

## **Self-Determination of Indigenous Education Policies in Australia: The Case of the Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People**

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### **ABSTRACT**

For centuries, education has been used as a tool of assimilation, and this has been the Indigenous experience in Australian education system. Nevertheless, for those who has successfully negotiated it, education provides the key to self-determination, active and equal participation in the society. Since 2007, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is relevant to the Australia's Indigenous people. It has provided several guidelines, such as self-determination, rights and equity, which should be given to them. The UNDRIP should be not just an acceptance of a symbolic gesture but a more active 'recognition of rights'. Therefore, this paper reviews the current and the past reports that reflect the shifts in government policy of Indigenous education in Australia during the important key period when government policy relating to the Indigenous people

shifted between 1974 and 2014. Several themes are identified as outcomes from the document analysis including: assimilation; equity and equality; participation and self-determination; and rights and recognition. The findings suggest that the Australian government still lack in their efforts to recognize and acknowledge the equity, the rights, and the self-determination of the Aboriginal people and Torres Straits Islander

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as ‘the first people’ in the country. It can be concluded that, Australia is yet to achieve at a substantive level the implementation of the UNDRIP. As a suggestion, alteration to the current curriculum framework needs to be done to improve the rights and equity of education development and cultivation of relationships between schools and Indigenous communities to ensure a successful outcome in the Indigenous education policy. Besides that, government of Australia should take an important and positive step approach towards the recognition of Indigenous Education rights through the adoption of the UNDRIP in their practice and constitution to recognize Indigenous languages, cultures and Indigenous knowledge in the education system in line with mainstream society.

*Keywords:* Equity, indigenous education policy, recognition, rights, self-determination

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## INTRODUCTION

Self-determination is a fundamental principle for ensuring that the educational aspirations of Indigenous peoples are heard and addressed. Self-determination for Indigenous people is vital for successfully resolving issues at every level of the education system and in educational programs. The right to self-determination is multifaceted and includes “communities’ involvement in the elaboration and determination of teaching methods, curricula and materials as well as in the appointment of teachers (King & Schielmann, 2004) to ensure that policies are consistent with the views that

Indigenous people have about the role of education in their lives.

Thus, it is important to this paper to examine the present state of Indigenous people in Australia and the degree to which their right to self-determination is expressed in the formulation and development of Indigenous education policy. The issue is examined in light of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007).<sup>1</sup> This declaration aims to protect the rights of Indigenous people throughout the world.

Some of the human rights and education issues regarding the discrimination suffered by Indigenous peoples have been clearly addressed by the United Nations International Decade of World’s Indigenous People (1995 to 2004). This included an examination of practical actions taken by most of the governments that supported the declaration of UNDRIP during its establishment. The UNDRIP covers issues such as Indigenous education systems, the state of Indigenous languages, the inclusion and exclusion of Indigenous cultures and knowledge from school curricula, and the need to promote Indigenous participation in educational programs. This is indicative of the rationale behind UNDRIP which states, in Article 14, that “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and

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1 Resolution adopted by the General Assembly [without reference to a Main Committee (A/61/L.67 and Add.1)] 61/295. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 107<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting, 13 September 2007.

institutions, providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning” (UNDRIP, 2007, p. 7). Hence, it is obvious that the Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of state education without discrimination in the supported countries.

Australia have education systems with a mainstream orientation, and very little consideration is given to the educational requirements and cultural context of Indigenous peoples. Firstly, scholars earlier have pointed out that government delivery of education to Indigenous peoples has been problematic (Champagne & Abu-Saad, 2006; Maxwell et al., 2018). Secondly, there is discrimination in the implementation of education policy (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Buckskin, 2009; King & Schielmann, 2004). The achievement of Indigenous peoples in education is still far behind that of mainstream society (Buckskin, 2009; Gale, 2000; Mohd Roslan, 2016a; Stone et al., 2017). Thirdly, in terms of participation and the recognition of Indigenous peoples rights in education policy (Ah Sam & Ackland, 2005; Buckskin, 2009; Gray & Partington, 2012; King & Schielmann, 2004; Mohd Roslan, 2016a; Munns, 1998; Riley, 2018). Yet, education is considered part of a complex system impacting on Indigenous students. This paper explores these issues through analysis of policy documents between 1974 and 2014. This paper provides an analysis of the formulation and development of Indigenous education policy in Australia during the

important key period when government policy relating to the Indigenous people shifted between 1974 and 2014. This paper reviews the Australian government reports, papers and policy documents concerning Indigenous Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research is based on document analysis, a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic. Analyzing documents incorporates coding content into themes similar to how focus group or interview transcripts are analyzed. Secondary sources consisting of 19 documents from Australian government reports, papers and policy reports that relate to Indigenous education were reviewed in this research. The reviews and discourse of government reports, papers and policy documents are essential to evaluate and analyze the formulation and development of Indigenous education policy in Australia during the important key period when government policy relating to the Indigenous people shifted between 1974 and 2014. Thematic analysis has been chosen to discuss the findings based on the themes that were then identified as outcomes from this document analysis.

