

30 years of education: Canada's language groups

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In an era of demographic, social and technological changes, the Canadian population faces an increasingly pressing need for a highly qualified labour force. As a result, education has become an important factor in the social and economic integration of individuals. In addition, the number of years of formal education needed to meet the requirements of many jobs has increased substantially over the past 30 years.

Using data from the Censuses of Population, this article examines how the educational profiles of Francophones, Anglophones and allophones have changed over the past 30 years, and the factors that have contributed to many of these changes.

Allophones have largest decline in proportion with less than grade 9 education

According to census data, all three language groups have made considerable progress in educational attainment over the past 30 years. One way to measure this is to look at, over time, the proportion of individuals who have less than grade 9 education, a level historically considered the threshold of literacy. Among Anglophones, the percentage of Canadians aged 15 and over who had less than grade 9 dropped from 23% in 1971 to 5% in 2001. Francophones also recorded a large decline, from 44% in

CST What you should know about this study

Data from this article come from the Censuses of Population.

Language groups: For the purposes of this article, the Canadian population is divided into three language groups: Anglophones (those whose first language learned at home in childhood is English), Francophones (those whose first language learned at home in childhood is French) and allophones (those whose first language learned at home in childhood is a language other than English or French).

1971 to 15% in 2001. Finally, the decline has been the largest among allophones, as the proportion who had less than grade 9 schooling dropped from approximately 50% to 17% over the 30-year period.

In 1971 Anglophones were, on the whole, in a considerably more advantageous situation than Francophones and most allophones. Educational improvements for Francophones took more time, as the major transformations to the French education system did not begin to have an impact on youths until the early 1970s.

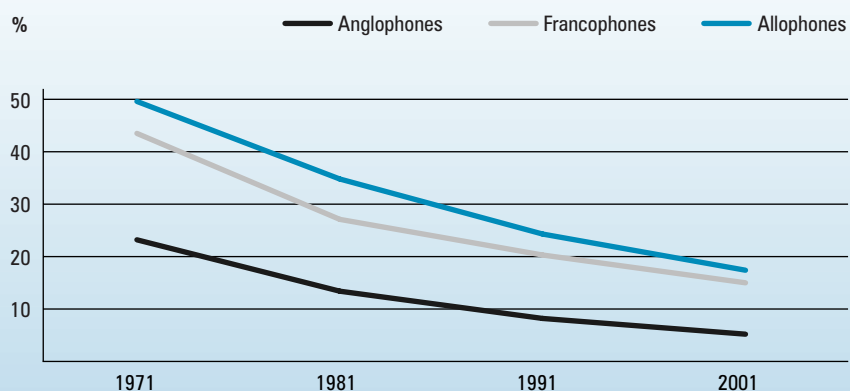
Allophones are more diverse because most have immigrated to Canada from a wide range of countries at various stages of development, and have entered under a range of admission classes ranging from refugees to economic class with diverse backgrounds. Consequently, newcomers to Canada have widely

different levels of education and socio-economic backgrounds. Some are highly educated when they arrive, while others acquire much of their education in Canada.¹

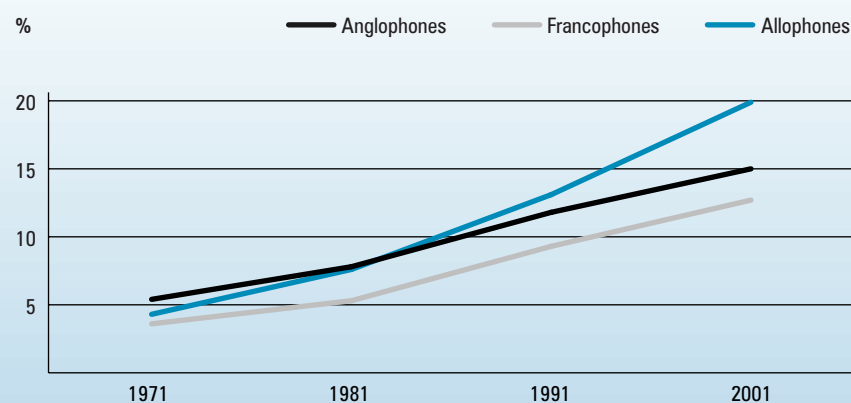
Francophone women aged 20 to 24 were least likely to have not graduated from high school

For young people, today, completion of high school is widely recognized as the minimum educational requirement and with greater demand for skills and knowledge in the labour market, postsecondary education is becoming the new standard. Those who don't complete high school face

1. Foreign-trained immigrants may experience barriers in having their skills and education credentials fully recognized in the Canadian labour market which may lead to an underutilization of their skills.



Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population.



Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population.

difficulty integrating into the labour market or finding satisfying work that provides a good quality of life. It is especially important to monitor how many young people don't complete high school. In 2001, about 21% of 20- to 24-year-old men had not graduated from high school, for each of the language groups.² Young women were less likely to have not yet graduated from high school than young men: 13% of Francophones, 16% of Anglophones and 17% of allophones.

Being without a high school diploma, however, need not last forever. In fact, among 20- to 24-year-olds

who had not yet graduated, a significant proportion attended educational institutions. Some 18% of young Anglophones were in this situation, as were 19% of Francophones and 25% of allophones. In all language groups, women were more likely to be enrolled than men.

Allophones are most likely to be university educated

Another measure of educational change assesses how the proportion of individuals who have at least one university degree changes over time. While Anglophones were clearly in the lead in

1971, by 2001 allophones had taken over and had become the group with the highest proportion of university educated individuals. During these 30 years, the proportion of allophones with a university degree increased by 363%, followed by Francophones (277%) and finally Anglophones (177%). By 2001, nearly 13% of Francophones had a university degree, compared with 15% of Anglophones and close to 20% of allophones.

In Quebec, the creation in the 1970s of the Université du Québec network, as well as access to part-time studies, contributed greatly to the rapid growth of Francophone university enrolment.³ During the 1970s and 1980s, part-time university programs were more likely to be offered in Quebec's French-language universities than elsewhere in Canada.

Young people have higher education

Naturally, changes in education have affected young people the most. The proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds who left school before Grade 9 is much smaller than in the overall population. In 2001, slightly over 1% of Anglophones in this age group, nearly 4% of Francophones, and 5% of allophones did not have a Grade 9 education.

Similarly, the proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds with a university degree was considerably higher than in the general population. Nearly 23% of

2. High school dropout rates refer to the percentage of the population who have not completed high school and are not working toward its completion. Some of the young people identified as not having completed high school are still working towards a diploma. Therefore, the percentages quoted here are not dropout rates.

3. Chenard, P. and M. Lévesque. 1992. "La démocratisation : succès et limites." *Le Québec en jeu : comprendre les grands défis* (G. Daigle, ed.). Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal. p. 405.

both Francophones and Anglophones, and 33% of allophones, this age had a university degree in 2001.

Compared with Francophones and Anglophones aged 25 to 34, the group of allophones this age is highly polarized in educational attainment, containing the highest proportion of both the least educated and the most educated individuals. In 2001, for example, 5 of the 20 most numerous allophone groups had a university education rate that exceeded 50%, while among 4 the proportion with university degrees was less than 20%. The highest proportion of university educated individuals occurred among those with Romanian mother tongue (59%) and the lowest among people with Portuguese mother tongue (15%).

Outside Quebec, young Francophones are more likely to have a university degree than Anglophones

The proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds with a university education varies from province to province and has changed significantly over the last 30 years. In 1971, in every province, Anglophones were more likely than Francophones to have had a university degree. By 2001, only Anglophones in Quebec were more likely to have a university degree than Francophones aged 25 to 34: 31% versus 23%, respectively. Francophones lead Anglophones in every other province. This occurred not because Francophones in Quebec had less education than Francophones in other provinces, but because Anglophones who lived in Quebec had significantly higher levels of education than Anglophones elsewhere.

In 2001, allophones in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and New Brunswick were more likely to have a university degree than the other two language groups, while in Manitoba and Saskatchewan they were less likely. In Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia



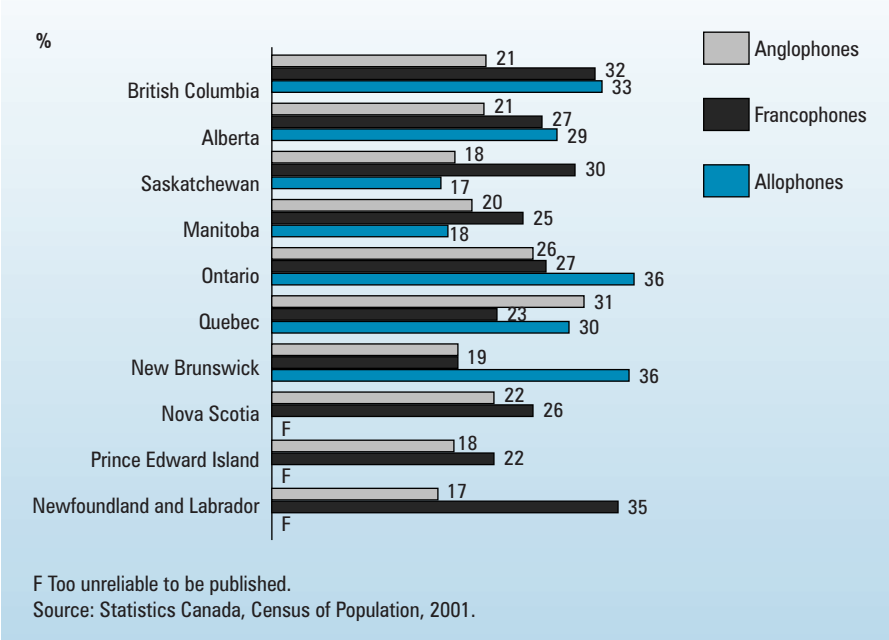
Proportion of university degree holders varies widely among young allophones

Mother tongue	% of 25- to 34-year-olds with a university degree
Romanian	59
Korean	55
Russian	55
Urdu	53
Chinese	50
Hindi	45
Gujarati	43
Persian	40
Arabic	39
Tagalog (Filipino)	37
Greek	33
Croatian	33
Italian	28
Punjabi	26
Spanish	25
Polish	24
German	20
Vietnamese	18
Tamil	16
Portuguese	15

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001.



In most provinces, Francophones aged 25 to 34 are more likely than Anglophones to have a university degree



The 1960s marked an important milestone in the evolution of education in Canada, particularly in Quebec. In 1963, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (the Dunton-Laurendeau Commission) was set up to address the discontent among Francophones about the continued vitality of their language and culture within Canada. The Commission found that Francophones were consistently behind Anglophones in educational attainment, average income, occupational levels and industrial ownership.

For example, according to the 1961 Census, Canadian men with a French origin in the labour force were considerably more likely than those with a British background to have stopped their formal education at the end of elementary school: 54% versus 31%, respectively. The cultural divide in educational attainment persisted at the higher end of the educational spectrum. Canadian men with British origins were more than twice as likely as those with a French background to have a university degree: 13% versus 6%, respectively.

In order to respond to the multiple needs of a society that was seriously behind in its universal access to education, the Parent Commission was set up in Quebec to “create a free and accessible public education system...”¹ In 1964, the Quebec Ministry of Education was founded to implement the recommendations of the Parent Commission.²

Because French schools outside Quebec received no government funding, until the early 1970s Francophones outside that province had very limited access to education in their own language.³ These difficulties meant that only a small number of Francophones attended secondary school and, of those, very few graduated.⁴ As a result of much work by various commissions and committees, by 1969 French language secondary schools had begun to be established in Ontario, the province with the largest Francophone population outside Quebec.⁵

1. Chenard, P. and M. Lévesque. 1992. “La démocratisation : succès et limites.” *Le Québec en jeu : comprendre les grands défis* (G. Daigle, ed.). Montréal: Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal. p. 385-422.
2. *ibid.* p. 386.
3. See Bordeleau, L.G., R. Bernard and B. Cazabon. “L’éducation en Ontario français,” as well as Levasseur-Ouimet, F., Y. Mahé, F. McMahon and C. Tardif. “L’éducation dans l’Ouest canadien” in *Francophonies minoritaires au Canada : l’état des lieux* (J.-Y. Thériault, ed.). 1999. Moncton: Éditions d’Acadie.
4. Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1967-70). Ottawa: Queen’s Printer. See also Bordeleau et al. p. 447.
5. This change resulted in large measure from the fact that in 1967, the premier of Ontario, John P. Robarts, recognized that “there is an urgent need to provide education at the secondary level in the language of the Franco-Ontarian community”. Davis, W.G. 1968. *Report of the Committee on French Language Schools in Ontario*. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education. p. 9.

the number of allophones is not large enough to provide reliable estimates.

