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Sociological Factors Influencing Education: A Canadian Perspective

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to answer the question: What are the sociological factors that have influenced the Canadian education system? With document analysis as the adopted research methodology, after a careful review of a significant amount of relevant literature on the education system's history, structure, governance, and learning outcomes of different student groups, it is concluded that there are inequities in the Canadian education system with regard to race, gender, class, and religion. Indigenous students and Black students have especially been consistently disadvantaged over the years in the education system, lagging behind other student groups in terms of graduation rates and learning outcomes, which have enormous consequences for their lives after they leave school and transition to postsecondary education and eventually enter the labour force. To move forward, Canadian policy makers, education administrators, and teachers need to work together to make the education system inclusive, serving the interest of all students.

Keywords

sociological factors, education, learning outcomes, race, gender

The purpose of this study is to answer the question: What are the sociological factors that have influenced Canadian education, including its history, social stratification, diverse cultural influences, and the relationships between education and the life outcomes of individuals and social groups? A sociological analysis of the Canadian education system helps us have a better understanding of the system, a vital sector of society critical for the stability and prosperity of the country. There is a common belief in society that education is essential to ensure a good quality of life and that education holds the key to an individual's success (Robson, 2019). Education is also essential to ensure that Canada is competitive in its economic activities and has a place in world politics. In addition, education

is an important sector of society. In 2021, out of 36.3 million Canadians, 4.1 million aged 15 years and over attended school, from elementary to postsecondary. In the same year, 1.4 million Canadians aged 15 years and over worked in providing educational services (Statistics Canada, March 11, 2024).

A sociological understanding of how social factors influence the education system is important for students, educators, and those interested in educational issues. While there are several textbooks on Canadian sociology in education, this study collects the most recent information from a sociological perspective and conducts analysis on the data. The strengthened understanding of these social factors influencing education is conducive to the better governance of the education system and is likely to contribute towards a more effective system. This study adopts a critical view when the system is examined.

There are five sections in this article. The first section describes the method of the study. The second section provides a brief history of Canadian education. The third section describes the structure and governance of the education system. The fourth section explores social factors influencing education. The fifth section offers a conclusion and presents some discussion on the delineated social factors. It also provides recommendations on the advisable direction for the system to move forward.

1. Research Method

To have an understanding of what sociological factors are influencing the Canadian education system, I have reviewed a significant amount of relevant literature. The methodology for this study is document analysis. Document analysis encompasses a systematic procedure for reviewing information to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). This method entails finding, making sense of, and synthesizing data contained in documents, which provide background, context, and a means of tracking change. Moreover, document analysis has the advantages of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, unobtrusiveness, and broad coverage (Bowen, 2009).

I have reviewed three Canadian textbooks on sociology in education. I have reviewed the most recent Statistics Canada's publications that provide information about the changing Canadian society, with regard to its racial and ethnic formation and the relationships between social groups and educational attainment, income, and other life outcomes often considered important sociological factors having an impact on the relationships among different social groups.

The legal system is an important social structure regulating all relationships in society. Education laws in each Canadian province regulate how schools are funded, operated, and what is taught there. I have reviewed some pieces of federal and provincial legislation related to the provision of education. Understanding education laws helps us understand the public education systems. I have also reviewed *Canadian Journal of Education, Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, Canadian Journal of Higher Education, Canadian Review of Sociology, Historical Studies in Education,* and *Sociology of Education* in the last 10 years. This is a descriptive and exploratory study attempting to enhance our understanding of the Canadian education system from a sociological

perspective.

2. A Brief History

The Canadian history and social structures have contributed to the current educational situation. Before Europeans arrived in today's Canada on a large scale in the 17th century, Indigenous peoples had lived here for millennia. When early settlers, particularly the French, moved to today's Canada, education was mainly provided in the families.

The Canadian history of settlement and colonization has resulted in a multicultural society made up of three founding peoples – Indigenous, French, and British (Brosseau & Dewing, 2018). Accepting a significant number of immigrants every year, Canada has many other racial and ethnic groups. The results from the most recent census in 2021 illustrate that approximately 9.6 million Canadians, out of 36 million, belong to visible minority groups, and almost 8 million Canadians speak neither English nor French as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, March 11, 2023).