Drawing on Foucault’s notion of power, knowledge and normalization provide a basis for understanding how the education institutions and government regulate and shape the education system for specific groups such as the Indigenous people.

Furthermore, this provides a comprehensive framework and philosophy and illustrations of educational practices. Foucault points out that “many acts of power and knowledge can interfere with our ability to freely explore how we may live within truth, rather than inside a prison made from our own culture and society” (Jardine, 2005, p. 11). He explained “...we cannot help but produce unequal differences, as it is an integral component of the system” (Briscoe, 2008, p. 29). Thus, “...well-meaning efforts to reduce inequalities of schooling continue to fail because schools continue to work in an organizational formats geared to normalize students” (Ryan, 1991, p. 118).

Normalization in this context is a complex process (Mohd Roslan, 2016b). The efforts of Australian government in seeking to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People can also limit the level of their self-determination. The challenges in Australia include such aims of Indigenous people as, identity recognition, land ownership, and an acknowledgement of the importance of embedding linguistic, cultural and also spiritual aspects in their education system (Brennan, 1998; Gray & Beresford, 2002; Gray & Partington, 2012; Harris, 2012; Kanu, 2007; Leonie, Lasimbang, Jonas, & Mansul, 2015; Maxwell et al., 2018; Partington, 1998b, 2005; Rigney, 2010; Rumsey, 2012). However, Australian government has historically used assimilation and nation building, and other mainstreaming tools, in order to develop Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People’s lives. The

normalization process challenges self-determination and still does not achieve satisfactory educational outcomes.

Therefore, this paper examines efforts taken by Australian government through assimilation and the ongoing tensions in attempts to fulfil the requirements of the UNDRIP for Indigenous people. For Indigenous people, the UNDRIP is an international law that seeks to represent and protect Indigenous rights. One of the tensions in education policy is the use of a single language in national curriculum in Australia (Mohd Roslan, 2016a; Sidwell & Roger, 2011). The aim of using a single language is part of the nation-building elements regardless of ethnic groups and religions. While it can be argued that many ethnic groups comprise the population of Australia, Indigenous languages and cultural differences can be prioritized above other ethnic groups based on the UNDRIP. Foucault provides a basis for analysis for a greater level of understanding of the tensions between the rights to self-determination for Indigenous people in Indigenous education policy within an education system of normalization.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

### **The Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Education Development Discourses from the 1970s**

This analysis begins with an examination of the many policies and program documents for Aboriginal education in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s under the Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke and Keating governments.

During these Prime Ministers' tenures, the Commonwealth School Commission and the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Education played an important role.

It can be argued that most of documentations in Australia in early days recognized Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as an 'educationally disadvantaged group'. This led to significant changes in Australian education policy that emphasized community respect, equity and recognition of Indigenous rights. The two decades witnessed the emergence of the Schools Commission Report. The report stressed the inequality issue especially on the Aboriginal system in Australia. Supporting this heated issue, several bodies were established to support the development of Aboriginal education, such as the National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG) (1974), National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) (1977), and Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (AECGs) (1983). All these were sought to represent the aspirations of the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The concerns of these people led to a series of changes in Indigenous education policy. As a result of the documentation analysis, themes such as participation, curriculum, discrimination, rights and equity were addressed since 1970s.

From the beginning, it is notable that the state focused on mainstreaming through nation building and assimilation. These efforts were a starting point of normalization. Earlier the federal government had consulted with the Aboriginal communities to develop

a national 'Aboriginal Education Policy'. This occurred as a result of establishment of a Task Force of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians by the Commonwealth and State governments. During the Hawke Labor governments, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy was established in 1989. Later under the Keating government, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy was reviewed in 1994 and another national strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was issued by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in November 1995.

