ACA prolang

STRATEGIC BILINGUALISM

CREATING COLLABORATION ACROSS LANGUAGES

This whitepaper explores the economic benefits, workforce challenges and regulatory framework of institutional bilingualism in Canada. It also outlines how implementing practical solutions when it comes to professional development, management and employee experience enables organizations to build sustainable bilingual capacity. By investing in both recruitment and workplace culture, organizations can turn compliance into competitive advantage.

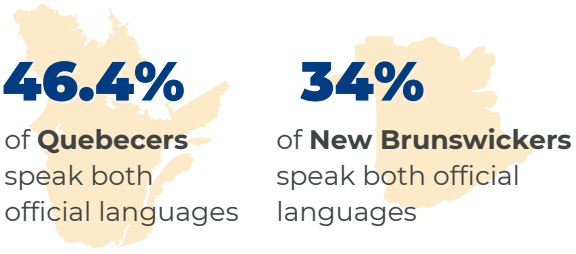


Linguistic Duality in the Workplace

Organizations across Canada are adapting to a shift in their workplace: bilingual environments. New tools, methods and frameworks are being deployed in a variety of ways, both to leverage advantages of this new reality, and to address the challenges that follow. Employees who use their second language to collaborate across cities and provinces, produce internal communications, or maintain client or supplier relationships can be faced with new tasks and professional development needs, which in turn requires organizations to respond with a wide range of supports. Skill-building, cultural frameworks, and models for inclusive practices help support employees and provide them with the confidence to perform more effectively in their second language.

What is driving this shift in linguistic duality and creating more opportunities for collaboration across languages?

Our country is home to a population of more than 41 million people, yet only 18% of Canadians are bilingual in English and French[1]. This limited bilingual capacity poses challenges for many organizations when it comes to attracting and retaining top talent from coast to coast.



46.4% of **Quebecers** speak both official languages

34% of **New Brunswickers** speak both official languages

9.5% of Canadians in the **rest of the country** speak both official languages

In 2023, there were nearly 15,000 active job postings that required bilingualism in Official Language Minority Communities[3]. The stakes are high, with demand for bilingual employees far outpacing supply, as organizations strive to serve their clients, foster a culture of inclusion, or in the circumstance of Federal institutions and Crown corporations, comply with language regulations to provide services in both official languages[2]. The impact of failing to embrace bilingualism in the workplace is significant, with companies risking non-compliance, higher job turnover, lower culture and sense of belonging, operational inefficiencies, and missed opportunities in French- or English-speaking markets.

Companies who are successful in deploying a culture of bilingualism or embracing linguistic duality, that is the coexistence of both French and English in the workplace, can reap the benefits of their efforts.

The Business Impact of Language Gaps

Research demonstrates that bilingualism generates measurable business value. Organizations that leverage it benefit from expanded trade and market access, higher employee retention, and improved client satisfaction. In provinces like New Brunswick, a strong bilingual workforce attracted investment and support in key industries such as IT, finance, insurance and tourism[8]. Organizations that offer language training and development gain in increased sales, productivity, market reach and client retention[10].

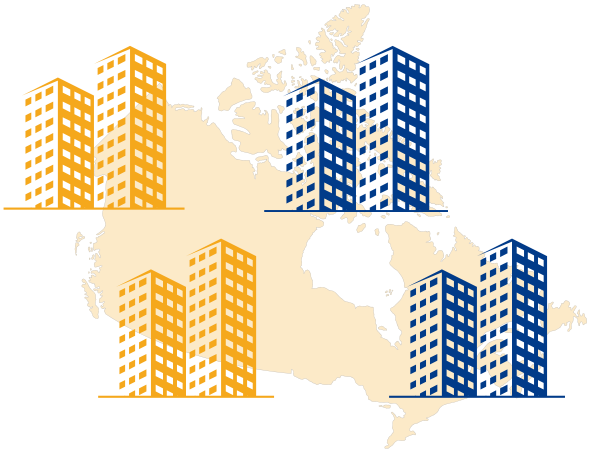
The Bilingualism Gap

Operating across Canada means navigating diverse linguistic landscapes. For a business in Toronto serving clients in Québec, or a federal Crown corporation operating nationally, bilingualism is not a “nice to have” but a strategic requirement. Whether serving official language minority communities in Manitoba or providing services across provincial borders, organizations must adapt to client, employee, and regulatory expectations.