The largest ethnic group in Canada is of English, including Scottish and Irish, descent, and the second group is of French descent (Statistics Canada, October 26, 2022). The French came to North America in the early seventeenth century, established their colonies, and called them New France. The British came later and also established colonies here. In the seven year's war (1756-1763), the British defeated the French, who ceded most of their colonies in New France to the British.

The early Canadian education systems formed in what are now the two provinces of Ontario and Quebec, where European settlement patterns were heavily concentrated until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1791 and 1841, these two regions were called Upper Canada and Lower Canada, corresponding to the southern parts of Ontario and Quebec. In the 1840 Act of Union, the Canadas were united into the United Province of Canada, with two parts, Canada West and Canada East. Canada West was named Ontario and Canada East was named Quebec with the Confederation in 1867, when Canada had only four provinces, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. There was an ongoing political battle by the French not to become assimilated into the British culture, which became dominant in the education systems in 9 of the 10 provinces. Quebec was the only province where the French culture was dominant.

More space is provided here in describing the development of education in Quebec and Ontario, the two most populous provinces receiving the most immigrants. In the era of New France (1608-1760), French parish priests established small schools to teach catechism, reading, writing, and arithmetic (Gaffield & Millette, 2015). Catholic missionaries also established boarding schools to educate, convert, and assimilate First Nations children, with the goal to turn them into Christianised obedient subjects of the French Crown (Berthelette, 2023). While New France's residential schools and assimilationist policy failed, they provided an important blueprint for the later Canadian Indian residential school system, which were meant to isolate Indigenous children and assimilate them into the dominant Euro-Canadian culture and society (Berthelette, 2023).

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Given the leadership role of the Catholic Church in Quebec, the construction of a state educational authority lagged behind while secular and religious leaders debated the division of power and responsibility. Quebec set up its first Ministry of Public Instruction in 1868, but abolished it in 1875 under pressure from the Catholic Church, which deemed it was alone capable of dispensing education (Gaffield & Millette, 2015). Thereafter, Quebec was the only province without a Ministry of Education until 1964, when the Ministry of Education was established as part of a quiet revolution to make education a state responsibility and expand access to all children.

The Public Schools Act (1807), the first Canadian education legislation, established eight public schools in Upper Canada. In 1816 the Common Schools Act divided Upper Canada into eight districts each with a board of education administered by locally elected trustees. The Act stipulated that no person should be appointed a teacher unless the person was a subject of the British monarch.

In 1841, an amended Common Schools Act in Canada West provided municipalities the authority to collect property taxes to operate local schools. The religious Catholic or Protestant minority in municipalities had the right to receive the due appropriation from the municipal treasurer based on the number of pupils to establish their own school. In 1844 Egerton Ryerson was appointed the education superintendent for Canada West, who established a residential school system for Indigenous children with the aim of assimilating them into the British dominated society (Ross, 1896).

At the time of the Confederation, most settlers and immigrants were either Protestants or Roman Catholics. In Ontario, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, English-speaking Protestants were the majority, but in Quebec French-speaking Catholics were the majority. In 1802, the New Brunswick government began to play a role in education by giving teachers financial assistance, and three years later, the government began to build elementary and high schools (Government of New Brunswick, 2025). The Nova Scotia legislature recognized the necessity for general education and approved the principle of free schools in an act in 1808 to encourage the establishment of schools throughout the province (Fergusson, 1964).

After the Confederation, Manitoba (1870), British Columbia (1871), Prince Edward Island (1873), Saskatchewan (1905), Alberta (1905), and Newfoundland and Labrador (1949) joined Canada. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the schools of the public education system inaugurated by the first Education Act in 1836 opened their doors to the children of parents of all creeds (Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage, 2025). The government of Prince Edward Island took the first step towards establishing an Island-wide educational system in 1839 (The School Net Digital Collections Program, Industry Canada, n.d.). In 1865, the Legislative Council of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, passed the Common School Act, establishing a non-denominational General Board of Education (The Homeroom, n.d.). The Manitoba School Act of 1871 authorized public support for denominational schools, continuing the existing religious relationship with education. In 1905, section 17 in the two Dominion statutes that established Saskatchewan and Alberta stipulated that section 93 of the Constitution Act (1867) applied to the two new provinces (Government of Canada, 2022a, 2022b).

