

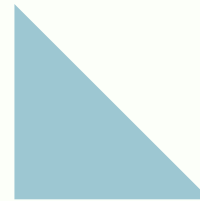
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Prepared by: Gustavo Andrade and Maria Morais.



# Community Vitality Report on English-speaking International Students

Youth For Youth Quebec (Y4Y)



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# Introduction

Since 2016, the first year of the QS Best Student Cities ranking, produced by QS Quacquarelli Symonds, Montreal is ranked in the top 10 best cities for students in the world. It is regularly ranked as the most student-friendly city in North America and was rated #1 in 2017. The rank's methodology includes indicators such as university rankings, affordability, and, since 2017, students' opinions (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2019). As a result, Montreal attracts tens of thousands of international students every year. Many of those students come to Quebec with English as their second language, with little to no knowledge of French, to study at both major English-language universities, Concordia and McGill, or in one of the numerous English-language private colleges. Besides all the challenges related to post-secondary studies and being an English-speaker in Quebec, English-speaking international students who want to settle in Quebec also need to face the challenge of living abroad and learning the language of the majority.

Although Quebec attracts so many international students, the retention rates are concerning. Retention rates refer to the number of students that move out of the province after finishing their studies. According to Holley (2017), the retention rate among international students in the province is only 43%.

Holley (2017) points out that several international students came to Quebec with the desire to learn French during their studies. However, most of them struggle to do so "due to time constraints, a lack of motivation, or because they interact mostly with English-speaking students" (Holley 2017, p. 4). French knowledge is essential not only in finding a job or daily life but also in the immigration process to live in Quebec. The leading immigration stream in Quebec for post-secondary students is the PEQ Graduate (Programme de l'expérience québécoise). As presented by Fleury et al. (2020), 86% of the immigrants obtained a Certificat de Sélection du Québec (CSQ) in 2019 through the PEQ stream. This process requires an advanced-intermediate knowledge of French (level 7, according to the Échelle Québécoise des Niveaux de Compétence en français des Personnes Immigrantes Adultes).

This report aims to measure the effectiveness of the systems and networks currently in place in Quebec to support international students who may not speak the language of the majority. To achieve this goal, the report will present the number of English-language post-secondary institutions in the province of Quebec, the average number of

# Introduction

international students those institutions receive every year, and English-speaking international students' perceptions and experiences on community support in Quebec through one on one interviews.

The next two sections will show the significance and methodology used in this work. We then present the number of English-language post-secondary institutions in the province of Quebec, the average number of international students those institutions receive every year, and the results of the interviews. We conclude by showing that the support network's effectiveness for these newcomers seems not to have improved.

*Today's English-speaking youth are located in a population of 1.1 million English speakers living in Quebec. A minority within a minority, Quebec's English speakers comprise 13.8% of the total provincial population. However there are 225,585 English-speaking youth (15-29) living in Quebec and they form a substantial 20.5% of their language population. Quebec's English-speaking communities range from more than 600,000 on the island of Montreal, and large population counts in nearby Montérégie (156,200) and Laval (91,115), to tiny populations in areas such as Bas-Saint-Laurent (1,080), Saguenay Lac-Saint-Jean (1,975) and Gaspésie-Iles (695).*

*In terms of socio-demographics, over one-third (35.1%) of Quebec's English-speaking youth are also members of a visible minority community. At 18.2%, English-speaking youth (15-29) exceed the provincial norm for English speakers to live in single parent families (12.4%). In 2016, 13.3% of Quebec's English-speaking youth were unemployed compared to 9.8% of French-speakers. Quebec's English-speaking youth earn lower income compared to their francophone counterparts: 23.6% are living below the low-income cut-off compared to 14.6% of French-speaking youth. This is despite higher education levels for English-speaking youth residing in Quebec, who were more likely to claim a university diploma or degree at the bachelor level or above as their highest level of educational attainment (20.4%) compared to French-speaking youth (13.9%) (CHSSN 2018). And not only have anglophones lost a relative socioeconomic advantage in comparison with francophones over recent decades, but also there are widening gaps within the anglophone population itself (Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec 2012).*

**Y4Y Belonging Project (2020)**

# Significance

This report's main contribution is to measure the vitality of the existing English-speaking international students' support networks. Thus, this report could spread information about these support networks and help to improve public-policy design on policies targeted to English-speaking youth.

# Methodology

We began our research by composing a list of seven interview questions surrounding English-speaking international students' experience in Quebec, and contacting English-language post-secondary institutions to obtain the average number of international students they receive every year. We opted to conduct interviews rather than surveys because interviews allow a more natural conversational approach to collect information, potentially providing us with a more robust understanding of the participants' overall experiences as English-speaking international students. To obtain our sample of three participants, we used Y4Y's network to reach out to English-speaking international students and ask if they would participate in an interview. Unfortunately, due to our current overwhelming climate with COVID-19, we were not able to reach as many students as we had initially hoped for. Due to this, we were only able to get five participants to interview. The interview questions can be found in the Appendix on page 11.