Bilingualism Means Business

The financial case is strong. Nearly a quarter of Canadian businesses already offer at least one bilingual service[4].

In bilingual provinces, 50% of businesses offer at least one bilingual service.



Organizations that embrace bilingualism benefit from greater access to government contracts, increased trade with Francophone markets, and stronger client relations.

In the realm of exports, European SMEs with a language training strategy and employees with language skills outperformed their competitors, achieving an export sales proportion that was 44.5% higher[10]. On an individual level, bilingual employees earn more, demonstrating how the labour market rewards these skills[6].

Bilingual employees in Québec earn up to

37% more



A Snapshot of our Market

The importance of bilingualism within our market, working with the Canadian private industry and government departments, agencies, and crown corporations, can be seen through the investment that our clients make and the priorities our clients are setting for languages. Demands are rising for training in both official languages, and more organizations are offering both French and English training programs to their employees.

Corporate clients who offered **language training in both French and English.**

2024	2025
20.89%	**24.81%**

Average **number of employees in language training** per client

2024	2025
32.2	**39.6**

+7.4

employees per client



Across Canada, organizations are recognizing that language proficiency plays a critical role not only in client relations, but also in employee engagement, professional development, and retention. As of 2025, data shows that companies are investing more heavily in their employees' language skill development. From organizations with just a handful of participants to those with over two thousand learners, the trend is clear: the average number of employees enrolled in language training per company has grown steadily.

Growth from the inside out

The rise reflects a shift in how employers approach talent development. Given the challenges organizations face in recruiting bilingual employees in many sectors, a logical solution is to invest more in developing the language competencies of an employer's current workforce, which could explain the overall increase in the average number of learners per company

This increase in investment could also be explained by a drive to improve employee satisfaction and retention within the company, as well as create a strengthened sense of belonging in a bilingual environment. Employees in language training report a greater likelihood to remain at their company when offered the chance to grow professionally[9].

Designing Training for Impact

Organizations are investing more in language training to keep up with market needs and worker demands. With bilingualism increasingly tied to competitiveness, inclusivity, and employee engagement, companies are seeking scalable and sustainable ways to build language capacity internally.

At the same time, economic factors must be carefully considered when designing and delivering training programs. Balancing cost-effectiveness with learning impact requires optimizing the format of instruction and choosing between individual or group training, or a blended approach that combines both. Each format offers distinct advantages depending on the organization's objectives, employee profiles, and operational realities.

Smart Formats that Deliver Real Results

Individual training can accelerate individual progress and address specific professional contexts, making it well-suited for employees in client-facing or leadership roles. Group training, on the other hand, offers collaborative learning opportunities that build cohesion across teams, foster inclusion, and deliver strong outcomes at scale, while working on shared objectives. The decision between these forms, or how to combine them strategically, has become a central consideration in maximizing both the return on learning investment, and the development of a truly bilingual workforce.

Evolution of the breakdown by format and language	English Training		French Training	
	2024	2025	2024	2025
Small groups	80.61%	85.78%	82.52%	84.42%
Private classes	19.39%	14.22%	17.48%	15.58%

Our data reveals a notable shift toward small group language training in English and French programs, and a corresponding modest decline in individual training in both languages. This shift reflects a growing preference for collaborative and cost-efficient training models. Group sessions not only allow companies to training more employees simultaneously, but also encourage peer learning, shared motivation, and interaction in realistic communication contexts, which are key drivers of long-term language retention. As hybrid and multilingual teams become the norm, group learning environments can reinforce inclusion and cross-departmental collaboration.

Balancing Scale and Learning Impact

While individual training remains important for employees with specific professional objectives or scheduling constraints, the data suggests that companies are prioritizing forms that maximize impact across larger teams, aligning with broader goals of accessibility, equity, and return on training investment.

However, choosing a group format does not mean sacrificing individual learning objectives. Among group learners, 17.5% in 2024 and 2025 also participated in individual follow-up sessions, offered as part of a hybrid format to balance collective and personalized learning needs.