Section 93 stated that nothing in any law shall prejudicially affect any right or privilege with respect to denominational schools which any class of persons had by law in the province at the Union (the Canadian Legal Information Institute, 2025).

Canadian postsecondary education had a history almost as old as that of the country, but for a long time postsecondary education was accessible only for a minority of the relevant age group. Expansion of postsecondary education began in the mid-1960s. In 15 years, from 1960 to 1975, enrolment in postsecondary education increased more than four times (Wisenthal, 2014). One thing to be noted was that Canadian university and college programs were built on colonial, capitalistic, and patriarchal policies and procedures that systemically discriminated against members of under-represented groups (Yoon & Kerr, 2023a). Canadian education history has been shaped by colonialism, capitalism, and racial discrimination, and it is also a sociological narrative of continuity and contestation.

3. Structure and Governance

The Constitution Act (1982) stipulates that education is under the exclusive jurisdiction of provincial governments. Each province has its own ministry or department of education, responsible for designing, implementing, and monitoring the implementation of educational policies. Children and youth have universal access to free education from kindergarten to the completion of secondary school at a certain age. They must attend school between the ages of 5 or 6 until they are 16, 17, or 18, depending on the provinces. Youth must pay tuition if they want to receive postsecondary education, but institutions receive substantial funding from provincial governments. While provincial governments are partially responsible for financing the operation of institutions, they receive transfer payments from the federal government. The largest portion of Canada Social Transfer from the federal government to provinces is intended for postsecondary education. The federal government in its 2024 budget strengthened assistance to postsecondary students by eliminating interest on Canada Student Loans, increasing Canada Student Grants, and enhancing loan forgiveness (Government of Canada, 2024). Without a federal ministry of education, there is a Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), an intergovernmental body to serve as a forum to discuss policy issues, a means by which to consult and cooperate with national education organizations and the federal government, and an instrument to represent the education interests of the provinces and territories internationally (CMEC, n.d.).

Nationally the Canadian education system was decentralized, determined by each province, while within each province it was centralized at the provincial level (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2008). In the last three decades, the provincial centralization in education governance has been increasing. In every province there is an education or school act that stipulates almost everything concerning elementary and secondary education. Separate laws regulate postsecondary education institutions in provinces.

Children and youth are socialized in schools into becoming future productive members of society, learning essential literacy and numeracy skills (Robson, 2019). In addition, all education or school acts stress the important role schooling plays in moral education. Schooling, from kindergarten to

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postsecondary, has a decisive impact on what kind of citizen children and youth will become after they leave school.

4. Sociological Factors Influencing the System

Canadian population can be categorized by race, language, gender, class, and religion. The relationships among these groups are not always equal. "One of the primary themes in the sociological analysis of education is the assessment of contributions made by formal education both to social equality and to socio-economic opportunity" (Wotherspoon, 2018, p. 246). The sociological factors that have influenced the education system include the fact that Canada is a federal country with two official languages: English and French, with English being the dominant language. Canada is increasingly becoming more diverse with regard to races, ethnicities (Hou et al., 2023), languages, and religions (Statistics Canada, March 11, 2024). In the 2021 census, more than 450 ethnic or cultural origins were reported with one in four people in Canada was part of a racialized group (Statistics Canada, October 26, 2022).

Canada continues to receive a significant number of immigrants every year. According to the 2021 Census, 23 percent of the Canadian population were foreign-born (immigrants). Approximately 83 percent of recent immigrants (2016 to 2021) belonged to visible minority population (Statistics Canada, December 16, 2022). In 2022 and 2023 annual immigration to Canada amounted to almost 500,000 new immigrants (Statista, April 16, 2024), of whom the vast majority spoke neither English nor French as their native tongue (Statistics Canada, March 11, 2024). Some immigrant school age children and youth struggle in the education system, encountering barriers caused by language, race, and religion.

