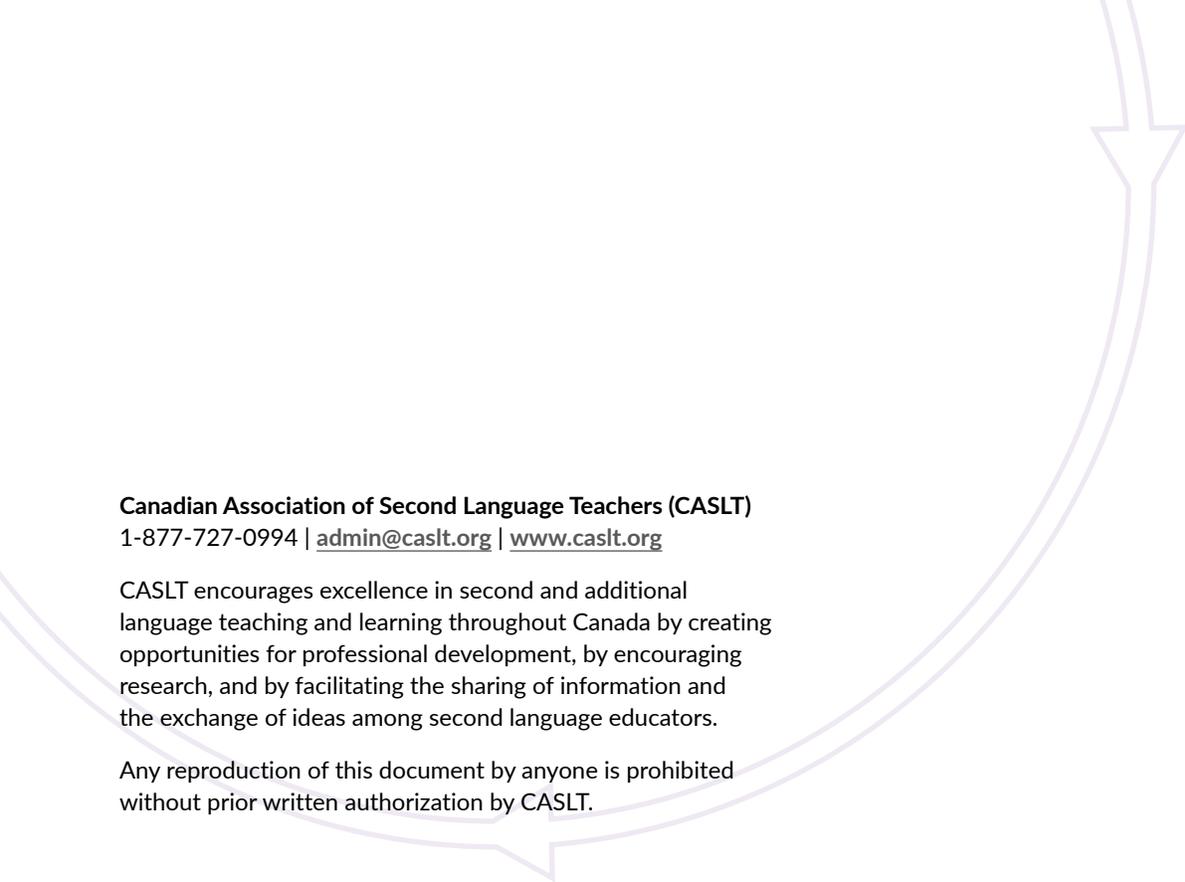

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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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Executive Summary – 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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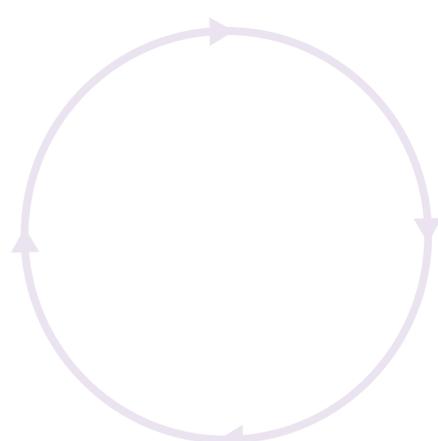
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Canada



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.
- Inadequate initial training received and unmet career aspirations.
- Not having access to a dedicated FSL classroom or an FSL consultant in their schools.
- A lack of funding for FSL-related activities.
- A lack of French-speaking supply teachers, consultants for students with special needs, and French-speaking support staff.
- Feeling more valued by their administration than by the community at large (including colleagues, parents, and students).

Teacher Retention

Relevant Findings for Teacher Retention in General

Key Findings from Retention Research

- Induction and mentoring programs are effective in improving teacher retention.
- Induction and mentoring programs are guided by a complex set of interrelated factors influencing retention rates (i.e., individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy).
- Induction and mentorship programs across Canada are not consistently available.

For Effective Retention Efforts

Individual Aspects

- Novice teachers are allowed space to reflect and bridge between professional realities and personal goals.

