REEES

QUEBEC FIRST NATIONS
REGIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT SURVEY

FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC AND LABRADOR **HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION**

CSSSPNQL • FNQLHSSC

EMPLOYMENT

BASIC SKILLS

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The First Nations Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey (REEES) aims to describe the state of development of early childhood, education, and employment among First Nations communities in Quebec. It was conducted between January 2014 and March 2015 in 20 communities of 8 nations. In all, 2,435 people (923 children age 11 and under, 472 adolescents age 12–17, and 1,041 adults age 18 and over) answered an electronic questionnaire submitted by field agents.

Data followed by "*" has a variation coefficient of 16.6% to 33.3% and must be interpreted with caution. The symbol "**" indicates a variation coefficient higher than 33.3%. This data is not published, except for estimates below 5%, which must be interpreted with caution.

In some cases, data is presented according to the respondents' community geographic zone as defined by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada:

- Zone 1 (urban): less than 50 km from a service centre with road access;
- Zone 2 (rural): between 50 km and 350 km from a service centre with road access;
- Zone 3 (isolated): over 350 km from a service centre with road access;
- Zone 4 (difficult access): no year-round road access to a service centre.

Service centre: The nearest location where community members must go to access service providers, banks and government services.

In the REEES, the term "community" is used to refer to "Indian reserves." Although officially recognized, the term "Indian reserve" is considered pejorative and has therefore been replaced by "community."

For more information, see the REEES *Methodology* booklet.

The REEES report is divided into three sets of booklets: early childhood, education, and employment. All booklets are available in the FNQLHSSC documentation centre: https://centredoc.cssspnql.com.

HIGHLIGHTS

This booklet sets out the basic skills of First Nations adults and adolescents in Quebec based on the results of the Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey (REEES). The survey was conducted between January 2014 and March 2015 among 20 First Nations communities in Quebec. Those surveyed were adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 and adults living in First Nations communities in Quebec. The sample used for this booklet was made up of 465 adolescents and 846 adults.

- Women feel they have better skills in writing, reading, and using a computer, whereas men think they have better mathematical skills. Both genders have a similar perception of their communication skills.
- A higher proportion of men (adults and adolescents) describe their mathematical skills as very good or excellent.
- Three quarters of adolescents say they are very good or excellent at using a computer, compared to half of adults.
- Close to one third of adult and adolescent respondents feel their mathematical skills are poor or fair, making mathematics the field in which those surveyed feel least competent.
- Residents of more isolated communities assess their skills (reading, writing, mathematics, and using a computer) as weaker than those of the other zones, except for communication skills.
- Perceived skill levels of adults decrease with age for all five skills studied in the survey.
- While over 90% of adolescents say school is helpful for finding a job and doing the work, almost 60% feel that skills needed in the workplace cannot be taught in school.

BACKGROUND

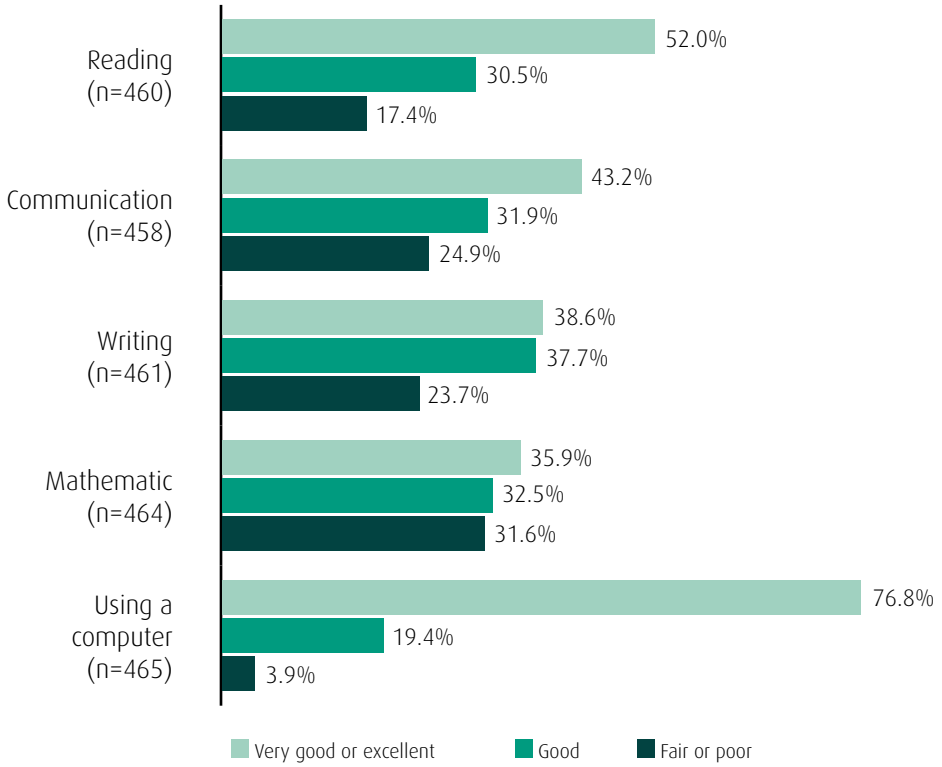
Mastering skills is a major issue in accessing the job market, especially for jobs that require post-secondary education. The link between the level of education and the skills is becoming more and more widely acknowledged. According to the First Nations Regional Health Survey report published in 2006, 49.0% of adults had not finished high school. Although the First Nations enrolment and graduation rate has been rising for the last 20 years, this group is still very much underrepresented in universities (Rodon, 2008).