In the 1870s, representatives of the Canadian government and First Nations negotiated Treaties 1 to 7, each of which included provision for education (Carr-Stewart, 2001). The First Nation representatives negotiating the treaties had an understanding of formal education and expected their members and future generations to benefit from such services (Carr-Stewart, 2001). The Canadian government, however, chose to provide limited educational services not as a treaty right, but as an assimilationist mechanism through its own criteria, the Indian Act (Carr-Stewart, 2001). Some First Nations had been systemically removed and dispossessed from most of their territory (Simpson, 2017). After 1880, residential schools, government-sponsored religious schools, were established to assimilate Indigenous children into Canadian society (Miller et al., 2024). Their labour was needed to sustain these institutions, where they received instruction for only half of the day (Giancarlo, 2022). An estimated 6,000 Indigenous children died at residential schools (records were incomplete) (Miller et al., 2024). The residential school system played a detrimental role to the traditional Indigenous culture and identity. From an Indigenous perspective, the Canadian education system for a long time was a tool of settler colonialism. It takes time to heal the wounds, and some residential school survivors and their children still have suspicion about the education system.

Canada is a multicultural country. The concept of a "multicultural society" can be interpreted in

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different ways: descriptively (as a sociological fact), or politically (as policy) (Brosseau & Dewing, 2018). As a sociological fact, multiculturalism refers to the presence of people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Politically, multiculturalism refers to the management of diversity through formal policies in the federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal domains (Brosseau & Dewing, 2018).

Race is widely seen as a social relational category and race matters (Dei, 1996). Critical race theory is useful in understanding education inequity (Ladson-Billings, 1998). While Canadians are generally supportive of a multicultural society (Brosseau & Dewing, 2018), according to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) (2023), systemic racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian society. "Whiteness" is the dominant cultural and racial group, norms and expectations associated with "White culture" are considered the norm, and deviations from that may be seen as weaknesses (Robson, 2019). It is in Canadian written and unwritten policies, laws, public practices, beliefs, and systems, producing, condoning, and perpetuating widespread, unfair treatment and oppression of racialized people (CHRC, 2023). The early Quebec missionary schools for Indigenous children and later residential school systems across Canada were tools of settler colonialism. Systemic racism has been recognized by people with lived experience, by civil society and Indigenous organizations, and by various levels of government (CHRC, 2023). Colonial harms and racism cause long-term injuries, which unfortunately occur and exist in Canadian schools in multiple forms and in various degrees (Yoon & Kerr, 2023b). With a critical race theory perspective, it can be stated that settler colonialism has shaped schooling in Canada, like that in the United States (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

International comparisons of social development among nations regard the general levels of education attainment as one of the most common indicators of the advancement of a society, serving as both a fundamental right as well as a tool for advancing social justice, equity, and inclusion (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2016). In terms of educational attainment, persons of Indigenous ancestry have significantly lower overall rates of educational attainment than other Canadians (Statistics Canada, March 28, 2024a). As there is a positive correlation between educational attainment and job opportunities (Statistics Canada, March 28, 2024b) and other life outcomes, the low educational attainment of Indigenous youth has enormous ramifications. Persons of Indigenous ancestry are under-represented in academia and among teachers working in schools. They are over-represented in homeless groups (Dionne et al., 2023) and in correctional services (Statistics Canada, March 19, 2024). Education is a social equalizer, but its equalizing effect is quite limited. This understanding may be applied to any group that has been historically disadvantaged in society.

In signing treaties with the Indigenous peoples in the 1870s, the early colonial Canadian government promised them that they would receive education provided by the government (Carr-Stewart, 2001). Treaty First Nations recognized that their treaty rights to education had not been implemented, but had been subverted by governmental interests and policies (Battiste, 2013). The residential school system was not what they expected. When publicly funded schools for Indigenous children were set up by the federal government, these schools tended to be under-funded when compared with the schools in their

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respective provinces. On February 27, 2012, a motion calling for the equal funding of First Nations education was passed unanimously in the House of Commons.

According to the Constitution (1982), the federal government is responsible for the education of Indigenous children and children of the armed forces. Indigenous Services Canada (2025) claims that the government of Canada is committed to achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation and government-to-government relationship based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership as the foundation for transformative change.