Interpersonal Aspects

- Teachers collaborate with other teachers on their own induction activities.
- A positive relationship is established between mentees and mentors in induction programs, which is critical to their professional development (e.g., helping teachers in bridging theory to practise).

Organizational Practices

- There exists a positive classroom climate and high student achievement.
- Leaders follow transformational and distributed leadership styles.
- Professional support is available:
 - ↳ From mentors who are from the same subject field as the teacher-mentee.
 - ↳ From collaborative networks to validate learning experiences and help develop teachers' professional identities.
 - ↳ From school leaders and administrators involved in induction programs (e.g., building trusting relationships with teachers; recognizing resilience as a motive for retention).

Community at Large

- Teachers feel a sense of belonging to the school community.
- Teacher induction is designed to begin during pre-service training and continue through the early years in the teaching profession for an easy integration into the school system.

Macro-Level Policies

- Retention strategies are tailored to specific groups of teachers (e.g., teachers in remote or rural areas, First Nations and minority teachers, and teachers in the Catholic sector).
- There are clear guidelines and/or a framework outlining administrators' roles in induction and mentorship programs.
- Stakeholders (in teacher education programs and in schools) attend to novice teachers' *stories to live by* (i.e., their professional and personal narratives).

Findings Specific to L2 Teacher Retention

- There is a lack of validation for L2 teachers' professional identities.
- FI professionals are highly educated, mostly L2 speakers of French, and mostly women who work in elementary education.

Findings Specific to FSL Teacher Retention

- FSL teachers benefit from professional development specific to FSL teachers' programs of instruction (i.e., French immersion).
- Immersion-based teacher education programs are more effective in supporting future FSL teachers' linguistic and cultural competencies in the target language.

Why Is It Challenging to Retain FSL Teachers?

- Competition within and/or across districts.
- FSL teachers' insufficient language competency levels.
- Working in rural locations.
- Heavy course loads.
- Teachers transferring to new assignments.
- Teachers receiving full-time contracts in other locations.
- Difficult working conditions.
- Lack of pedagogical resources.
- Challenges inherent to the diversity of FSL programming.
- Inadequate administrative support.
- Inadequate coordination with universities to support incoming novice FSL teachers.
- Geographical location.
- Low job security.

Recommendations to Enhance FSL Teacher Retention

- Tailored professional development opportunities to help incoming FSL teachers maintain and advance their linguistic and cultural competences (e.g., regular immersive exchanges in Francophone environments, opportunities to improve knowledge about the French language).
- Tailored professional development opportunities to help incoming FSL teachers address their reported professional learning needs (e.g., access to effective teaching resources, opportunities to improve their knowledge of effective teaching strategies).
- Creating a national or provincial resource centre which includes resources and online assistance for immersion and core French professionals, as well as direct access to research.
- Making a concerted effort to promote the value of a career in FSL education (e.g., by offering dedicated classroom space to teachers, prioritizing CF programs in schools, legal protection from lay-offs, financial incentives, higher wages).
- Offering professional development to raise administrators' awareness of the benefits and issues unique to French immersion programs (e.g., facilitating forums with school board HR personnel).
- Simplifying how to communicate information about immersion education to school boards (e.g., using newsletters, identifying immersion ambassadors at each school board).

Teacher Recruitment

Relevant Findings for Teacher Recruitment in General

Key Findings from Recruitment Research

- Recruitment efforts are successful when addressing reported challenges and using a variety of platforms at all levels (e.g., Faculties of Education, community partnerships, school boards, language courses during secondary school, etc.).
- Recruitment strategies must be tailored to the targeted group of teachers (i.e., teachers in rural areas, teachers in First Nations schools, and minority teachers).

For increased Recruitment Rates

- Teachers are offered loan payments.
- Teachers' workload is reduced.
- Teachers are offered financial incentives (e.g., cost of moving, one-time recruitment fee).

Findings Specific to L2 Teacher Recruitment

- Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs about their linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical competence before, during, and after pre-service training affect their ability to develop the necessary skills to succeed as L2 teachers.
- Secondary school students hold misconceptions about the L2 teaching profession.

Findings Specific to FSL Teacher Recruitment

- Schools and teacher candidates report inconsistent standards for French-language proficiency requirements and assessment during the hiring process.
- Cross-board collaboration reduces the variation of tools and processes used to assess the French proficiency of teacher applicants across boards.
- Administrators and parents (in BC) are opposed to lowering the hiring standards to attract more FSL teachers.

Why Is It Challenging to Recruit FSL Teachers?

- The lack of prioritization of French within schools/districts.
- Common knowledge about FSL teachers' working conditions (e.g., feelings of isolation in the school community, underfunded resources, heavy workload and responsibilities).
- Location of teachers' residences and the schools.