Up to now, few studies have been conducted on skills or lack of skills among populations living in First Nations communities in Quebec, whether in terms of the level achieved or factors at play in acquiring skills. The topic is particularly relevant because a study on skills provides an opportunity to consider which factors make it easier to enter the job market, in an environment specific to First Nations communities. The REEES addresses five skills: reading, communication, writing, mathematics, and using a computer.[1] Participants were asked about their perceived skill level (excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor). Data is presented by gender, age group, geographic zone, and level of education.

SKILLS PROFILE

The results in Figure 1 show that slightly over half of the adolescents (52.0%) perceive their reading skills as "very good or excellent." Communication skills are next with 43.2%. Writing and mathematical skills appear to be weaker, but the ability to use a computer is the skill perceived to be the strongest. Three quarters of respondents feel they are "very good or excellent" at using a computer. The combined "very good or excellent" and "good" categories correspond to fairly high perceived skill levels.

Figure 1: Perceived skills among adolescents

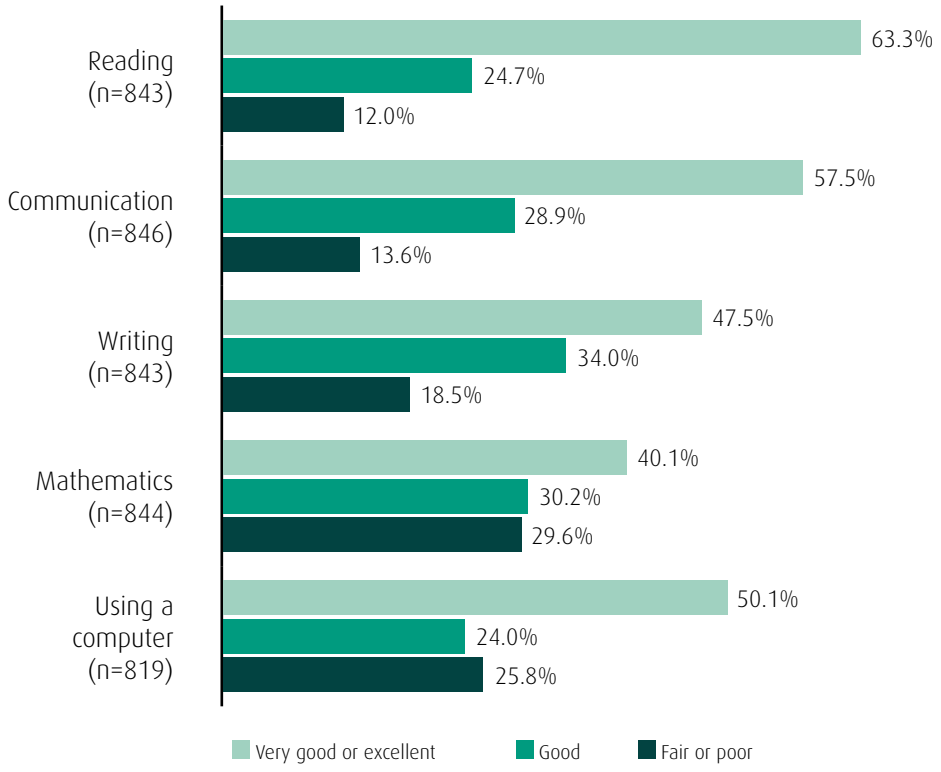


[1] More specifically, the REEES defines the skills as follows:

Reading: This includes understanding text being read and identifying the key elements, and using written material to find information.
Communication: This includes explaining ideas to others, speaking in front of an audience, and taking part in a discussion.
Writing: This includes writing to transmit ideas or information to others, and revising written texts to improve them.
Mathematics: This includes using formulas to solve problems, interpreting graphs or tables, and using mathematics to solve real everyday problems.
Using a computer: This includes using the Internet, electronic messaging, and various software applications.

Figure 2 shows that close to two thirds of adults describe their reading skills as "very good or excellent." For communication and writing skills, the proportions are 57.5% and 47.5%, respectively. Mathematical skills appear to be weaker, but half of the adults describe their ability to use a computer as "very good or excellent." As for adolescents, the combined "very good or excellent" and "good" categories correspond to fairly high perceived skill levels.

Figure 2: Perceived skills among adults



SKILLS BY GENDER

Among adolescents, the results in Table 1 show no significant difference between boys and girls, apart from mathematical skills. In fact, 41.8% of boys perceive their mathematical skills as "very good or excellent" compared to 29.8% of girls. For writing, close to one third of boys feel their skills are "very good or excellent" compared to 41.7% of girls.

Table 1: Perceived skills among adolescents by gender

Skills	Perception					
	Fair or poor		Good		Very good or excellent	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Reading (B=219/G=241)	13.8%	21.2%	37.7%	23.0%	48.5%	55.8%
Communication (B=219/G=239)	23.9%	26.0%	34.4%	29.2%	41.7%	44.8%
Writing (B=220/G=241)	29.5%	17.6%	34.9%	40.6%	35.5%	41.7%
Mathematics (B=220/G=244)	29.2%	34.0%	28.9%	36.2%	41.8%	29.8%
Using a computer (B=221/G=244)	4.6%*	3.1%*	21.1%	17.6%	74.4%	79.2%

Among adults, a higher proportion of women assess the following skills as "very good or excellent": reading (70.0% of women compared to 56.8% of men), writing (51.8% of women compared to 43.2% of men), and using a computer (53.1% of women compared to 47.2% of men). However, more men feel their mathematical skills are "very good or excellent" (42.7% of men compared to 37.6% of women), while men's and women's perception of their communication skills are similar (58.5% for men and 56.5% for women) (Table 2).

Table 2: Perceived skills among adults by gender

Skills	Perception					
	Fair or poor		Good		Very good or excellent	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Reading (M=405/W=438)	14.9%	9.1%*	28.3%	20.9%	56.8%	70.0%
Communication (M=406/W=440)	13.5%	13.8%	28.0%	29.7%	58.5%	56.5%
Writing (M=404/W=439)	22.0%	15.0%	34,8%	33.2%	43.2%	51.8%
Mathematics (M=405/W=439)	26.5%	32.8%	30.8%	29.6%	42.7%	37.6%
Using a computer (M=391/W=428)	29.9%	21.7%	22.9%	25.2%	47.2%	53.1%

SKILLS BY AGE GROUP AND GENDER

Among adolescents, an analysis of the data by age group and gender does not reveal any significant difference. For this reason, only adults are listed here.

Table 3 shows that the respondents' perceived skill level decreases with age. More than 70% of 18–24 year olds describe their skills in reading and using a computer as "very good or excellent," but only half of the 55–64 year olds feel the same way about reading and one third about using a computer. A lower level of education among older people could partly explain these discrepancies. About 40% of people age 45–64 do not have a high school diploma. The figure rises to 60% among those 65 and over. The ability to use a computer is the skill that varies the most with age, while communication varies the least.