Another group disadvantaged in the education system is Black students. The first person of African heritage known to have come to Canada arrived in 1604 (Government of Canada, February 1, 2024). Mathieu Da Costa came with the French explorer Samuel de Champlain. Da Costa, a multilingual interpreter speaking English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese, provided an invaluable link with the Mik'maq people encountered by the Europeans (Government of Canada, February 1, 2024). Historically there were legally segregated schools for Blacks in Ontario and Nova Scotia (Henry-Dixon, 2021). Today Black children go to the same schools as all other children, but scholars contend that Black students experience alienating schooling cultures that have low expectations of them, are Eurocentric, stigmatizing, and ultimately end up streaming them out of university pathways (George, 2023). Joyce and Abdou (2023) find that secondary school world history textbooks from Quebec and Manitoba continue the valorisation of white Western civilizations at the expense of ancient African histories and Black peoples more generally. Black youth have lower high school grades, have higher rates of suspension, and are disproportionately placed in special education, while comprising a scant proportion of those in gifted programming, and are less likely to attend university than other racial groups (George, 2023). A Statistics Canada study indicates that different racial and ethnic groups registered very dissimilar bachelor's degree program experiences (Handler et al., 2024). In bachelor's degree enrolment rates; graduation rates; enrolment in math-intensive science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs; and (among students initially enrolled in STEM) STEM graduation rates, Black students consistently ranked near the bottom and trailed the top group by a considerable margin on all these measures (Handler et al., 2024).

The 2016 General Social Survey found that 60 percent of Black youth aged 15 to 25 expected that they would obtain a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 79 percent of non-Black youth (Wall & Wood, 2023). High school instructors and counsellors disproportionately guided Black students, regardless of their academic standing, towards courses that did not fit the prerequisites for university (Wall & Wood, 2023). Among working-age individuals born in Canada, educational attainment was low among Black Canadians when compared with White Canadians (Bonikowska et al., 2024). Consequentially, Blacks were under-represented as teachers working in the education sector. Group-level differences in educational attainment had implications for other outcomes, particularly earnings (Bonikowska et al., 2024).

However, the Black population was diverse in terms of birthplaces, ethnic or cultural origins, religions,

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and mother tongues (Statistics Canada, October 26, 2022). The educational attainment of Black populations varied greatly; 46.3 percent of Black children of African immigrants had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 15.8 percent of Black children of Canadian-born parents, compared with the overall Canadian average of 32.9 percent (Hou et al., 2023; Statistics Canada, January 18, 2023). A study on high schools and selected universities in Toronto also found that some of the largest gaps between Black and non-Black students were faced by Black children and youth with Canadian-born parents (Wall & Wood, 2023).

There are gender inequalities. The Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) 2022 results indicated that Canadian 15 year old girls out-performed boys in both reading and science, but boys out-performed girls in mathematics (CMEC, 2023). In 2016, 40.7 percent of young women aged 25 to 34 reported having a bachelor's degree or higher. By comparison, 29.1 percent of young men aged 25 to 34 reported having a bachelor's degree or higher. However, more women than men still reported that they encountered obstacles preventing them from achieving the highest level of education desired (Deng, 2021). More female students graduated from postsecondary institutions in Canada in 2021 (Statista, March 27, 2024). But females were under-represented in programs that produced graduates joining professions that tended to earn a higher income, such as mathematics, computer and information sciences, and engineering (Statistics Canada, October 13, 2025). Overall, women had the edge in educational attainment, but their labour market outcomes still lagged behind (Statistics Canada, April 26, 2024). Why do males continue to out-perform females in mathematics in the education system?

As early as in the 1840s in Ontario private schools supported by tuitions became almost exclusively associated with boarding schools attended by the members of the upper social classes, and others went to common schools supported by government grants (Robson, 2019). Today the vast majority of children attend publicly funded schools. In terms of public funding, equity is an important issue. Brimley et al. (2016), experts in financing education, consider that if the per student funding variation among school boards is less than 5 percent, it can be considered equitable. With this standard the funding of education can be considered equitable, as 7 out of the 10 provinces have their elementary and secondary education funding centralized at the provincial level regardless of local wealth. The other 3 provinces determine funding both locally and provincially, but in all 3 there is a provincial equalizing grant that has been increasing in proportion in recent years. It is assumed that the variation in funding per student among school boards in these 3 provinces is less than 5 percent. There are still inequities in education funding mainly caused by the different fund-raising abilities of local communities. In addition, community cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), which is different for different schools, provides resources that can strengthen organizational capacity to improve educational opportunities and learning outcomes (Bridwell-Mitchell et al., 2023).

