

Inequality and Discrimination of Indigenous People and Their Culture

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Abstract: This paper argues the long-time and unsettled inequality Indigenous people and its group have encountered in history yet to present days. Main arguments regarding Indigenous people will be spread out into various parts: lack of education system in school, lack of Indigenous students' recognitions, and safety, employment, and health concerns. Therefore in regards to the various topics, this paper will be researched and analyzed in detail with consideration of three approach: what inequality in Indigenous people is, why this current situation brought from the past have been long-lasting yet unjustified, and finally potential ways to improve this phenomenon and bring equality to Indigenous people and its culture; in hopes to raise awareness of its identity and history and bring more respect to Indigenous nation worldwide. In result, data comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people will clearly show the impact of inequality brought to Indigenous culture and the unjust treatments it has encountered starting from history. As people around the world have already started taking action to help improve this phenomenon, there are specific sources for people to refer to and take into consideration. As changes and improvements for Indigenous culture have been long held with minor insights taken, it is to conclude that this paper in examining the background reasons and giving advice can change this phenomenon and help promote progress in making Indigenous culture better and more recognized.

Keywords: Indigenous, Métis, culture, history, health, employment, safety, education, student

1. Introduction

The history of Canada has been marked, in large part, by the inequalities and paternal relationship between the Crown government and Indigenous people. In both the past and present days, Canadian Indigenous populations have received discriminatory and unequal educational resources. In schools around Canada, the culture and education system of Indigenous people have still not yet been fully identified or respected where Indigenous students receive education learnings regarding the history of themselves and their ancestors. Students with Indigenous backgrounds often get criticized for coming from somewhere other students are unable to recognize or have heard of. Without the opportunity to cooperate and communicate with other students in balance, Indigenous students in school often have a very hard time finding people to communicate with, especially someone who can appreciate their culture. Outside of school and education, employment, health, and safety

concerns are always surrounded to Indigenous people and its surroundings. Indigenous people often are anxious and concerned of their neighborhoods or have overwhelming pressure of financial earnings in maintaining a good life. Especially compared to non-indigenous people, the contrast between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people and the difference in challenges they encounter then becomes obvious.

There are 370 million Indigenous people from over 90 countries around the world. Indigenous people, often referred to as the “naturally occurring or originated people of a land” have nowadays been increasingly recognized through different parts of Canada [1]. Like recognizing a period of historical event, the cultural background and history behind the development of Indigenous people have slowly started to gather in school textbooks and in news articles. Uncovering Indigenous backgrounds, shades of darkness with unjust treatments have slowly uncovered from what Indigenous people have encountered in the past and present days. Although high schools, universities, and even elementary schools have proposed education systems about Indigenous culture, its true history and the key concepts have been missed out or misinterpreted, where Indigenous people did not gain equal rights and what was presented to the world remains questionable in terms of its accuracy and the actual truth.

2. Background Information

Lack of recognition causes a critical education gap where education systems do not respect Indigenous peoples’ diverse cultures [2]. This is because there are very few teachers in schools who speak Indigenous languages and that schools have very few resources and basic materials for teachers to teach. With the materials provided, it is hard to judge its accuracy and fairness to correctly teach Indigenous people and their ways of life. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, 58% of young adults living on-reserve in Canada have not completed high school [3]. It is believed that the Indigenous education issue is strongly associated with the passing of the British North America Act in 1867. Before the British North America Act, the association between Indigenous people and the federal government was “peaceful” yet on a nation-to-nation basis. However, with the passing of the event, the Indigenous people have become the compartment of the Crown where the federal government was given the authority to make laws regarding the Indians and lands reserved for them. Speaking of language backgrounds of Indigenous people, they represent 5,000 different cultures and speak a majority of an estimated 7,000 languages worldwide. However, 40% of the languages are at risk of disappearing [2]. With the general trend in the disappearance of languages, schools and education resources in learning Indigenous languages will slowly decrease and disappear.

Despite the numerous international instruments that proclaim universal rights to education, Indigenous peoples do not fully enjoy these rights, and an education gap between Indigenous peoples and the rest of the population remains critical worldwide [2]. As people in modern society slowly start to recognize the significance of Indigenous culture, the recognition and education taught to students and people around Canada may not always be accurate or appreciated by Indigenous people. Although education systems in Canada are now getting more inclusive of Indigenous cultures (even starting in kindergarten or elementary schools), the lack of resources and the source of accuracy have yet still had a long way to be improved. With limited access to learning regarding Indigenous people, finding precise and useful information for teaching students with respect to the culture then becomes hard.

