schools, but so had enrollments in the general population, such that until the mid-1980s, the participation rate of Francophones reached 54% of that of non-Francophones, and appeared to be increasing only marginally relative to that of the general population. Thus it appeared at the time that undergraduate participation rates were to be a mirror image, but diminished, of that of the general population and that the creation of the French-language secondary schools was far from having the intended effect. But by the mid-1980s participation rates began a gradual, almost imperceptible increase and by 1994, the final year for which we have data, the participation rate of Francophones stood at 71% of that of the general population. It appears then that the relative amelioration in participation rates was to begin almost 20 years after the opening of the new French-language secondary schools.

Fig. 2 – Participation rate of Ontario Francophones and non-Francophones, undergraduate, 1979-1994



Source: MET/UCIS

## **Participation Rates by Field of Study**

In the field of Education, non-Francophone participation rates continued to increase at a regular pace, but Francophone participation rates increased markedly after 1987, such that by 1994 their participation rate was 1.4 times that of the general population. This is no doubt due to the fact that Education, of all the major fields available at the undergraduate level, was the one field in which programs were available entirely in French and the labour market appeared to provide employment in French through the continued existence of French-language schools and the growing interest in French immersion programs throughout the province.

Other fields of study offer a more variegated pattern of participation rates. In fields such as Social Sciences, Humanities and Health Sciences, some programs are available entirely in French and some of these lead directly to employment to bilinguals, given the positions available in the Federal civil service, and some positions involving communication with the Francophone public in certain designated areas of the province in the provincial or municipal civil service. Still other fields of study, notably those of Mathematics and Physical sciences, Engineering and Applied Science, offer almost no programs in French and almost no employment opportunities are available in French in the province of Ontario. In those fields there was a small increase in enrollments, nowhere as significant as in other fields.

The enrollment data reveal that one cannot interpret the gap between Francophones and non-Francophones simply in terms of a preference that the former might have for the humanities and social sciences, and that the latter might have for science and technology. The participation rate of non-Francophones increased dramatically in the field of the Humanities during the decade and remained stable in Engineering, whereas the participation of Francophones increased much less in the Humanities and somewhat slightly in Engineering. The participation of non-Francophones increased by almost 50% again in Fine and Applied arts, whereas the participation of Francophones increased only marginally.

In summary, the overall pattern of enrollments and participation rates since 1979 reveals a quite different one than that which was found at the college level. There, the increases and declines came at a rather shorter time interval, much like what was to be found in secondary schools. At the undergraduate level the increases mirrored that of the non-Francophone population until well into the mid-1980s, but at a rate

almost half of the latter, at which time they began to increase at an almost imperceptible, then more pronounced, rate relative to that of the non-Francophone population.

### **Combined College and Undergraduate Enrollments**

In Ontario, universities and colleges represent alternate paths to postsecondary education. Although it is theoretically possible for college students to transfer into the undergraduate stream, a very small proportion of college students do so in actual fact. Thus it is the *combined* participation rates of college and university which reveal the relative success of access to postsecondary education. It can be argued that if Francophones demonstrate a lower participation rate in university programs, this gap between the two linguistic groups would represent a larger proportion of Francophones available for study at the college level, assuming that linguistic groups have the same theoretical proportion of the population available for postsecondary studies. Thus even the marginal success of Francophones at the college level until 1983 should be interpreted as a relative lack of success, given the larger proportion of the Francophone population which should have been available for study at the college level. An examination of the combined participation rates of Francophones and non-Francophones over a 10 year period reveals that in 1983, the year of highest enrollments on the part of Francophones in the CAATs, the gap between the two was 32.4% and decreasing, whereas in 1989 the combined participation rate of Francophones stood at almost 40% less than that of non-Francophones (Frenette & Quazi, 1990, p. 245). Thus the gap between Francophones and non-Francophones had been increasing from 1983 to 1989, following the measures taken in the interval which decreased College course and program offerings in French. In 1992, with the opening of La Cité collégiale et the continued growth at the undergraduate level, the gap had once again started to close, reaching a 22.4% differential.

