

Second Language Teacher Attrition, Retention, and Recruitment

A Literature Review on Issues,
Challenges, and Strategies for French
as a Second Language Teachers



Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers
Association canadienne des professeurs de langues secondes

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Second Language Teacher Attrition, Retention, and Recruitment: A Literature Review on Issues, Challenges, and Strategies for French as a Second Language Teachers

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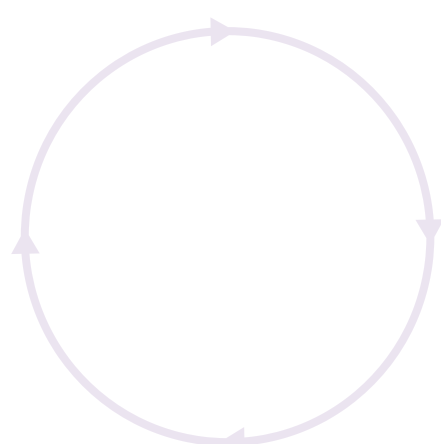
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Introduction: Language Teacher Shortages and Labour Market Needs in Canada

The following report examines the literature on second language (L2) teacher attrition, recruitment, and retention, particularly as it pertains to French as a second language (FSL) teachers in Canada. It comes after the Department of Canadian Heritage announced a Federal Action Plan, earmarking \$31.3 million over four years, starting in 2019–2020, to address the chronic shortage of FSL teachers across Canada.

Since the 1960s, FSL programs have grown in terms of their popularity with parents and their ability to develop Canadian students' language abilities in French. Currently, FSL is taught across a variety of programs, including core French (basic French instruction, usually resulting in about one French period a day in schools), French immersion (where students receive 50% to 90% of their core classes, such as mathematics, science, or social studies, in French), intensive French (where students receive at least 3 times the number of hours of instruction devoted to French in the core French program over a period of 5 to 6 months during the school year; the other half of the school year is taught in English), and extended French (where students take about half of their core subjects in French throughout the entire school year). While about 90% of Canadian students are enrolled in core French programs (Early, 2016), French immersion and intensive French have been gaining considerable attention and demand in recent years (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Over the years, educators, teachers, and support staff have dedicated themselves to maintaining French as part of the Canadian linguistic landscape. However, FSL teacher shortages have been a longstanding issue across Canada (Grimmett & Echols, 2000; Karsenti et al., 2008; Macfarlane & Hart, 2002). FSL teachers, particularly French immersion teachers, have always been in high demand, especially in rural areas, including the three territories.

The following report covers three important pieces to understand the FSL teacher shortage and, in particular, what

variables and local contextual factors determine the evolution of teacher attrition, retention, and recruitment. As Lonsdale and Ingvarson (2003) note, “The problem of teacher demand and supply is both cyclical and complex with a range of interconnecting variables” (p. 5). This report aims to answer the following questions to provide a nuanced picture of the current situation in Canada in terms of labour market needs and teacher shortages:

- What issues have been identified that contribute to teacher attrition?
- How can schools and Teacher Education programs encourage teacher retention?
- What measures can be put in place to encourage teacher recruitment?

Key to implementing any recommendations stemming from this report is to take into account the CASLT report on effective language teacher education (Masson, Battistuzzi, & Bastien, 2021) which considers the specific preparational needs of FSL teachers before they enter the field. Many of these needs align or overlap with findings in the literature about the need to foster intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, along with a solid grasp on institutional and organizational expectations and culture, to improve teacher retention and recruitment.

As such, the report is organized into three sections which each examine research pertaining to teacher attrition, teacher retention, and teacher recruitment. In each section, we examine the findings from the literature on general teacher education, then L2 teachers, and finally FSL teachers in Canada. Both international and Canadian studies are presented in the general teacher education and L2 teachers research summaries to provide a broad view of the state of the research in the field. The concluding research summaries offer research specific to FSL teachers in Canada.

Executive Summary



Teacher Attrition

Relevant Findings for Teacher Attrition in General

Key Findings from Attrition Research

- The newest and most experienced teachers are at a higher risk of leaving.
- Highly qualified teachers are more likely to leave the profession.

Attrition Rates Increase

- In schools with a lower socioeconomic composition.
- In schools with a higher racial/ethnic composition.
- In urban and suburban areas.