Policy took on a new direction with new education policies and programmes, such as Mainstreaming of Indigenous Affairs, and the Northern Territory Intervention during the Liberal Government led by Prime Minister John Howard in 2007. These policies were supported by subsequent Labor Prime Ministers such as Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard. The Northern Territory Intervention was drafted during the Howard leadership, with Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough being the chief architect. Later, the Rudd government pledged to continue the policy, although Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin later reinstated the Racial Discrimination Act in 2010, even though the Gillard Government continued the Intervention as it had pledged to do. Thus, it can conclude that both State leaders and Federal governments focused on bridging the education gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

students. Many initiatives such as the Indigenous Language Policy and Building the Educational Revolution program (BER) in August 2009, were created to achieve this aim. The BER was "...designed as a response to the 2007-2010 global financial crisis to provide new and refurbished infrastructure to all eligible Australian schools" (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 1). However, most of the Australian Federal government's reports, publications, and documents reflecting the emergence of 'Aboriginal education' began in the 1970s. This has resulted in significant changes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, principally to ensure education fulfilled the aspirations and expectations of Australia's Indigenous peoples. A summary of education development for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander the different phases is illustrated briefly in Table 1.

In 2005, the Australian Direction in Indigenous Education (2005-2008) presented twelve recommendations (MCEETYA, 2006) focusing on 5 priorities which are:

*"...early childhood education, school and community educational partnerships, school leadership, quality teaching, and pathways to training, employment and higher education."* ( p. 32).

All of the priorities covered important issues such as the need to "...increase the number of Indigenous teachers, review English as a Second Language funding; review opportunities under programs for gifted and talented students; and review services for Indigenous students with a disability" ( MCEETYA, 2006, p. 17). This became a basis for all future discussions and reviews by highlighting the concept of engaging Indigenous children and young people in education, and providing a focus to three dimensions of engagement. These were "...behavioural (involvement), affective (personal attachment to others, such as teachers and classmates), and cognitive (application to learning) themes" ( MCEETYA, 2006, p. 17).

The theme of involvement was still an important one. The report highlighted the

Table 1

*Phase of education development policy for aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

Time / Year	Theme / Focus
1940s – 1960s	Assimilation as first step forward to normalization
1970s	Demand of Equity and Equality
1980s	The era of Equity towards Self-Determination
1990s	Indigenous Rights towards Self-Determination, participation and Mainstreaming
Early 2000s	Equity, Parents and Mainstreaming
2005 – 2014	Equity, participation and closing the gap

involvement of community and family as important tools to ensure the paradigm of Indigenous education coincided with the needs of Indigenous students. Equality was discussed in the report of Australian Direction in Indigenous Education (2005-2008), which looked at early childhood education including language and Indigenous cultural aspects.

In 2010, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan 2010-2014 was established and it reflected commitments by State and Federal governments through COAG to improve "...early childhood education and schooling...as outlined in national agreements" between the Federal, State and Territory governments (MCEETYA, 2010, p. 1). It also aimed:

...to help education providers to accelerate enhancements in the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people so that the gap between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their peers was closed. (p. 4).

This plan resulted from organizations invited "...to provide comment on a draft version of the Plan and 100 written submissions were received and discussions were held with many stakeholders" (MCEETYA, 2010, p. 4). The recent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan 2010-2014 reflects earlier commitments by governments through COAG to improve the education structure and "...the system's early childhood

education and schooling as the same as outlined in national agreements between the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments" (MCEETYA, 2010, p. 2).

Participation was a major aspect in discussing "...early childhood education, literacy and numeracy, attendance, retention, and post-school transitions through various programs undertaken to ensure the childhood early education system achieve a culturally inclusive and high quality of early childhood education programs" (MCEETYA, 2010, pp. 1-3). To achieve this outcome, the plan highlighted a more specific form of Indigenous development (MCEETYA, 2010, p. 12). It recommended:

The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of educational decision-making and the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals, teachers, education workers or community members in schools and classrooms provides strong role models and builds connections, contributing to a positive impact on educational outcomes. (MCEETYA, 2010, p. 12).

Indigenous participation remained an important item and the plan also highlighted the partnership concept as reported in the Task Force report on Indigenous education (2000). The concept of a 'two-way approach' between the community and schools was the best way to ensure the involvement of all individuals who could positively impact on

learning and engagement in the education system. This plan also presented "...the need to embrace diversity and explicitly value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures so the students feel it is culturally safe at school" (MCEETYA, 2010, p. 16). The curriculum and pedagogy had to be culturally sensitive regarding the issues of attendance and retention. This was in line with the National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Hughes, 1995) and the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (Department of Education Science and Training, 2000). Participation here meant bridging the education gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Aboriginal people.