Currently Used Recruitment Strategies for FSL Teachers

- Proactively hiring teacher candidates on practicum.
- Posting on school district job board websites and job banks (e.g., *Apply to Education* in Ontario, *Make a Future* in BC, *Workopolis*).
- Presenting at Faculties of Education.
- Having HR staff recruit at job fairs and travel to other provinces to recruit.
- Relying on word of mouth and using social media.
- Offering substitute teaching positions to teacher candidates before graduation.
- Offering higher wages.

Recommendations to Enhance FSL Teacher Recruitment

Expanding Recruitment Efforts

- Using promotional resources and marketing campaigns.
- Targeting secondary school students.
- Involving the community by:

- ↳ Providing community-based educational training programs in remote Indigenous communities.
- ↳ Targeting current FSL students who might become immersion teachers in their communities.
- ↳ Creating projects in cultural communities to assist them in using their French.
- Training more native French speakers to become L2 specialists.
- Creating a specialist CF position for elementary and middle schools (in BC).

Offering General Incentives

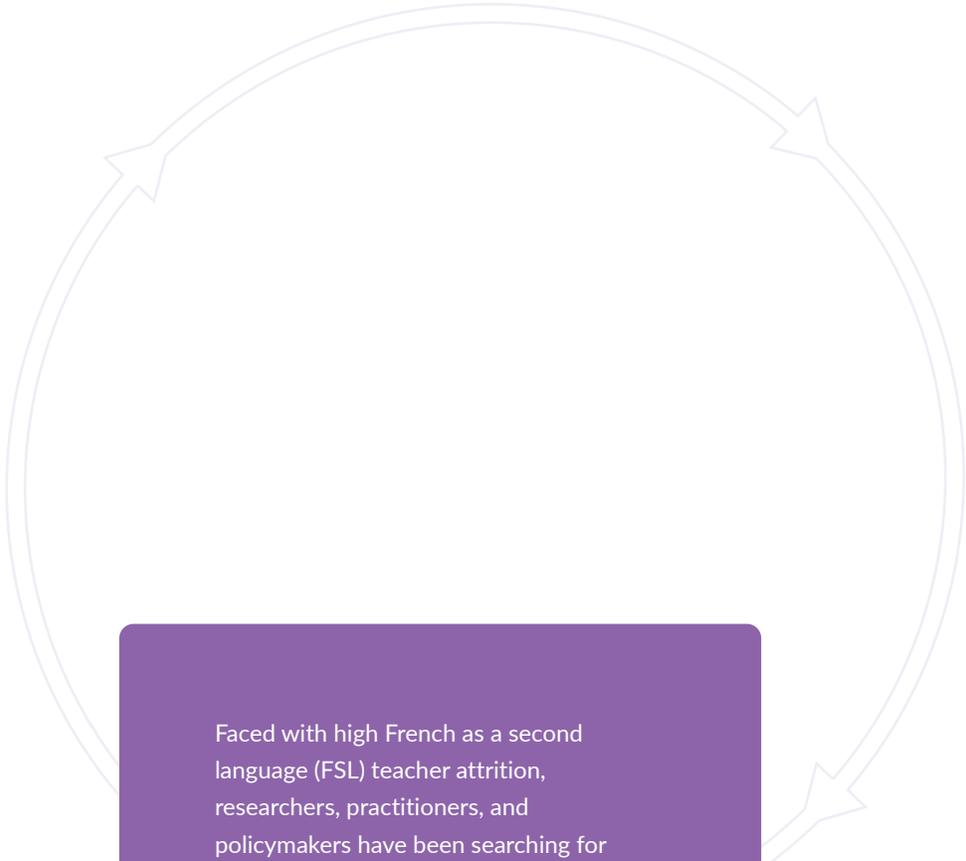
- Financial:
 - ↳ Repayment of student loans and offering scholarships.
 - ↳ Enhancing job conditions (e.g., offering funding for professional development opportunities, classroom materials, and resources).
 - ↳ Providing financial subsidies for FSL teachers (e.g., to aid with the costs of moving, a one-time relocation payment).
 - ↳ Giving students in teacher education programs the chance to take part in a Canada-wide contest (winners would receive a French immersion placement in a Canadian context of their choice).
- Social and linguistic:
 - ↳ Offering social and recreational opportunities to develop and maintain linguistic and cultural competence in French.
 - ↳ Providing early career teachers with a French Immersion virtual kit. This kit would include activities, resources, contact information, and information on immersion schools.

Offering Targeted Incentives

- Offering placement grants for teacher candidates in hard-to-staff areas.
- Reducing barriers minority students face in pursuing a career in teaching.

Enhancing Access to FSL Programs

- Offering fast-track courses for suitable candidates.
- Recruiting potential candidates through partnerships.
- Developing new tools:
 - ↳ Developing standardized FSL teacher qualifications to align qualification standards and professional equivalencies across Canada, including minimum language proficiency levels required by FSL teachers.
 - ↳ Creating a diagnostic test for students to enter the university-level education program.
 - ↳ Creating a national web portal for all immersion and core French professionals searching for positions.
- Training school district recruits on the targeted teachers' unique circumstances.



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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