To the Indigenous students who attend schools with students mainly from the rest of a different population, they do not receive enjoyable experience in school and often have a very hard time cooperating with other students. Indigenous girls, specifically, may also experience gender discrimination, school-based violence, and sexual abuse. Schools around Canada are being more

inclusive now with Indigenous culture and students, but it is still not obtained to a level that compares equally to non-Indigenous students. With the lack of equality, Indigenous students attending school may feel criticized or discouraged by their identity and background. So forth, Indigenous students attending schools with the majority students being non-Indigenous may isolate communicating with them and further on criticize their background identity.

2.1. The Métis Group

As being part of the Indigenous people and its history, the Métis group have long been under discrimination from mainly health and education supplements. For example, in a survey conducted in 2006 and 2007, it has been recorded that Métis adults compared to non-Indigenous counterparts were at a higher risk of being diagnosed with a chronic condition and twice as likely to die before the age of 75 [4]. As for employment, a 2007 to 2009 study shows that unemployment rates were nearly 2% higher among Métis than among non-Indigenous people, where Métis' employment rate and participation in the formal economy became 6 to 8% lower [4]. As to a broader view, the Métis Nation was continued to be denied as a distinct Indigenous group by the Government of Canada until 1982 in the Constitution Act. Between 1885 and 1960, also known as The Forgotten Years, the Métis people were not given status in the Indian act and not accepted by the "Canadian Mainstream" [5].

3. Problems Faced by the Indigenous People

3.1. Loss of Identity

One of the biggest reasons why information access regarding Indigenous people is very limited is due to the loss of identity. From examples like the residential schools to the Indian act of 1876, with the removal of over 150,000 children from their families, Indigenous people have already been in danger of losing their identity and the history behind them. With a loss of identity, it is thereby more important that what is brought to students in school about Indigenous people is as accurate as possible. However, in connection to the experience in attending school for Indigenous students, it becomes less enjoyable because of the atmosphere offered and promoted to be independent and competitive, where Indigenous students prefer atmospheres more towards communal ways of life and cooperation [2]. Its language, properties, and formation and changes of its culture remain unstudied. Without required learnings, Indigenous children are unable to learn about themselves and non-Indigenous children will never get a chance to understand cultures other than what they are familiar with and learn about people that share the land with them.

3.2. Starting Difference

Indigenous students have already experienced a "startup" difference from non-Indigenous students. In addition to being behind compared to non-indigenous students, Indigenous students whose parents are direct or intergenerational survivors of the residential school system may not be graduated with a great standard of education. Therefore, they may be unable to help their children with school assignments or projects and may be less supportive in terms of encouraging their children to graduate [3]. With limited access to help and support from parents for Indigenous students, the education gap between them and non-Indigenous students then becomes wider in school.

3.3. Unsuitable Learnings and Focuses

Indigenous students are not taught with relevant survival and work skills that are suitable for

Indigenous economies, where later they return to their communities with formal education that is irrelevant and unsuitable for their needs. Furthermore, minor reasons for the limited spread in knowledge of Indigenous people is that surveys and research people often propose are based on individuals or households, and less on communities [4]. As a result, people do not bring much attention to community needs or improvements.

4. Difficulties during the Pandemic and Solutions

4.1. Difficulties of Risks and Securities

As Covid-19 became a very cautious disease spread around different communities worldwide, the Indigenous community and its people reported various challenges and difficulties that the pandemic has brought to them. The three main obstacles encountered came from health, employment, and safety. Indigenous people are potentially at greater risk of being infected with various health conditions, less secure with financial income and spendings, and feel less protected around neighborhoods where they think crime rates increase and happen more often.

4.1.1. Unemployment and Financial Needs

Outside of the Métis Nation, unemployment rates have been increasingly high in the past years for Indigenous people. For example, in a study, 37% of Indigenous people experienced job loss or reduced work hours, whereas the situation is 35% for non-Indigenous participants [6]. Especially during Covid-19, 1/3 of Indigenous participants in a study reported that their ability has been impacted and challenged to meet financial obligations and essential needs, whereas it was a 11% reduction for non-Indigenous participants who have encountered the same challenges. Within financial impacts, 65% Indigenous people have reported the effect as strong, whereas 56% was reported from non-Indigenous participants [6].

4.1.2. Healthcare and Illnesses

During Covid-19, many Indigenous people have found and reported existing problems and illnesses with no further improvements and continued getting sick, especially compared to non-Indigenous people. For example, in 2017, 82% Inuit people reported that they did not have a family doctor, whereas compared to Canadians, less than one in five do not have a family doctor. Further on, 46% of Indigenous women have reported their days as some or very stressful, and 48% reported long-lasting symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder, both of moderate and severe level [6].