Thus, it is argued that all reports show that, improvements in 'involvement' and 'participation' among Aboriginal people was needed. Participation is important as it is a manifestation of 'self-determination' in the education policy. This demonstrates that 'full self-determination' was not achieved as outlined in the UNDRIP in Article 3, Article 4 and Articles 31 to 36 (UNDRIP, 2007, pp. 11-13) highlighting the right of Indigenous self-determination, including "...matters relating to internal local affairs such as culture, identity, education, information, media, housing, employment, social welfare, economic activities, land and resources". This is because the existing education system does not give Aboriginal people complete self-determination in terms of

culture, language, pedagogy, and Indigenous knowledge within the education system.

Participation is also embedded through equity. All reports show that there are only a few elements of equity such as language, pedagogy, curriculum and indigenous knowledge. These elements should be formally articulated in the education system so that equality can be accomplished. Some of the reports reveal that inequality of education between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people still exists. The reports generally recommend that participation should be given to Aboriginal people in determining the direction of their own education. This is parallel to the need to embrace and elevate their culture, language, and indigenous knowledge through the curriculum at every education level. It is also in line with UNDRIP as mentioned in Articles 11-13 (UNDRIP, 2007), which deal with equity relating to Indigenous culture, spirituality and linguistic identity.

To enhance the rights and recognition education policy for Indigenous people in Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan 2010-2014 was implemented as a plan that reflects commitments by governments through COAG in improving and recognizing Indigenous people and knowledge in the education system. Therefore, in this plan (see MCEETYA, 2010) has identified six priority domains as the key factors "... to improve outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education which are readiness for school; engagement

and connection; attendance; literacy and numeracy; leadership, quality teaching and workforce development; and pathways to real post-school options” (MCEETYA, 2010, p. 5). Further, the priorities included 3 phases of action and cooperation consisting of local (families, community, school), systemic (non-government, State/Territory) and national (Australian Government, Ministerial Council) bodies (MCEETYA, 2010). This plan was based on outcomes, targets and performance indicators to determine the desired goals.

However, the implementation of the rights and recognitions of Indigenous people is limited as full autonomy within the education system is not granted to Indigenous communities. One of the major points is language. Their languages are still not being used as a medium of pedagogy in the classroom and school (Harris, 2012; Rahman, 2009; Rumsey, 2012; Zuckermann et al., 2014). Thus, according to the UN Declaration, there should be more emphasis on languages and learning in their own language further efforts on the full autonomy should be given to Aboriginal community. Yet, according to UNDRIP, rights and recognition in terms of language and cultural should be formally incorporated into the education system to ensure that equality of education for Aborigines can be accomplished. Based on the rights and recognition, I argue that government should be given rights to Aboriginal people so that, they can determine their own direction of education system. It embraces and elevates the culture, language, indigenous knowledge

of people through pedagogy and curriculum in Australia.

Rights and recognition in terms of language, culture, Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy were established at different times based on the administration of the Federal government. Past reports indicate there were times when rights for and recognition of Aboriginal people went through certain phases. For example, during the Hawke government, recognition and rights of the Aboriginal people in the education system were given much attention when the government implemented the policy of bilingual education. However, this is less recognized due to resurfacing policies of assimilation and Western assumptions to measure every aspect of Aboriginal people’s level of education. For instance, this includes denying the use of Aboriginal people’s languages as the medium of interaction in the schools. Based on the evidence in past reports regarding the rights to an Indigenous education policy, recognition remains a ‘tension’ and there is much debate in ensuring rights and recognition of Indigenous people in the education system. Challenges to establish rights and recognition in the education system are not only about ‘inequality’ but are about autonomy and self-determination as the First Nation in Australia in line with the UNDRIP in Articles 14 to 17 which is rights to Indigenous education (UNDRIP, 2007, pp. 7-8).

### **Symbolism of Australian Government Initiatives versus Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Demand**

Recalling the development of Indigenous education policy over the last 41 years, policy issues are now more specific. Based on the reports from 1974 through to more recent reports, various issues have been highlighted and almost 300 recommendations have been presented to improve Indigenous education. The 1964 report focused on assimilation in education through 96 recommendations involving school organization, curriculum, language of instruction, teaching method, teaching staff and research (Watts & Gallacher, 1964). Four themes were identified here: assimilation; equity and equality; participation and self-determination; and rights and recognition.