Table 3: Adults who describe their skills as "very good or excellent" by age group

Skills	Age groups					
	Age 18–24	Age 25–34	Age 35–44	Age 45–54	Age 55–64	Age 65 and above
Reading (n=843)	75.2%	66.3%	68.7%	57.6%	50.4%	40.3%
Communication (n=846)	64.3%	53.4%	58.6%	58.8%	52.0%	51.5%
Writing (n=843)	57.8%	52.3%	46.7%	41.6%	43.7%	29.2%*
Mathematics (n=844)	48.3%	41.7%	41.8%	35.3%	38.0%	23.9%*
Using a computer (n=819)	70.2%	57.0%	60.6%	35.2%	32.0%	8.9%*

Table 4 shows that the perceived level of mathematical skills and the ability to use a computer decreases with age in women and men alike. Comparing 18–24 year olds to those age 65 and over in regard to their reading and writing skills, the decrease in the proportion of respondents who think these skills are "very good or excellent" is more pronounced for men.

Table 4: Adults who describe their skills as "very good or excellent" by age group and gender

	Skills	Age groups					
		Age 18–24	Age 25–34	Age 35–44	Age 45–54	Age 55–64	Age 65 and above
Men	Reading (n=405)	70.3%	56.0%	63.4%	53.9%	39.1%	26.3%*
	Communication (n=406)	68.1%	53.6%	55.4%	61.6%	48.8%	55.2%
	Writing (n=404)	57.8%	49.3%	38.1%*	38.6%	36.3%	15.6%*
	Mathematics (n=405)	49.7%	45.5%*	44.3%	38.7%	38.2%	25.5%*
	Using a computer (n=391)	68.4%	56.1%	50.3%	37.7%	24.2%*	6.4%*
Women	Reading (n=438)	81.4%	74.1%	73.7%	62.5%	62.6%	48.1%
	Communication (n=440)	59.4%	52.3%	61.5%	55.0%	55.5%	49.5%
	Writing (n=439)	57.9%	54.5%	54.5%	45.5%	51.5%	36.7%*
	Mathematics (n=439)	46.5%	38.7%	39.6%	30.8%	37.8%	22.9%*
	Using a computer (n=428)	72.6%	57.7%	69.9%	31.9%	40.0%	10.4%*

SKILLS BY GEOGRAPHIC ZONE

Remoteness can affect access to educational services and the number of services available. It is therefore relevant to investigate the remoteness factor further to determine how it affects skill development.

Table 5 shows that a lower percentage of adolescents living in zones 3 and 4 feel their skills are "very good or excellent" compared to adolescents in the other zones. However, for mathematics, the difference between zones is less noticeable than for the other skills. While a high proportion of Zone 1 respondents think their reading skills are "very good or excellent," a smaller number feel the same way about their writing skills.

Table 5: Adolescents who describe their skills as "very good or excellent" by geographic zone

Skills	Geographic zone			
	Zone 1 (urban)	Zone 2 (rural)	Zone 3 (isolated)	Zone 4 (difficult access)
Reading (n=460)	58.9 %	37.8%*	44.7%	34.9%
Communication (n=458)	44.1%	57.4%*	19.4%*	29.1%*
Writing (n=461)	43.9%	**	21%*	37.6%
Mathematics (n=464)	37.9%	36.3%	32.4%*	26.7%*
Using a computer (n=465)	80.5%	81.9%	58.9%	55.2%

Table 6 shows that compared to the other zones, a smaller proportion of adult respondents in Zone 4 describe their skills as "very good or excellent." The difference between Zone 1 and Zone 4 is significant for all skills except communication, for which there is a difference, but it is not as noticeable. The perceived level of communication skills thus seems to be the factor that varies the least by age group, gender, and geographic zone. The fact that oral tradition still exists in First Nations culture could explain this finding.

Table 6: Adults who describe their skills as "very good or excellent" by geographic zone

Skills	Geographic zone			
	Zone 1 (urban)	Zone 2 (rural)	Zone 3 (isolated)	Zone 4 (difficult access)
Reading (n=843)	67.9%	64.0%	50.5%	48.1%
Communication (n=846)	59.3%	54.1%	53.3%	52.6%
Writing (n=843)	48.2%	53.2%	45.1%	33.3%
Mathematics (n=844)	42.3%	37.3%	38.6%	30.8%*
Using a computer (n=819)	51.3%	50.6%	49.0%	38.5%

SKILLS BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

A comparison of skill evaluation among school dropouts and adolescents attending school shows little difference. However, a higher proportion of people with a high school diploma feel their skills are "very good or excellent," particularly in communication and writing.