Attrition Rates Decrease

- In schools where teachers receive financial and emotional support from the school.
- In schools with higher student achievement levels.
- When beginning teachers participate in a mentorship program.
- When teachers are part of school-based teacher networks and opportunities.
- When teachers have regular and supportive communication with their administrators.
- When the levels of bureaucracy and the amount of paperwork for teachers decreases.

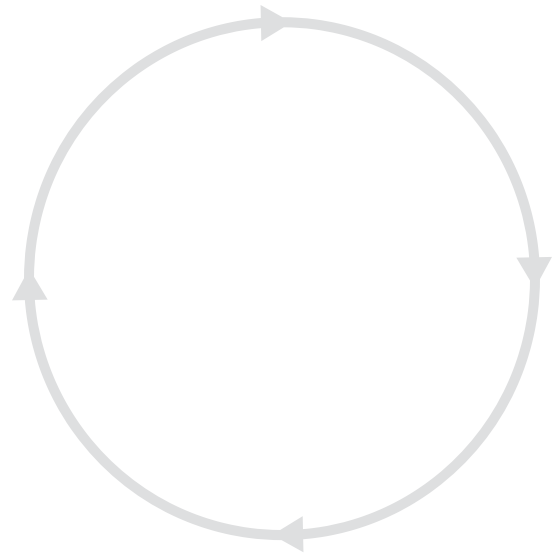
Factors Unique to L2 Teachers That Contribute to Attrition

- Teachers' confidence in their pedagogical content knowledge (i.e., knowledge and skill in teaching a foreign language).
- Teachers' confidence in their target language proficiency (i.e., knowledge of and ability in the target language).
- L2 program conditions.
- Support and value for L2 teaching.
- Respect and value for L2 teachers.
- Relationships with other L2 teachers.
- Lack of suitable employment opportunities.
- Difficulty finding their first L2 teaching position to enter the profession.
- Inconsistent federal funding (i.e., for programs such as LINC).
- Lack of job security (i.e., lack of stable full-time positions with benefits, and low salaries).
- Feeling overworked and isolated in their L2 teaching practice.

Factors Unique to FSL Teachers That Contribute to Attrition

- Difficult working conditions in FSL.
- A lack of French immersion instructional materials.
- Challenges with fostering positive professional relationships with non-FSL administration, non-FSL colleagues, and parents.
- Difficulties with FSL classroom management.

Teacher Attrition



Language teacher attrition characterizes the decision teachers make to leave the classroom. It can be defined in terms of *hidden attrition* (i.e., those who move out of teaching foreign/second languages (L2), but remain in education as administrators, consultants, or teachers of other subject matter) and *voluntary attrition* (i.e., teachers who leave the profession entirely; Mason, 2017). Schaefer and colleagues (2012) explain that teacher attrition is usually understood in terms of an **individual problem** (e.g., issues of burnout, resilience, personal demographics, and personal factors, such as family) or a **contextual problem** (e.g., support, salary, professional development, collaboration, nature of the context, student issues, and teacher education). However, a meta-analysis of teacher attrition research reveals that characteristics of teachers' working conditions are more salient for predicting attrition than was previously noted in the literature (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

It is difficult to determine exact teacher attrition rates, which often range from 5 to 50%, but research is clear: new teachers are at a higher risk for attrition (Guarino et al. 2006). What is more, attrition rates suggest that teacher turnover is greater than what would normally be deemed a healthy turnover rate, particularly as the research seems to indicate that the “best and the brightest” teachers are those who leave the most (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Frequent changes in teachers are not good for student learning outcomes. Given that teachers are the most determining factor in student success, teacher attrition comes with a financial cost to the education system (OECD, 2005, cited in Karsenti & Collin, 2013) and a professional cost to the quality of teaching. The economic cost of teachers leaving means new teachers need to be trained, boards and educational consultants need to provide resources for new teachers more frequently, etc. The social cost of teachers leaving means school communities cannot easily be formed and maintained. Schools are therefore less efficient in promoting student success.