Thus, overall provincial data reveal that students in French-language schools have the same rate of progress as those in English-language schools through the secondary program up to grade 12, but that the transition rate between grade 12 and the final transition year at the secondary level begins to show a considerable decline. Some of this appears due to the fact that a certain portion of Francophones transfer to English-medium programs in grade 13, perhaps in the hope that enrollment in the

final year of an English-language secondary school will ensure the transition to postsecondary levels. Nonetheless, it would appear that very few minority Francophones follow this route or, if they do, very few succeed in entering into university.

The transition rate of Francophones from grade 13 to university shows a further decline relative to that from grade 12 to grade 13, while the participation rate at the undergraduate level revealed a quite stable relationship to that of the non-Francophone participants until well into the mid-1980s, at little more than half the participation rate of the latter. Since the mid-1980s the participation of Francophones relative to that of non-Francophones has begun to climb, standing in 1994 at over 70% that of the latter. The participation rates at the college level are somewhat more unstable, indicating a rapid increase until 1983 and further declines after that time, then rapid increases with the opening of the first French-language CAAT. By 1992 the participation rate of Ontario Francophones had almost reached parity with non-Francophones, reaching 18.33% of age-group 18-21, whereas non-Francophones were 19.33% of age-group. There was some falling off the following year but this result may be due to unreliable data for the academic year 1993-94.

### **SOME LONG TERM LESSONS**

The reduction of Francophone transition rates to the final year of secondary school and further reductions in transition rates from secondary school to university must be interpreted not so much as a localized filtering phenomenon at the grade 13 level, although that is undoubtedly a factor, so much as an anticipatory reaction on the part of Francophones in the face of reduced options in French at the postsecondary level. It would appear that minority Francophones, in anticipation of the absence of French-medium programs at the postsecondary level, in some cases reinforced by the lack of employment opportunities in French, begin to slide away from further studies during the transition from secondary school to the final transition year. Further declines occur in the transition from the transition year to postsecondary studies.

An historical analysis of enrollments reveals that in times of decreasing offerings of programs in the minority language, as was the case in the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology following the 1981-82 recession, minority enrollments actually decline, even though

major stakeholders agreed in this particular case that program offerings in French were not essential.

The relationship between the type of institution attended by minority Francophones at the secondary level and their relative success in attaining postsecondary levels can be seen as a form of self selection, but a self selection in which minority youths seek a form of cultural continuity between their secondary experience and the desired postsecondary experience. This despite the numerous surveys indicating the lack of priority given to the language of instruction at the postsecondary level. This phenomenon should not be interpreted as an acceptance of bilingual programs and institutions per se, but as a best-bet scenario given the absence (at the time of this study) of homogeneous French-language postsecondary institutions.

The perspective adopted here reminds one that although in theory Francophones always have the choice of attending English-language institutions, in practice almost only those who have attended French-language or 'mixed' institutions at the secondary level, and the former more than the latter, eventually succeed in enrolling at the postsecondary level, and that even when they do succeed, they tend to enroll in those institutions in which there are greater chances of encountering other Francophones and greater chances of studying in French.

In addition, the results appear to indicate that language-minority members function to a large extent in a reactive mode to the supply of educational services, notably the supply of programs in French, such that the reduction of programs in French entails the decline of language-minority enrollments, while the increase of educational services in French increases minority-language participation rates. In a time of budgetary constraints, however, it would appear that the institutional logic of providing services to a need as manifested in enrollments clashes with the minority logic of waiting to see if there will be educational services in the minority language.

The reactive mode is rapid at the college level, the wait-time phenomenon noted above lasting no more than two years before enrollments begin to rise rapidly. On the other hand, the two-year period is one which, at the college level, can still lead to program cancellations, given the propensity of colleges to rapid cancellation of the 'offer' of programs when the 'demand' is weak.

Our data show that although neither colleges nor universities succeeded very well in answering minority needs, colleges were less successful not because they were less efficient, but paradoxically, because they were more efficient than universities. They studied the data; they listened to their students; they withdrew programs which were under-subscribed. And enrollments fell almost immediately. On the other hand, universities were very slow in setting up programs in French, and perhaps even slower to withdraw them. And enrollments continued to increase, albeit at a rate which did not show significant changes until more than 15 years after the inception of the new French-language secondary schools. In this case the lack of response capacity was a positive advantage, at least in comparison with the colleges.