4.1.3. Safety and Crimes

Around neighborhoods, Indigenous people also experience a strong contrast compared to non-Indigenous people of safety and crime issues and the protection of its people. For example, a study showed that in reports believing crime in neighborhoods increased after Covid-19, 17% of Indigenous participants said so whereas 11% of non-Indigenous participants said so. Further on, because of their race, ethnicity, or skin color, 22% of Indigenous people feel like they are often attacked or harassed in the neighborhoods due to this reason, whereas it was 11% for the same reason for non-Indigenous people. Specifically, 13% of Indigenous women reported as concerned about their home's violence [6].

4.2. Potential Ways to Improve

In ways to eliminate the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, to appreciate and respect the bringing of Indigenous education system in schools, and to protect the fundamental

rights of Indigenous people living in different communities, it is important to gain social awareness of their culture, history, and its people. For example, the IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs) website is an organization that protects human rights and in hopes to promote and defend for Indigenous people [7]. Outside, there are various resources such as online Indigenous news magazines, Indigenous literatures and arts, events, etc [8]. These websites and online resources all promote Indigenous culture and the importance of recognizing its identity; telling stories, voices, and personal experiences Indigenous people have encountered and further on spread around the world.

4.2.1. Social Media Spread and Updates

Social media platforms are one of the most efficient ways. As both old and young generations nowadays rely on the use of technology devices, spreading the importance and significance of Indigenous background on websites and posts can be very easily seen. For example, repeatedly sharing Indigenous peoples' history in articles, interviewing past survivors or elders who have witnessed the change in history over the years, or asking Indigenous students around schools in Canada of their personal opinions in attending school with non-Indigenous children (if there is a significant difference). Potential ways to improve education systems that have already included Indigenous learnings would be to update the accuracy of information as soon as possible whenever there is a need to change what has been previously taught. For example, updated materials online instead of papers so that people do not have to wait a long time for textbooks to be reprinted with updated information. By making edits online, teachers and researchers can easily get access to the most updated information regarding Indigenous education.

4.2.2. Global Actions and Raised Awareness

In showing the importance of Indigenous language, in 2018, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have acted and declared 2019 as the international year of Indigenous languages in showing its importance. More schools and especially earlier ones like kindergarten will be able to let students recognize and learn about Indigenous history sooner. For example, Ontario announced mandatory lessons on Indigenous people earlier in grades one through three, starting in September 2023 [9-10]. With more policies developed like Ontario, more schools and especially earlier ones like kindergarten will be able to let students recognize and learn about Indigenous history sooner. Especially for Indigenous students, they will be able to recognize who they are and their cultural background before learning about the actual core and in-depth history of Indigenous people or in other words their ancestors. According to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, quality education for Indigenous people should be "education that is well resourced, culturally sensitive, respectful of heritage and that takes into account history, cultural security and integrity, encompasses human rights, community and individual development." In some places around the world, actions have already been taken in bringing rights to Indigenous people. For example, in Colombia, the Ministry of Education encourages educational projects and models of learning for Indigenous people by providing technical, methodology, and financial support. The communities also participated in the curriculum design to incorporate specific cultural components to the classroom. Starting in New Zealand/Aotearoa and now spread to other places, they developed "language nests", where older Māori community members provide childcare while speaking their language, in hopes to expose children to their language in early childhood. In Nicaragua, UNESCO has long been attempting to encourage Indigenous people to preserve their own language. The classroom materials are encouraged to design in Indigenous

people's own language and incorporate their specific living environment. Lastly, in Paraguay bilingual teaching and learning have become a national policy since 1994.

5. Conclusion

There is still a long path in achieving the goal of bringing equality to Indigenous culture and their people and to further on see it in future context. To be specific, being culturally sensitive can be hard not only for Indigenous people but for all types of historical events around the world. Forming a society and learning environment that accurately presents historical events with respect to its people may take a long time for everyone to feel equally and correctly recognized. A specific example would be the potential difficulty that Indigenous people do not have access to schooling in their traditional languages, where schools around Canada should take that into more consideration and not make Indigenous students feel like they have a hard time cooperating and understanding in school. It is important that as decades pass, people understand and improve the current phenomenon that Indigenous culture is still not being fully respected, and that the people do not feel they received the rights they deserve. As there are more Indigenous people living around the world today compared to the past, it is important that in a shared community, there is not a contrast or less of a gap in treatment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Protection, rights, and more freedom is a long-term goal yet a challenge that people need to work on for both the ancestors and young generations of Indigenous people and for the history and the uprising future.

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