Religion is an important social structure. Approximately two-thirds of Canadians state they have a religion. More than one-third of Canada's population report having no religious affiliation (Statistics

Canada, March 11, 2023). The proportion of this group more than doubled in 20 years, going from 16.5 percent in 2001 to 34.6 percent in 2021 (Statistics Canada, October 26, 2022). In some provinces public funding is provided to the Catholics, but not to other religious groups. In Ontario, there is a movement to seek the amalgamation of Ontario's public and Catholic school systems into a single secular school system for each official language (OneSchoolSystem.org, n.d.). People supporting the movement suggest that there must be one public school system for all children. Educators and parents in other religious school systems such as the Jewish school system and the Islamic school system fought for public funding and took the Ontario government all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, which declined to hear the case. They took the government to the United Nations, which determined that the Ontario system was discriminatory in that government funded only one religious school system, but not others. The UN stated that a government should fund only one public education system for all children and no religious school system should receive public funding. Or a government should fund all religious school systems if it chose to fund religious schools. The Ontario government ignored the UN determination, stating that education was under provincial jurisdiction in Canada.

5. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

Based on the information analyzed above, enlightened by the critical race theory and other critical perspectives, it can be concluded that there are inequities based on race, gender, class, and religion in the Canadian education system. There are also systemic tensions between efficiency and equity. In addition, different people perceive equity differently. A sociological inquiry reveals that education has served as a key mechanism for reproducing colonial hierarchies and racial inequities. While these issues are not new, this article provides a comprehensive, although brief, summary of these issues with the most recent information. Education has been cast as individual investment rather than a public good, reproducing racial and class hierarchies that sociologists like Bourdieu (1986) and Apple (2005) identify as central to capitalist societies. This article attempts to frame the education system through the lens of sociological power structures, particularly as they are related to race. Educators need to continue their efforts to narrow the gaps in learning outcomes among different student groups, making the system inclusive.

In terms of equity, for Canada overall, those in the highest decile scored 244 points higher than those in the lowest decile in PISA 2022, similar to the average gap (235) across OECD countries (CMEC, 2023). Although high-achieving countries tended to have larger gaps, Estonia achieved a higher score in mathematics but had a smaller achievement gap, or greater equity, than Canada (CMEC, 2023). Japan and Macao (China) achieved higher average scores compared with Canada but with similar achievement gaps between the high and low achievers (CMEC, 2023).

This is a brief overview of the Canadian education system from a sociological perspective. While I am critical of the overall system, Canadians placed a high degree of trust in school teachers (Narrative Research, 2021). A public opinion survey with 4,000 participants in Ontario indicated that Ontarians

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had greater admiration for teachers than other provincial government workers (Erl et al., 2023).

With limited, sometimes even tightening, financial resources, education policy advocates must emphasize a few central values (Fowler, 2013). Accountability is a central value provincial governments have been advocating. In the 1990s all provinces reduced the number of school districts, centralizing the administration of schools except Prince Edward Island (Ben Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). Provincial governments have become more powerful, increasing expectation of accountability for district school boards, school administrators, and teachers. As jurisdictions strived to draw the most value from their education systems, it was common for governments to implement reforms to their accountability regimes (Copp, 2019; Wang, 2019). However, one question arises, has the increase of accountability improved equity, enhanced student learning, or deepened stratification?

As accountability increased, the discretion of trustees and school administrators in operating schools decreased. There were more education documents to be filed (Faubert et al., 2019; Higginbottom, 2019). Accountability also put pressure on teachers, who must follow provincial policies more closely, demonstrating students' success in learning outcomes, often defined in terms of student achievement on standardized tests (Lim, 2019). In analysing education policies these questions should always be asked: Who gains power and who loses power (Fowler, 2013)? Provincial governments have increased their power in deciding issues at the expense of school boards, administrators, and teachers' discretion as a result of the centralization trend over the last three decades. At the same time, there are countercurrents of transformation. Indigenous self-governance in education, anti-racist curriculum movements, and inclusive education reforms illustrate how marginalized communities are asserting their agency. These movements embody what Dei (1996) termed "education as resistance"—an effort to reclaim learning as a space for cultural survival and social justice. The tension between accountability and autonomy remains one of the defining contradictions of Canadian education.

To fight against anti-Black racism in Toronto District School Board, an Africentric alternative school was established in 2009. With Africentrism the school taught the contributions of Black people around the world. Students there had opportunities to learn things like African drumming (Shafi, 2024). Canadian educators also worked hard to make the system inclusive of all students (Ismailos et al., 2022), and less restricted by the colonial influence that has been part of history.