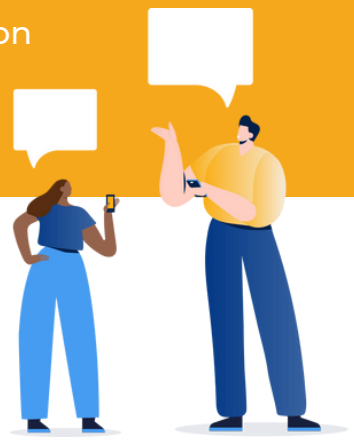
A closer look by language shows that 21.54% of English learners, and 12.48% of French learners in group programs opted for additional individual support. This disparity may reflect differences in professional roles, language application in the workplace, or varying levels of proficiency. This highlights the importance of a flexible, blended approach that delivers both team-based development and targeted individual skill-building.

17.5%

of group learners in 2024 and 2025 were in a hybrid format that includes

tailored

weekly individual training sessions that reinforce oral proficiency and provide oral production and comprehension practice.



Language Skills that Drive Confidence and Performance

Beyond choosing the right training format, organizations must also consider how language development supports effective collaboration and employee confidence. Even when employees possess foundational skills in a second language, insecurities can limit participation in meetings, cross-departmental projects, and client interactions. This can create barriers to fully leveraging a bilingual workforce. Well-designed language training addresses these challenges by providing employees with practical, workplace-relevant practice, opportunities for repeated interaction, and structured feedback.

Fostering a Culture of Collaboration with Bilingualism

Group learning environments, in particular, allow employees to practice in a safe, collaborative setting, reinforcing language use while normalizing mistakes as part of the learning process. Individual follow-ups can then target specific skill gaps or professional scenarios, further boosting confidence.

By combining these approaches, organizations enhance bilingual communication skills and foster a culture where employees feel empowered to contribute fully, reducing hesitancy and strengthening collaboration across teams. Language training becomes a tool not only for skill development, but also for creating a safe learning and experimental environment. It drives engagement and a stronger sense of belonging in the workplace.

Culture Starts with Confidence

Having the right skills to do perform in their second language is not the only factor that creates challenges in the workplace; many bilingual employees actually hesitate to use their skills at work due to linguistic insecurity and workplace cultures that default to a single dominant language[5].

The underutilization of bilingual talent is a missed opportunity for organizations striving to foster inclusivity and agility in their operations.

In this context, HR and learning leaders have a unique opportunity to make a strategic shift and drive performance, one that enhances engagement, growth and retention by actively investing in language training and embedding bilingualism into the fabric of workplace culture.

But what type of support is most effective in helping employees feel confident and empowered to use their second language? Learner feedback offers valuable insight. When asked about their experience, 91.2% of learners that answered our survey reported feeling more confident using their second language after training, underscoring the impact of structured, supportive instructor-led training.

91.2% of learners reported increased confidence after their language training



The Employee Perspective: Insights from Learner Feedback

The effectiveness of language training is further reflected in learner satisfaction and endorsement. An average of 97.4% of participants indicated that they would recommend the program to a colleague.





98.54% of English learners + **96.39%** of French learners

would recommend the program to a colleague



This strong approval highlights both the perceived value of training and its relevance to employee' professional needs.

The Power of a Hybrid Approach

Supporting employees in workplace communication extends beyond the group class. Structured follow-ups provide opportunities for relevant practice, help address specific challenges, and reinforce confidence in business contexts. Individual follow-ups are highly valued, as they provide a chance to practice newly acquired language skills, which supports their use in the workplace.

96.5% of English learners

95.5% of French learners

reported that individual follow-ups **supported their ability to communicate effectively.**



Taken together, these findings point to a broader imperative for HR and learning leaders: to create sustainable, bilingual environments where employees feel confidence using their second language and are supported in doing so. The next section outlines strategic solutions and actionable recommendations in managing language training needs to help drive engagement, performance, and retention while fostering a culture of bilingual collaboration.

The Pillars of Bilingual Performance

To address Canada's bilingual workforce challenges, organizations must act on two fronts: expanding the supply of bilingual talent and encouraging the active use of both official languages in daily operations. Solutions are not limited to hiring alone; they also involve culture, management, and individual empowerment.

Make Bilingualism Part of your Organizational Identity

When bilingualism is woven into the organization's identity, employees see it as more than a compliance requirement; it becomes a shared value. Visible actions such as bilingual signage, email signatures, and newsletters reinforce that both languages belong in the workplace. This cultural shift reduces linguistic insecurity and signals to clients, partners, and employees that the organization takes inclusion seriously.