Schaefer and colleagues (2012) suggest using a holistic approach that takes individual and contextual factors into account during new teachers' identity-making process to

understand teacher attrition. Borman and Dowling (2008) suggest a need to look more closely at contextual factors that can be addressed to curtail teacher attrition and a need to move away from a discourse of teachers not being “resilient enough” to look at how their working conditions affect their level of resiliency. Factors that can be changed relatively easily with initiative and policy changes include offering higher salaries, providing opportunities for teacher collaboration and networking, and offering more administrative support. Professional identities, linked to teacher resilience (Day & Gu, 2014, cited in Clandinin et al., 2015), also have a hand in determining levels of teacher attrition. Ultimately, Schaefer and colleagues (2012) suggest shifting the conversation from looking at teachers' decisions to leave the classroom as a decision that takes place at a specific point in time to a decision that is part of a long and dynamic evolutionary process for teachers, specifically, an identity-making process that has failed. **Schools and administrators that do not account for the identity-making process of new teachers offer little in the way of retaining new teachers, much less sustaining them in their burgeoning careers.**

For L2 teachers, that identity-making process is affected by the perception and status of the target language (Mason, 2017). Schools that do not provide curriculum, physical space, or emotional space for their L2 programs devalue the status of the target language. The impact of this can be seen among French as a second language (FSL) teachers who mainly attribute their desire to leave to their dissatisfaction with teaching FSL specifically, rather than teaching in general (Lapkin & Barkaoui, 2008).

Relevant Findings for Teacher Attrition in General

Key Findings from Attrition Research

- The newest and most experienced teachers are at a higher risk of leaving.

Research Summaries

Teacher Recruitment in general

Grimmett, P. P., & Echols, F. H. (2000). Teacher and administrator shortages in changing times. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 25(4), 328–343. <https://journals.sfu.ca/cje/index.php/cje-rce/article/view/2790/2091>

In this qualitative study, the authors investigated factors relating to teacher attrition and recruitment in British Columbia. Looking at teacher attrition by region, level, and subject, the authors caution against a serious shortage in teachers and describe a need to address issues with teacher recruitment. Interviews with stakeholders (i.e., local union presidents, teachers, administrators, and school district officials) were conducted in three sites: the Ministry of Education, the British Columbia College of Teachers, and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, in addition to second language (L2) school districts. Findings revealed that **the variation in shortages is due to differences in student population and workforce demographics. Responders pointed to the changes in course demands, a mismatch between teacher programs and the needs of schools, difficulties in the recruitment of qualified teachers, diversity needs, and an ageing teaching workforce.** The authors recommend both immediate and long-term changes: there is a need for immediate response to shortages of particular kinds and a need to address the long-term demand of all kinds of teachers at all levels across British Columbia. Overall, the authors recommend the establishment of policies and planning for enhancing teacher recruitment. A finding that was not anticipated in the study was identifying shortages in administrative staff at school. Findings in this regard highlighted how **teachers negatively viewed the administrator position, making it difficult for schools to hire qualified teachers into administrative roles.** Although the study was specific to British Columbia, the authors view the findings as relevant to the rest of Canada.

Kitchenham, A., & Chasteauneuf, C. (2010). Teacher supply and demand: Issues in northern Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 33(4), 869–896.

The study sheds light on the unique needs of educators in the northern parts of Canada. The authors build on previous findings on teachers' retention and recruitment practices in northern Canada. A total of 113 participants (96 teachers, 13 administrators, and one Human Resources representative) from four research sites took part in the study. Data were collected using online questionnaires and two or more semi-structured interviews to gather information on recruitment approaches for teachers in northern Canada. Findings reveal **the districts' use of advertisements in national newspapers**

and district websites and their attendance at recruitment fairs. In addition, incentives were used to attract teachers, including higher increments after several years, higher than average salaries, subsidized housing, and opportunities for advancement. Further, the Yukon Department of Education offers one-time financial incentives for teachers to come to the Yukon, which increases when a teacher agrees to move to more remote communities.

Mueller, R., Carr-Stewart, S., Steeves, L., & Marshall, J. (2011). Teacher recruitment and retention in select First Nations schools. *In Education*, 17(3), 56–71.

Investigating the factors affecting teacher recruitment and retention in First Nations schools, the authors conducted a case study comparison between eight schools in one Tribal Council and one publicly funded school in Saskatchewan. The results reveal that **attrition and recruitment variations between schools were largely contextual. The absence of a comprehensive school system that governs many of the teachers' rights, such as salaries, was identified as a leading cause of teacher attrition and low recruitment numbers in the Tribal Council schools.** For example, teachers in First Nations schools were faced with lower salaries in comparison to teachers in other school boards. **At the community level, high attrition rates impacted students' achievements, parents' involvement, and overall educational goals in First Nations schools.** Therefore, a recommendation emerged for policymakers to create enhanced long-term educational policies guaranteeing consistent funding to First Nations schools. Such a policy decision may help counter First Nation teachers leaving First Nations schools for better incentives at a publicly funded school.