One of the important issues being debated was assimilation. Assimilation was assumed to enable Aboriginal people to receive a Western education. However, some reports argued that the assimilation approach failed and was unfair to Aboriginal people. Duke (1972) focused on a policy which could take into account the views of Aboriginal people through the concept of Indigenous self-determination. However, based on evidence presented in more recent reports and the policies (see in Council of Australian Governments, 2008; Department of Education, 2015; MCEETYA, 2010) on Aboriginal Education there is what appears to be a return to assimilation as part of an emphasis on equity. For example, the National Indigenous English Literacy and

Numeracy Strategy is still prioritizing English as a medium of instruction. However, this is inconsistent with the Coolangatta Statement (1999) and the National Covenant on the Rights of Indigenous People (United Nation, 1994) which emphasized the use of Indigenous language in the education system. According to the UNDRIP, Article 14 (3) states that:

*...states shall, in conjunction with Indigenous people, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own cultural setting and provide in their own language. (UNDRIP, 2007, p. 7).*

The UNDRIP highlights that every person has "...the right to express themselves in the language of their ancestors, not just in the language of convenience" (Zuckermann, 2012, p. 1) such as the English language. By supporting language revival, Australia's Federal governments have appreciated the significance of Aboriginal languages and recognized their importance to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Zuckermann et al. (2014) commented that the government "...can then amend some small parts of the wrongs against the original inhabitants of this country and support the wishes of their ancestors with the help of linguistic knowledge" (p. 57). For example,

New Zealand<sup>2</sup>, South Africa<sup>3</sup>, Norway<sup>4</sup> and Peru<sup>5</sup> are significant examples of language preservation and restoration for Indigenous people by making their native peoples' languages official. The Aboriginal people of Australia are still using English in the mainstream curriculum and as a teaching medium (Maxwell et al., 2018).

<sup>2</sup>For more details concerning the Maori Language Act 1987 see Human Rights Commission (New Zealand) 2008-14 "New Zealand's official languages, <<http://www.hrc.co.nz/enquiries-and-complaints-guide/faqs/new-zealands-official-languages>>".

<sup>3</sup>South Africa's constitution mandated the establishment of a Pan South African Language Board, which has recently started a project to revitalize the N/uu language spoken by the San people. Chapter 1 Sec. 6 in "Constitution Republic of South Africa <http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/constitution-republic-south-africa-1996-1>".

<sup>4</sup>In Norway the protection and promotion of the indigenous language, Sami, comes under the Sami Language Act 1990. This statute was passed by the Norwegian Parliament in 1990, and it guarantees Sami rights to communicate in Sami. The obligation to respond in Sami extends to public bodies, courts, police, hospitals and churches. Furthermore, in the Sami administrative area, children have the right to receive education through the medium of Sami. For more detail see Magga (1994).

<sup>5</sup>Peru provides a powerful example of a nation's gradual recognition of its indigenous language. Peru enacted Decree No. 21 recognizing Quechua as an official language alongside Spanish, in 1975. Decree No. 21 also declares the teaching of Quechua to be compulsory at all levels of education in the republic. More recently, in July 2011, Decree No. 21 was repealed by the passing of Law 29735 for the Preservation, Development, Revitalization and Use of Indigenous Languages. The new law makes more than 80 Indigenous languages official languages of Peru. See more discussion in Kuzborska and de Varennes (2016).

Thus, participation and equity were noted by the Karmel Committee Report (1973) which emphasized the quality of opportunity, participation and equity in education. Equality of opportunity "...has been an important social goal, which, in Australia schools have been given a major responsibility for achieving for this era" (p. 4). It also outlined several suggestions to ensure that equity in the education system could be experienced by all Australians and especially the Aboriginal people. These suggestions involved the participation of Aboriginal people in the education system regarding teaching method, curricula, language, etc. Aboriginal people should have full opportunities to create their own curriculum that is based on their own culture.

Cultural recognition, support and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are prerequisite to increase the level of achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Islander students. Success will not be achieved without recognition of culture, language and knowledge. Furthermore, educational institutions should be more 'culturally-friendly'. It is lived experience that will produce 'strong' forms of cultural inclusion if it has at least the three central elements: recognition of culture, language and Indigenous knowledge. Research by Beresford and Partington (2003), Bevan-Brown (2005), Bishop and Berryman (2006), Groome (1995), Kanu (2007), Whatman (2004), Rahman (2009), Maxwell et al. (2018), and Stone et al. (2017) showed that indigenous children had a strong bond to

and knowledge of their identity and culture, which would enable them to develop their academic potential.