# Number of International Students in Postsecondary English-Speaking Institutions

According to the Bureau de Coopération Interuniversitaire (BCI), 45,086 international students were enrolled in a university in Quebec for the 2018 Fall Term. The three English-language universities - Bishop's, Concordia, and McGill - account for nearly 45% of those students, with 20,091 international students enrolled in 2018. Quebec houses a total of twelve English-language post-secondary institutions, and the number of new international students each of those twelve institutions receives every year, on average, are as follows:

Institution	Number of International Students on average per year
Bishop's University	750
Champlain College Lennoxville	**
Champlain College Saint-Lambert	**
Champlain College Saint-Lawrence	2-6
Concordia University	3,000
Dawson College	175
Heritage College	**
John Abbott College	**
Marianopolis College	**
McGill University	12,798*
TAV College	230
Vanier College	**

Source: Elaborated by the authors with the information provided by the institutions.

\*Total number of international students.

\*\* Information not available.

# Interviews

The interviews took place in 30-45 minutes time blocks in which the interviewer asked the interviewee 7 questions regarding the interviewee's experience as an English-speaking international student in Quebec.

The interview began by discussing the professional and educational goals of the interviewees. All three interviewees shared that they were looking to finish their education and obtain employment in their field.

The participants that we interviewed all shared that employment has been a major factor in feeling compelled to improve their ability in the language of the majority. Two out of three of the participants shared that they feel that their inability to speak french has eliminated the possibility of a future in Montreal. These two participants are now planning to move out of Montreal because they feel that not knowing french has created a barrier in their ability to obtain employment in their fields.

Mixed responses were received when the interviewees were asked about their knowledge of English-speaking communities outside of Montreal. Two interviewees said that they were aware of the existence of those communities through their connection with Y4Y, but still did not know much about these communities. The third interviewee admitted that they knew nothing about English-speaking communities outside of Montreal.

When asked if they had ever travelled in Quebec outside of Montreal, all three participants shared that they had, but reported feeling more self-conscious as English-speakers when outside Montreal. All three participants shared that if they had not travelled with someone who spoke French, they imagine their experience would have been a lot more challenging and stressful. They faced situations where language skills were necessary for quotidian things, like getting a coffee in a café.

Considering the community support, although the participants mentioned they have some support for their daily lives, either from the university or other English-speaking students, the participants emphasized that they don't feel supported as a whole. The only organization mentioned was Y4Y Quebec, but it was not a viable option as it was far from the interviewee's home. Another participant pointed out that, although she has lived in Quebec for a long time and understands French, she feels discouraged to use the language in conversation because attendees reply in English when she speaks in French.

# Interviews

Regarding access to health, social and government services, one participant reported difficulties due to the necessity of speaking French. This participant stated that she always had to pay someone to assist her with bureaucracy and always used private doctors to get health care. The other two interviewees said they hadn't faced any challenges in accessing services. However, one of those two interviewees mentioned that she hadn't had problems because of the University's support, but she does not know how she will handle it after graduating. She also pointed out that she chooses to travel back to her native country to utilize dental health care since the University's health assistance does not cover it. This topic introduces a critical concern. Besides all the expenses related to moving to a new country and the international fees included in the tuition, these interviewees offered examples of situations where they additional expenditures may be a concern.

Lastly, we asked the participants to share some experiences related to being an English-speaking international student in Quebec. One participant offered a situation where she volunteered to work in a hospital at the beginning of the pandemic. Still, the hospital refused due to a lack of knowledge in French. The other two participants hadn't shared any experience, but both mentioned they comprehend and respect the necessity to learn the language of the majority, in order to stay in Quebec.



# Conclusion

Quebec is an exciting province with an effervescent cultural scene that attracts thousands of international students every year. However, as Holley (2017) presented, the retention of English-speakers, both Quebec-born and international students, is an issue that impacts the province severely.

This report aimed to measure the effectiveness of the systems and networks currently in place in Quebec to support English-speaking international students through one-on-one interviews.

Unfortunately, our interviews presented similar constraints to those pointed by Holley (2017), such as the difficulty in learning French while studying, lack of support outside the University community, and accessing certain services. These results indicate that the network of support for English-speaking international students hasn't become more robust since 2015. This is a long and hard road, and we need to keep improving to make Quebec more friendly to these newcomers and avoid the brain drain that, as pointed out by Stevenson (2000) in Holley's work, "had harmful effects both on the province's economy and on its viability as a distinct society." (cited in Holley 2017, p. 8)

## Future Directions

Considering the scenario presented by Holley (2017) and the findings in this report, the support network for English-speaking international students needs to find solutions to increase their reach to help the province retain more of these talented graduates in post-secondary institutions in Quebec.

Future research regarding the English-speaking international students' community's vitality may consider implementing and dispersing a new survey similar to Holley's work. A new survey would help identify how the recent changes to the PEQ program and the Covid-19 situation have impacted English-speaking international students, and whether they felt supported during these challenging times.

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# Appendix - Interview Questions

1. Have you ever felt compelled to improve your ability in the language of the majority, if so, in what situations did you feel that way?
2. What are your professional/educational goals while living in Quebec? Do you feel that lacking knowledge of French may pose any barriers to reaching those goals?
3. What do you know about English speaking communities outside of Montreal?
4. Have you ever travelled in Quebec outside of Montreal? If no, why not? If yes, how was your experience travelling in Quebec as an English Speaker?
5. Lastly, do you currently feel supported in your community as an English speaker? If not, what could improve this sense of support?
6. Have you experienced any situation in which you were not able to get employment, or struggled to access services (health care, government services) due to the lack of knowledge of French?
7. Do you have any situation/experience you would like to share related to being an English speaking international student in Quebec?