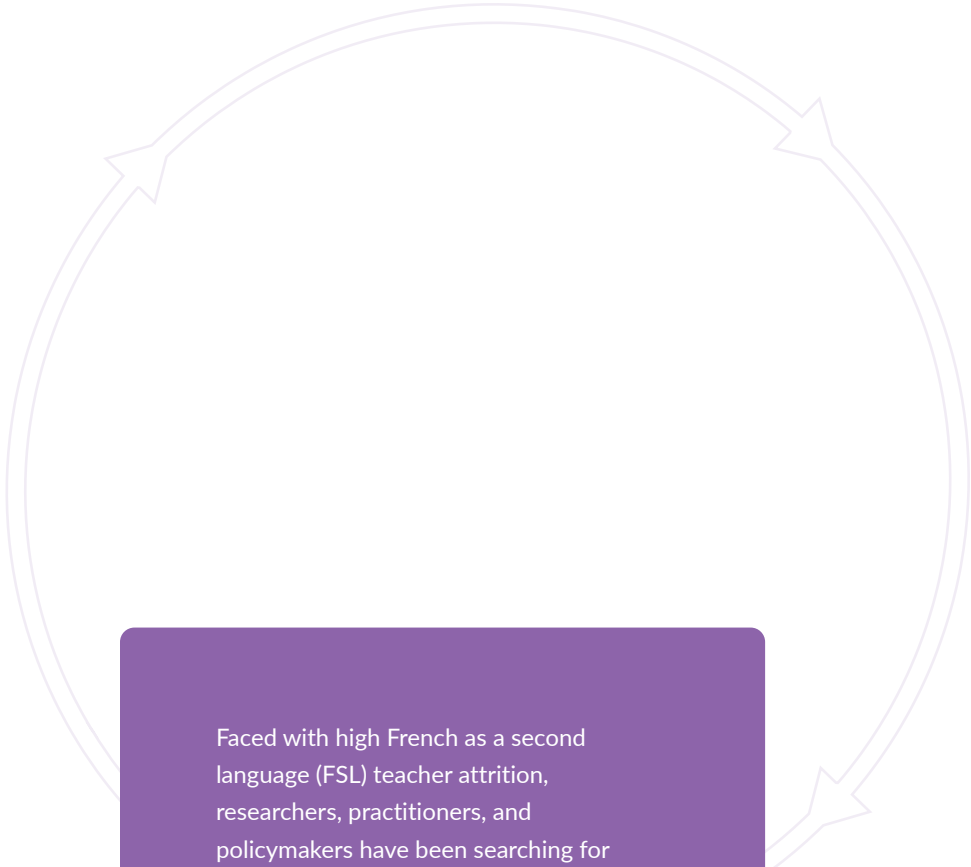
Storey, V. J. (1993). Factors, issues, and problems in the recruitment and retention of teachers for rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 9(3), 160–169.

In this article, the author reports on rural teachers' perspectives on factors influencing three critical decisions in their teaching career: 1) the decision to join the teaching profession; 2) the decision to remain; and 3) the decision to leave the profession. The aim is to inform rural school districts' recruitment and retention efforts. Data were collected through a survey of 558 teachers in rural schools and districts across British Columbia (BC). Information sought in the survey included demographic data and participants' perspectives regarding the factors influencing their recruitment, retention, and attrition, in addition to information on participation in a government loan forgiveness program. Results outlined a profile of rural teachers. **In at least one of the three career decisions, influences included job conditions, teachers' lifestyle, school district recruiters, compensation, social and recreational opportunities, and partner's job.**

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Faced with high French as a second language (FSL) teacher attrition, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have been searching for and creating strategies to increase retention in the profession. In addition to chronicling these efforts, this report offers a detailed review of research on teacher recruitment. Each section begins with an introduction and follows with a list of key findings and recommendations. Studies reviewed are organized to narrow the focus from general education to second language and FSL teachers. This report is essential to everyone concerned with the issue of FSL teacher attrition and looking for evidence-based strategies to enhance recruitment and retention.



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