An analysis of sociological factors influencing the education system helps us understand the current situation, and it may also help us foresee where it is likely to go, particularly in uncertain times with fast social changes. The analysis of these factors and education outcomes helps us understand what kinds of values and beliefs prevail in a society, and how open and democratic a society is (Wotherspoon, 2018). These factors are not only descriptors but also forces of power and resistance. This article assists us in having a better understanding of the sociological factors influencing the education system over the years and probably a better understanding of why changes have occurred and are occurring. With the current structure of provincial funding, the Canadian political landscape, and the economic situation, the status quo is likely to remain resistant to changes. While there are different social forces pushing for

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educational reforms, they are in different directions. I have systematically described and analyzed the social factors that have influenced and are influencing the education system. The analysis contributes to ongoing debates in the sociology of education about equity, decolonization, and social reproduction. This study has the potential to advance historical, practical, and theoretical knowledge from a Canadian perspective, but there are limitations to the study. One significant limitation is that this study relies on secondary sources and there is a lack of empirical data. Future studies can focus on the issues discussed here, collect field data to increase our understanding of these issues, and make specific recommendations on how to move the education system forward.

Canada is completely different from New France in the early 1600s, when small schools were established by French speaking Catholic priests and nuns, but the Canadian education system continues to reproduce the structural inequalities that have defined the nation's formation. The system mirrors the contradictions of its broader social order—a liberal democracy built on colonial and capitalist foundations. The 2021 census results indicate a more diverse population (Statistics Canada, March 11, 2024). Education laws have become more complicated. The first Ontario Public Schools Act (1807) was only 3 pages long, with no related regulation. The current Ontario Education Act is over 300 pages, under which 256 regulations have been made.

The Constitution (1982) stipulated that existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada were recognized and affirmed. First Nations demanded the fulfilment of their treaty right to education, while the Canadian government administered educational services within the boundaries of the federal legislation: the Indian Act (Carr-Stewart, 2001). Honouring treaty commitments offered hope for educational opportunities and equity for Indigenous students within the context of First Nation governance, traditions, and cultural milieu (Carr-Stewart, 2001). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) called on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would incorporate seven principles. The first one was to provide sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). To fulfill its treaty commitments and narrow the gap in educational attainment between Indigenous youth and general youth, more effort from the federal government is needed. How much progress can be made in improving the education for Indigenous students remains to be seen.

Efforts from all those working in the education sector are also needed to narrow a similar gap between Black youth and the general youth. The promise of equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization strategies might bring about the imagined institutional changes only through critical examination of their policies, removing systemic barriers which operated over the years to maintain the inequitable situation (James, 2023). Similarly, in higher education, racialized and Indigenous scholars' knowledge and experiences exposed the impact of the processes of racialization, Whiteness, Anglo-Eurocentrism, colonization, and hegemony that continued to operate within the academy (Henry & Tator, 2009). To advance the contemporary aspirations concerning equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization, and

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Indigenization, continued collective perseverance was needed (Yoon & Kerr, 2023a). If we put our minds to work on examining the evidence of how systemic racism was structured and experienced in higher education, we had a better chance at seeing it for what it was and then dismantling it (Cranston & Bennett, 2024). Multicultural policies have replaced assimilationist policies long time ago, but there is still room to enhance inclusiveness. Is there a possibility of Indigenous education resurgence and self-governance? Will there be more pieces of legislation similar to Mi'kmaq Education Act?

An understanding of the discussed sociological factors influencing the education system requires us to make further efforts to confront the colonial and Eurocentric logics embedded in policy. "Schools continue to be both testing grounds and battlegrounds for building a society that extends its freedoms and material benefits to all" (Bowles & Gintis, 2001, pp. 21-22). Looking forward, the path toward a more equitable and decolonized education system will depend on collective commitment to critical reflection and policy renewal. As we face intensifying demographic change, and truth and reconciliation imperatives, critical sociology provides a set of commitments—to truth, to equity, and to a more humane vision of learning. Reimagining Canadian education through this lens is a necessary step toward realizing the unfinished project of social justice within a plural, democratic, and still-decolonizing nation. In the publicly funded education system, the most important value is the interest of all students.

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