



THE EDUCATION GAP IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES: CANADA'S REALITY

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ABSTRACT. Canada's history with the Indigenous community is long and complex. History spills over to current events in society and impacts the indigenous community greatly to this day. This country has a concerning Indigenous Education Gap—a disparity in educational achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The Indigenous Education Gap is widening and rising quickly across Canada. Bridging the education gap is thus a critical component of any plan for enhancing the prosperity, health, and well-being of Canada's indigenous population, as well as eliminating marginalization. Education is one of the many concerns that Indigenous people in Canada must tackle. The acts of previous Canadian administrations, both implicit and explicit, have resulted in a considerable educational disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous pupils. The Western system of education is inherently exclusive, and its fundamental educational process is based on privilege. Resolving the enormous and ongoing inequalities in student educational learning results must be based on Indigenous notions of education, rather than a standard Western/colonial approach.

Keywords: Indigenous Community, Education, Canada, Funding, Students, Post-Secondary Education

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous education is severely underfunded, particularly on reserves. The issue is that federal funds are used to finance First Nations schools, while provincial funds are used to fund other schools. Schools on reserves are predicted to receive at least 30% less money than regular schools (Derenisky, 2020). First Nations schools receive far less funding per student than other schools. This indicates that Indigenous children receive considerably less financing for their schooling if they opt to live on their ancestral reserve land with their families. This makes it more difficult for these schools to deliver the same level of education. It also makes it difficult for them to give extra assistance to students who must leave their reservation to attend high school in a city. Because of their distant location and limited size, schools on reserves already have greater expenditures, and having less financing creates an even wider imbalance (Derenisky, 2020). This is an even bigger concern for kids with disabilities who attend First Nations schools, as their schools frequently cannot manage to provide them with the necessary resources and assistance (Derenisky, 2020).

Post-secondary education

University-level education is a treaty right promised by Canada to Indigenous peoples. This was stated as a fundamental right in the 1982 Canadian Constitution Act ("First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario," 2017). Despite the fact that

education is a basic human right, the history of colonialism, residential schools, the systematic separation of Indigenous children from their families, and frequent racism against First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples have created substantial obstacles to gaining postsecondary education. Even though the government does indeed have a moral and legal obligation to provide access to education, most Indigenous people are unable to attend college or university due to financial constraints ("First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario," 2017). The tremendous rise of the Indigenous population, along with rising demand for college or university attendance, has put further strain on financing available for Indigenous peoples to pursue post-secondary education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Access to Post-secondary education

Over 16,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students are enrolled in universities and colleges in Ontario. However, there remains a considerable educational achievement disparity in Ontario between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. Regarding university degrees, 29.3% of the non-Indigenous population has one, whereas just 11.3% of the Indigenous population has one ("First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario," 2017). There is no discernible difference in college-level accomplishment, where costs are typically one-third of those of universities. Indigenous peoples living on reserves

are much less likely to have access to education. Almost half of the Indigenous population living on a reserve does not possess a high school diploma (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017).

Funding for Indigenous Education

Indigenous education funding was legally acknowledged as the federal government's role in 1956 as part of the commitment to respect the Constitution and signed Treaties from the 18th century. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) is responsible for providing financing methods to assist Indigenous students in paying for the cost of post-secondary education (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017). INAC now oversees the Post-Secondary.

Student Support Program (PSSSP), the University and College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEPP), the Post-Secondary Partnership Program (PSP), as well as other workforce development, job experience, and vocational training initiatives (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017). The PSSSP and UCEPP give financial assistance to qualified First Nations and Inuit students participating in postsecondary programs. Both programs assist students in advancing academically and improving employability for First Nations and Inuit students. The PSP funds postsecondary institutions to provide courses for First Nations and Inuit students, along with course conception and delivery (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017). The PSP focuses on expenditures connected with particular tasks relating to First Nations and Inuit education instead of allocating capital funds or money directly to students.

The federal government solely assists First Nations and Inuit students financially. Métis students in Ontario can qualify for the Métis Student Bursary Program (MSBP), which is administered by the Métis Nation of Ontario and is accessible in 42 post-secondary schools across the province (MNO). The MSBP awarded 200 bursaries totalling \$136,772 in 2015-2016 (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017). The MNO works hard to establish and improve programs in order to provide greater opportunities for Métis students in postsecondary education.

In *Daniels v. Canada* (Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development), the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) declared on April 14, 2016, that Métis and non-status Indians have to be acknowledged as “Indians” under section 91(24) of the Canadian Constitution (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017). Despite knowing that the federal government owes Métis and non-status Indians a fiduciary obligation, the government has failed to

revise the PSSSP to accommodate these two groups. The Supreme Court has not required the federal government to adjust current laws and programs to reflect the Daniels decision's conclusions but instead wants these communities to hold the federal government accountable for rectifying their historical disadvantage (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017).