During the past 30 years the proportion of Francophones with a university degree outside Quebec had increased substantially, partly as a result of youth migration from Quebec to other provinces, especially western Canada. In places, such as western Canada, which have small Francophone populations, a small influx of Francophones from Quebec can cause a large increase in the proportion with university degrees. This was the case in all provinces except New Brunswick and Ontario for young adults aged 25 to 34. In New Brunswick and Ontario, where Francophone populations were already

sizeable, migration did not have a large effect on the proportion of Francophones with university degrees.

Young Francophone women show largest increase in the proportion with a university degree

One of the most notable changes since the 1960s resulting from social change and education reform is undoubtedly the large-scale enrolment of women at postsecondary institutions, especially universities. In 1971, the gap between university educated men and women aged 25 to 34 was considerable. Among all three linguistic groups, men were at least twice as likely as women to have a

university degree. For example, the proportion of Francophone men with a university education was 10% compared with 4% of Francophone women. The corresponding percentages were 14% versus 6% for Anglophones, and 12% versus 6% for allophones.

By 1991, the number of 25- to 34-year-old women with university degrees had caught up with the number of men in all three language groups and by 2001 they had surpassed them. The change was most pronounced among Francophone women, whose proportion with a university degree grew nearly sevenfold between 1971 and 2001. Allophone women recorded the second largest

Women are now more likely than men to hold a university degree in all three language groups

	Anglophones		Francophones		Allophones	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
	% of 25- to 34-year-olds					
1971	14	6	10	4	12	6
1981	16	12	12	8	19	14
1991	16	16	14	14	21	20
2001	21	26	19	27	32	33

Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population.

The growth in the proportion of graduate degrees is stronger among women than men

	Anglophones		Francophones		Allophones	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
	% of 30- to 39-year-olds					
1971	3.2	1.1	3.0	1.2	3.4	1.3
2001	3.5	3.2	3.6	3.3	10.0	6.2

Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population.

increase in the proportion who had university degrees over this period, followed by Anglophone women. In 2001, Francophone women lead Francophone men by 7 percentage points, the widest gender gap among language groups.

Allophones most likely to have a graduate degree

Over the last 30 years, the number of individuals aged 30 to 39⁴ with a master's or doctoral degree has increased nearly fivefold, contributing to Canada's highly-specialized skills and research capabilities. However, since the total population has also increased over these decades, the proportion of 30- to 39-year-old graduate degree holders has stayed fairly constant, at around 3%, for Anglophones and Francophones. The proportion of allophones with master's and doctoral degrees, however, grew from 3% to 8% between 1971 and 2001.

In each language group, the growth of graduate degrees was stronger

among women than men, so by 2001 both Anglophone and Francophone women had caught up to men. Once again, allophones were the exception. Among this group, men were much more likely than women to hold a graduate degree (10% versus 6%), probably the result of changes in immigration policy placing more emphasis on education as an entry criterion for some classes of immigrants.

Despite considerable progress made by Francophones in Quebec, Anglophones and allophones aged 30 to 39 were almost twice as likely to have a master's or doctoral degree in that province. Outside Quebec, on the other hand, 4% of Francophone men and women aged 30 to 39 had graduate degrees, compared with 3% of Anglophones. Among allophones both inside and outside Quebec, the proportion who had such a degree was more than twice as large as among Francophones.

Summary

All three language groups — Anglophones, Francophones and allophones — have made notable improvements in their levels of education over the past 30 years. In all three groups, the proportion of individuals with a less than grade 9 education has dropped and the share with a university education has climbed. While in 1971 Francophone Canadians were clearly behind Anglophones in educational attainment, they have since made considerable progress at all levels. In fact, the proportion of Francophones with a university degree exceeds that of Anglophones in every province outside Quebec. In Quebec, continuing a historical trend, Anglophones have higher levels of education than do Anglophones in other provinces.

Many social changes coincided with the large-scale increase in the proportion of women with postsecondary education, especially university education. While in 1971 women were much less likely to have a university degree than men, by 2001 women were more likely to have a degree in all three language groups, with francophone women showing the largest change. Women increased their representation not only in bachelor's degrees, but also in master's and doctorates as well.

In all language groups, young men aged 20 to 24 were more likely than young women to have not completed high school. A number of them, however, attended educational institutions at the time of the Census.

4. This age group was chosen rather than the 25 to 34 age group because students enrolling in master's or doctoral programs tend to be older.