Recognition of culture, language and Indigenous knowledge in the education system needs to have a mutual trust in racial harmony. This is in line with the UNDRIP as stated in Articles 1-6 (UNDRIP, 2007), which recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to enjoy human rights and fundamental rights, equality and freedom from adverse discrimination, self-determination and nationality. To achieve these goals, cooperation by all Australians is needed. All parties should practice genuine negotiation and predictability and consistency in ensuring the accomplishment of the goal. One of the main obstacles to the educational accomplishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is that the educational institution body, school administration and Ministry of Education seem reluctant to modify any arrangements in terms of a few aspects like the pedagogical, structural, and organizational for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. There must be a particular approach to tackle this issue and that even a small change can give a big impact.

The education system should encourage and recognize the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their heritage in schools. This can be achieved by improving the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the school system by encouraging and increasing parents participation in

school (Buckskin et al., 2008; Viviani, & Nicholson, 2017; Williams et al., 2017). The same arguments were presented in the United States and Canada, based on studies by Brayboy and Castagno (2008a, 2008b, 2009), Kanu (2007) and Karousiou and Angelides (2018). These studies also showed the significance of recognition of cultural background in the practice of a student inside the classroom. The curriculum and the pedagogy should be 'culturally inclusive' to ensure the academic success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The lack of participation and recognition and rights of Aboriginal people in education is noted in every report, and this is a weakness in the existing education system. However, the concept of recognition and rights for Aboriginal people still contains gaps which can only be filled and properly addressed by giving 'absolute power' to Aboriginal people in their education. The concept of partnership between the community and government is important to ensure every action planned achieves its goal in a 'win-win' situation. Thus, self-determination and self-management should be given as 'full authority/power' to the Aboriginal people so they have the education system they want. This will ensure the direction of education is based on the views and hopes of Australia's indigenous people.

Improving the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in policy decision-making or self-determination can only occur by providing the appropriate mechanisms (Fletcher,

1989). Decision-making in education is a theme which has been stressed in several reports (Partington, 1998a; Mohd Roslan, 2016a; Whatman, 2004; Yunupingu, 1994a, 1994b, 1995). Recommendations for participation in decision-making in education policy have arisen from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves and their insistence on what to include in education policy (Brennan, 1998; Partington, 1998a; Whatman, 2004; Williams et al., 2017). Over the last three decades these issues have not been resolved because the policies simply did not improve (Fletcher, 1989; Mohd Roslan, 2016a; Watts, 1982; Whatman, 2004; Yunupingu, 1994a, 1994c, 1995). Participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be consistent with UNDRIP stated in Articles 3 and Articles 4.

The 'equity' theme is in line with the interests of Aboriginal people. Equity can deliver outcomes and bridge the education gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Following this theme, Howard and Perry (2007) argued that "...Indigenous students need the sense of belonging and adaptation in the school as it is vital to ensure maximum potential can be achieved by including the Aboriginal culture and language" (pp. 402-403). Therefore, equity through languages, cultural, curriculum, sources filling, pedagogy, and teaching and learning will ensure Aboriginal people can realize their goals and function well alongside mainstream society. As a signatory of the UNDRIP it is argued that in terms of self-determination, the Federal government

should give rights and recognition to culture, Aboriginal people's way of life, indigenous knowledge and languages.

## CONCLUSION

The achievement of a policy can be viewed and measured through its outcomes. Even though it should be recognized that there are many challenges and obstacles, the Australian Federal government is trying to overcome these to ensure that the education system gives Aboriginal people opportunities. International laws recognize the minimum standard required for the protection of human rights (Faruqi, 2009; Mohd Roslan, 2016a). Since 2007, UNDRIP is relevant to the Australia's Indigenous people, it has provided several guidelines, such as self-determination, rights and equity, which should be given to them. The UNDRIP should be not just an acceptance of a symbolic gesture but a more active 'recognition of rights'. Several efforts have been taken to standardize guidelines outlined by the UNDRIP, based on the reviews and discourse provided by government reports and policies. However, Australia has not yet achieved the 'substantive' level demanded by UNDRIP. Reconciliation is important to ensure rights and recognition of an identity, culture and the languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The reconciliation process depends on respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in terms of their culture, heritage, values, and identity and how these are implemented in improving their education in the long term. From 2007 until now the Australian

government states that the main aim of the education system for Aboriginal students is to 'close the gap' in disadvantage so that they are not left behind. These initiatives were the result of the power and authority held by the state. The state had played a significant role in acknowledging the rights' and equality of Aboriginal people in education in line with UNDRIP.

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