Equip Managers as Language Leaders

Managers play a pivotal role in setting the tone for language use. By integrating language learning into development plans, checking in on employees' progress, and encouraging bilingual contributions during meetings, managers create safe spaces for employees to use both languages. Empowered managers act as role models, bridging the gap between policy and lived workplace culture.

Invest in Ongoing Training and Professional Growth

Hiring bilingual employees is only the first step. To retain them and fully leverage their skills, organizations must provide continuous opportunities for growth. Professional development workshops on running bilingual meetings, training in communication best practices, and access to language courses ensure that employees are confident and effective in both languages. Employee retention is strengthened via language training, which not only supports compliance but also improves productivity and client service.

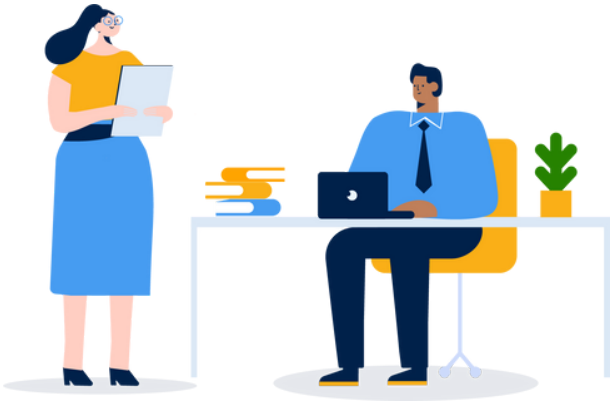
58% of language learners are **more likely to remain with their current company** if they are offered a chance to grow professionally[9]

63% of them are **more likely to report feeling engaged** at work[9]

64% report **increased productivity** working with teams, partners and vendors[9]

Normalize Everyday Bilingual Practices

Small, low-stakes interactions—greetings, short messages, or alternating between languages in coffee chats—make a big difference. Over time, these everyday practices reduce linguistic insecurity and encourage employees to bring their full bilingual capacity to work.



Encouraging language ERGs and social events further embeds bilingualism into the organizational routine. When employees build confidence in informal contexts, they are more likely to transfer that confidence to professional settings.

Notes and References

For more suggestions on how to make your organization bilingual, **check out our podcast episode on bilingualism at work**.

1. Statistics Canada (2023). *English–French bilingualism in Canada: Recent trends after five decades of official bilingualism*.

2. Government of Canada. (2022). *Bill C-13: An Act to amend the Official Languages Act*.

3. CMFC-MCCF. (2023). *Exploring Canada's Unmet Labour Demand for Bilingual Workers in Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs)*.

4. Statistics Canada. (2023). *The Daily — Almost one in four businesses offers at least one type of bilingual service*.

5. Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. (2021). *Linguistic (in)security at work – Exploratory survey of official languages among federal government employees*.

6. Conference Board of Canada. (2019). *English-French Bilingualism Outside Quebec: An Economic Portrait*.

7. Statistics Canada. (2024). *More than one in six private sector establishments that required bilingualism expected difficulties recruiting employees*.

8. The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages for New Brunswick (2019). *Two languages: It's good for business*.

9. Marmorstein, Jack (2018). *5 ways language training delivers a strong ROI*.

10. CILT, the National Centre for Languages (2006.) *ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*.

Embracing Bilingualism

Based on these solutions, we recommend public and private Canadian organizations take these steps:

1

Reframe Bilingualism as a Strategic Asset

Position it as a driver of client satisfaction, regulatory compliance, and employee retention — not just a legal checkbox.

2

Invest in Language Infrastructure

Budget for training, bilingual tools, and professional development tailored to organizational needs. It's an investment in employee retention, increased engagement and higher productivity.

3

Encourage Managers to Uphold Bilingual Culture

Incorporate language support into leadership performance metrics, ensuring managers actively promote and enable bilingualism.

4

Celebrate Progress and Recognize Contributions

Showcase bilingual "champions" internally, share success stories, and reward employees who contribute to a more inclusive linguistic culture.

5

Embed Bilingualism into Operations

Move beyond symbolic gestures to make bilingualism part of everyday business processes—team meetings, client interactions, internal communications, and employee development.

To find out more about how your company can embrace bilingualism with our language training solutions and advisory services, **book your free consultation.**

ACA

www.lesateliers.ca • 1-844-960-2600

prolang