The Funding Gap

The PSSSP offers financial assistance to First Nations and Inuit people that is handled regionally and is intended to pay for the costs of tuition, textbooks, supplies, transportation, and living expenses. Before 1992, it was anticipated that all qualifying students would get financial assistance. Rather than being decided by the number of qualified students, the PSSSP became a scheme that simply gave a portion of cash irrespective of student demand in 1992. By 1996, the federal government had set a two-percentage-point yearly ceiling on PSSSP budget increases, irrespective of how many students registered (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017). Ever since, financing has lagged behind increases in student demand, living expenses, inflation, and tuition costs. The federal government's shortage of financing has led regions that administer the grants to make difficult judgments about who gets support each year. INAC provided financial aid to 22,000 status First Nations and Inuit students in 2014-2015; the amount remained the same in 2006 (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017). Prior to the implementation of the budget restriction, however, around 27,000 students were given financial assistance. A shortage of federal financing was expected to have prevented around 22,500 persons from pursuing postsecondary education by 2007. The federal government's latest \$90 million investment in the PSSSP program for 2 years is a fantastic move, but it does not address the growing Indigenous youth population or the risk of financing instability in the coming years (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017).

When a budget limit is in effect, communities may be certain that they will not get more than the amount authorized. When the current government commits 90 million dollars for 2 years, there is no guarantee that the funds will continue (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017). As a result, Indigenous students face significant barriers to obtaining postsecondary education in Canada. Employers today demand some level of postsecondary education in a nation where getting a job is correlated with completing education beyond high school. Increasing First Nations graduation rates to levels equivalent to the Canadian population would result in a \$401 billion (2006 Dollars) financial

advantage and a \$115 billion reduction in government expenditure. The Auditor General of Canada found in 2004 that closing the education gap between First Nations individuals living on reserve and the rest of the Canadian population might take 27 years (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017).

The deficit had not yet been closed, according to the Auditor General's 2011 progress report. There has not been a consistent approach to closing the gap premised on the 2004 recommendations, nor has the government completely adopted an implementation plan in accordance with the audit (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017). While the PSSSP's influence is diminishing, non-status First Nations and Métis peoples are still completely excluded from federal laws governing Indigenous support. Because the PSSSP is inaccessible to these students, thousands are unable to enter a post-secondary university. In addition to raising PSSSP funding, there have been repeated proposals to expand eligibility to include non-status and Métis students (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017).

Undergraduate tuition costs in Ontario have climbed by 248% since 1993-1994, making public universities unaffordable to a greater number of students. The Ontario government offers very little financing for Indigenous postsecondary education in the province. The provincial government contributed \$5 million to the nine Indigenous institutions in 2015 (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017). Excluding the Aboriginal Bursaries Search Tool, which was created in 2009, Indigenous students do not get direct financial help from the government. Ontario distributes \$1.5 million in bursaries every year, which is insufficient for the 16,036 Indigenous students who attend college or university in the province. The majority of the provincial government's investment in Indigenous postsecondary education goes to colleges and universities for support programs, counsellors, curriculum, and teaching initiatives (“First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario,” 2017).

Challenges to Progress

There is a fundamental divergence in the definition of education between Indigenous communities and the federal and provincial governments of Canada. Sovereignty, not subjection to another authority, is the beginning point for First Nations. As sovereigns, Indigenous people consider education as a broad notion, not one restricted to brick-and-mortar schools and K-12 schooling (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). For Indigenous People, the concept and delivery of education must be consistent with their culture, history, and customs. One of the most significant

challenges confronting Indigenous people is governance or authority over educational decisions.

The Federal Government's traditional ethos of “knowing best” persists in many facets of everyday life in the Indigenous territory, impeding Indigenous communities' capacity to manage their own future (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). Inadequate line-item budgets that require Indigenous people to seek approval before reallocating funds from one school line to another impede the Indigenous community's capacity to fulfil local needs rapidly. An Indigenous tribe, for example, may have a larger proportion of pupils who require special education services. They should not require Ottawa's permission to reallocate funds from the overall education budget to address such needs.

The overall amount of education financing for Indigenous people is a substantial impediment to closing the learning gap, as evidenced in several reports and studies over the years. Indigenous communities will never be able to overcome the consequences of previous colonial activities and narrow the learning gap for their pupils unless suitable resources are provided. Aside from appropriate, continuous, and regular financing, there are a few essential building blocks that will be critical in ensuring that Indigenous children have equal access to excellent education and achieve comparable educational achievements as non-Indigenous children (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). Given the significance of Indigenous culture, it is critical that these schools have room for Elders who will be accessible to help pupils, as well as space for traditional and cultural activities. Given the likelihood that schools will also function as gathering places for Indigenous people, these structures should feature community-oriented spaces to act as a community hub (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021).

The second important impediment is the lack of a comprehensive curriculum in the Indigenous people's language that reflects its culture, history, and customs. The Indigenous education system must support and guarantee that each Indigenous community's language, culture, history, arts, and abilities are passed down to the next generation and subsequent generations (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). This includes establishing and/or improving immersion programs in the language to reclaim lost ground. Each Indigenous community must have the freedom to spend the funds in the way that best suits its unique circumstances. In all circumstances, learning materials for all grades must be prepared, and the curriculum must emphasize each unique Indigenous community's culture and language.