The preceding comparison of Francophone and non-Francophone enrollments and participation rates reveals that the finer the analysis, the more one is obliged to consider minority-language access to secondary and postsecondary education in its own right. Indeed, the further one distances oneself from general comparative data to examine participation rates at the program level, the more minority-language enrollments appear as an autonomous subsystem requiring their own analysis and their own explanations.

In general, it would appear that whenever fields of study are available in French and those same programs lead to employment in French, the participation rate of Francophones actually exceeds that of non-Francophones, a finding which could not be predicted from the surveys conducted in the 1970s. The only case in which this has happened is the field of Education. Whenever fields of study represent an array of programs available partially in French and those same programs lead to partial employment in French, participation rates of Francophones tend to increase, yet without reaching levels obtained by the linguistic majority. Whenever programs are available only in English and lead to employment which can only be exercised in English, participation rates of minority Francophones are uniformly low.

Finally, we previously alluded to the numerous needs analyses of minority students conducted during the 1970s. These studies all concluded that the primary consideration for minority members in the choice of postsecondary programs was not the language of instruction. It was on the basis of these studies and other informal surveys that college administrators reached the conclusion that programs in French did not correspond

to an important need. And yet the behaviour of minority Francophones reveals, at both college and undergraduate level, and despite the overt claims to the contrary, that the language of instruction is an extremely important consideration that appears to have a major influence on their access to postsecondary studies and on their choice of programs.✱

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> At the time the separate schools were not eligible for public funding at the secondary school level, and the government was not prepared to extend funding to separate schools, thus the location of minority-language secondary schools at the public schools. The result was, for minority francophones, a curious situation in that the vast majority of students attended separate (confessional) elementary schools and then made the transfer to public (non-confessional) secondary schools. Elsewhere we have argued (Frenette & Gauthier, 1990) that what at first glance appeared to be an anomaly turned out to be a fortuitous result. It ensured that the elementary schools ensured the cultural reproduction of the community, including its Roman Catholic heritage, whereas the secondary school provided the transition into modernity and secular values without explicitly contradicting the religious values promoted by the elementary schools.

<sup>2</sup> The Charter conferred rights to minority language education not upon the children, but upon the parents of school-age children. Those parents able to exercise their rights are identified as Canadian citizens residing in a Canadian province: a) “whose first language learned and still understood is that of the . . . minority; or b) a parent who has received primary school instruction in the minority language in Canada; or c) a parent of whom “one child in the family has received or is receiving primary or secondary instruction in the minority language.”

<sup>3</sup> The student application forms for university level studies provide for three categories of ‘mother tongue’ among applicants: English, French, and ‘other.’ The college application forms provide for four categories of ‘first language’: English, French, ‘bilingual’ and ‘other.’ The ‘bilingual’ category is intended for French/English bilinguals, but experience has shown that many others assign themselves to that category.

<sup>4</sup> One of the more interesting features of this study is that following the economic recession of 1992, the relative importance of part-time undergraduate students among Francophones declines substantially, by about 35%. Non-Francophone part-time studies declined less dramatically, with the result that part-time students now represent the same proportion of overall enrollments for both linguistic groups. Unfortunately, the study was not able to examine the reasons for that decline.

<sup>5</sup> The 'mixed' secondary school had no status in right under the Education Act. but was a pragmatic response, in small communities, to the requirement to provide French language services for the minority population. It was (usually, but with few exceptions) an English language school with a complete gamut of programs, accompanied by a restricted program in French. Typically, the course offerings became more restricted as the students reached the senior years, such that French language students were constrained to take more and more of their courses in English. The mixed school came to be denounced by Francophone leaders as 'foyer d'assimilation' (Churchill, Frenette, & Quazi, 1985; Soucie, 1982) which filtered Francophone students out of programs in French and effectively impeded access to postsecondary education. After it was shown that Francophones enrolled in mixed schools were less likely to attend university than both their anglophone colleagues in the mixed schools and their Francophone colleagues in homogeneous French-language schools, the Ministry of Education encouraged school boards to provide autonomous French-language schools, sometimes in the same building: quite literally a school within the school. By 1994 there were fewer than 60 Francophone students enrolled in mixed secondary schools.

<sup>6</sup> From this point on we are in a position to refer to "Francophones" as opposed to "students in French-language schools" since the postsecondary admissions data does pick up the the mother tongue of applicants.