Table 7: Adolescents who describe their skills as "very good or excellent" by school attendance

Skills	Attendance at an elementary/high school or an equivalency program		
	Do not attend elementary/ high school or an equivalency program (no diploma)	Attend elementary/high school or an equivalency program	High school diploma or equivalent
Reading (n=439)	56.9%	50.6%	58.7%
Communication (n=436)	39.9%*	44.3%	59.5%
Writing (n=440)	36.8%*	37.3%	52.3%
Mathematics (n=440)	32.0%*	37.8%	39.2%*
Using a computer (n=442)	74.2%	78.9%	79.7%

In general, the proportion of adults who describe their skills as "very good or excellent" is lower among those who have not attended high school. Most university graduates say their skills are very good or excellent in all areas except mathematics. Having a diploma thus appears to have a positive impact on the perception of skills.

Table 8: Adults who describe their skills as "very good or excellent" by level of education

Skills	Highest level of education completed				
	Did not finish high school	High school diploma or equivalent	Diploma of vocational studies	College diploma	University degree
Reading (n=796)	42.9%	75.9%	75.5%	89.5%	95.8%
Communication (n=797)	44.1%	65.9%	57.9%	71.7%	88.1%
Writing (n=797)	30.3%	60.0%	46.3%*	54.9%	88.1%
Mathematics (n=796)	28.3%	46.2%	55.3%	60.6%	54.8%*
Using a computer (n=773)	32.7%	58.2%	71.9%	83.0%	93.8%

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Tables 9 and 10 show an apparent contradiction in how adolescents perceive the importance of education. While more than 90% of adolescents agree with the statement that academic success can help them find a job (regardless of gender, geographic zone, or school attendance), more than half (58.0%) also believe that the skills they will need in the workplace cannot be taught in school. This finding is most noticeable among adolescents in zones 2 and 3. A higher percentage of respondents who do not attend school (71.7%) agree with the statement that the skills they will need in the workplace cannot be taught in school, compared to those who are still in school (56.9%) and those with a high school diploma (33.1%). However, the data seems to indicate that school attendance affects the respondents' view of how relevant the concepts taught in school are to the workplace, particularly among those with a high school diploma or equivalent.

Table 9: Adolescents who agree or strongly agree with statements about the perceived importance of education by geographic zone and gender

Statements	Geographic zone				Gender		
	Zone 1 (urban)	Zone 2 (rural)	Zone 3 (isolated)	Zone 4 (difficult access)	Boys	Girls	Total population
School taught me things which could be useful in a job (n=424)	90.6 %	94.9%	92.3%	91.5%	93.5%	90.8%	92.2%
Doing well in school can help you get a job (n=426)	94.4%	96.4%	92.5%	91.4%	93.8%	95.6%	94.7%
The skills you need to do a job can't be learned in the classroom (n=402)	45.1%	82.2%	74.4%	50.8%	56.3%	59.8%	58.0%

Table 10: Adolescents who agree or strongly agree with statements about the perceived importance of education by school attendance

Statements	Attendance at an elementary/high school or an equivalency program			
	Do not attend elementary/high school or an equivalency program (no diploma)	Attend elementary/ high school or an equivalency program	High school diploma or equivalent	Total population
School taught me things which could be useful in a job (n=410)	92.6%	91.7%	92.3%	91.9%
Doing well in school can help you get a job (n=412)	93.3%	95.1%	95.4%	94.8%
The skills you need to do a job can't be learned in the classroom (n=394)	71.7%	56.9%	33.1%*	58.0%

CONCLUSION

As there is no longitudinal data that shows the long-term development of professional skills among First Nations populations, research on this topic should be continued, especially because current results do not highlight the factors that facilitate or limit the acquisition of skills.

Data on skills can be used to make a number of observations. For example, in general, the higher their level of education, the higher the respondents' confidence in stating their skills are good. However, this perception decreases with age or geographic remoteness.

Mathematics skills are generally considered weaker, regardless of education level, age, gender, or geographic zone. Communication skills are consistently perceived as good, except when analyzed according to the level of education.

Although the skills examined here are beneficial in entering the job market, skills specific to First Nations cultures and communities should be taken into account.

The results in this booklet seem to indicate a link between perceived skills and the level of education. However, First Nations schools are facing a chronic funding shortfall. In fact, the difference between funding for schools in Quebec and funding for First Nations schools can sometimes be as high as 20% (Bastien, 2008). It is therefore important to support and encourage all initiatives aimed at overcoming obstacles and increasing graduation rates among First Nations students.[2]

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