To teach an Indigenous-centric curriculum, instructors must be proficient in the language as well as knowledgeable about the Indigenous people's culture and history. Qualified teachers are the bedrock upon which great education for Indigenous kids is

built. In Canada, there are various faculties of education that provide specialities for Indigenous teachers (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). It is critical not just to recruit these teachers, but it is also critical to keep them in the community. Indigenous schools, particularly in more rural areas, have struggled to attract and retain skilled instructors. When there was a teacher shortage, Indigenous communities were able to recruit younger instructors who were early in their careers and looking for teaching experience. After accumulating teaching experience, these instructors would be transferred to provincial systems. We are now entering a period of teacher shortage, with school districts competing for skilled instructors (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). This will make recruiting and retaining qualified teachers much more difficult. To help in the recruitment and retention of talented teachers, salary and benefits parity with the provincially financed system is required. Furthermore, extra incentives, particularly in more remote regions, may be required to realize the increased expenditure in those places. It is also critical to improve Indigenous people's access to teacher education. This may be accomplished through Indigenous institutes' courses and programs, as well as improved financial assistance (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). In certain circumstances, this may be the only method to locate a teacher who possesses cultural understanding and competence and who can be retained year after year.

The involvement of the community and the notion of "family-centred" education are two fundamental principles of Indigenous education (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). For Indigenous education to thrive, the historical burden of Indian education reform in Canada must be addressed. The social consequences of these government practices (residential schooling, forced assimilation, and language and culture loss) are still evident in Indigenous communities today. Specific services are required to help the school effectively engage with the community.

Furthermore, Indigenous people recognize the critical role of families in educational results, and that until the entire family is active and prospering, the individual student will not have the resources at home to thrive throughout their academic career. For the next generation of students to achieve, the legacy of previous government mistakes must be addressed. This can only be accomplished by ensuring that families have access to the necessary programs and services. This approach contrasts with the "student-centred focus" that is prevalent in many non-Indigenous institutions (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). Most parents want their children to be successful in their chosen fields. The emphasis on culture and language is intended to establish a firm foundation for learning.

Steps to Close the Gap

A few methods must be implemented in order to considerably reduce the educational learning gap between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous pupils in Canada. Many educational financing models allocate funds to local governments based on "inputs," which are financial amounts per unit of input (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). For example, \$500 for learning materials per student. An outcome-based strategy must offer adequate funds to address structural performance inequalities, decades of underfunding, and deliberate actions by successive governments to downgrade Indigenous language and culture. This outcome model would give each Indigenous community an overall educational budget, with each community making allocation decisions based on its particular circumstances, rather than being guided by a "central authority" on how to spend the resources. The Indigenous educational body would be held accountable to people of their community for how money is distributed and used, but more crucially, for student results. The fundamental principle is that the funding must be used for educational objectives as outlined by the Indigenous communities (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). To be able to take on this responsibility, Indigenous people may need to invest in increasing their capability. They are up to the task.

Accountability can be analogous to the accountability connection between the federal and provincial governments for medical transfers, or to the accountability relationship between provinces and municipalities (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). In addition to typical financial records, the Indigenous people might publish outcome-based reports on their student's educational progress.

The second proposal contends that Indigenous communities' full desires to offer a comprehensive approach to their children's education, which emphasizes the crucial role of the community, must be acknowledged. Within that educational framework, Indigenous communities must be given the authority and funding to create a curriculum that represents their language, culture, history, and educational philosophy (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). This entails fully integrating land-based education into classroom instruction. It also implies that Indigenous communities would create their own databases to assess their students' learning results. Because many Indigenous children attend high schools outside of their native region, the curriculum would have to follow the provincial curriculum (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). Furthermore, these students must acquire a provincial graduation diploma in order to participate in higher education or apprenticeships if they wish.

Giving Indigenous people the freedom to direct their financial resources to areas of most need would enable them to attract and retain talented instructors. This is especially challenging in rural, fly-in

communities. Some of these instructors may need to participate in an "immersion" program to re-acquaint themselves with Indigenous languages (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). Indigenous people must have the freedom to invest in professional development while also adequately compensating instructors.

CONCLUSION

The word "equity" in the context of educational attainment is commonly used in public education. Equity is frequently associated with equity of opportunity, equity of access (to schooling, technology, resources, and mental health), equity of result, equity of resources, and eventually reducing the achievement gap, which means equity in graduation and a future (Sékaly & Bazzi, 2021). In a knowledge-based economy, completing a post-secondary education gives the marketable skills and training required for job placement and higher pay. If skills are not adequately transmitted, dependency on government transfers will expand, as will the disparity in labour market participation and post-secondary graduation rate among Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. To close the enormous education gap and remove financial constraints to postsecondary education, government support must be immediate and increased for Indigenous students in postsecondary education ("First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario," 2017). Students who are able to obtain government support and a college or university degree go on to become leaders in their respective fields and make significant contributions to their communities.

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