Indigenous Economic Development Education: Aligning Curriculum with Community Aspirations

Tasha Brooks
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY

Sarah Gowans
DBA CANDIDATE
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

This research examines how postsecondary economic development curricula can align with the needs of Indigenous communities in Canada. Drawing on Indigenous research principles and mixed methods design, the study combines a literature review with semi-structured interviews (n=17) and an online survey (n=43) of Indigenous economic development practitioners and prospective students. Key curriculum priorities include leadership, governance, financial literacy, cultural competency, Indigenous knowledge systems, entrepreneurship and business skills, and legal and regulatory frameworks. Participants emphasized the central role of Indigenous economic development corporations; the importance of meaningful employment and revenue generation for community well-being; and the need to embed Elders, Indigenous instructors, and Indigenous knowledge. The findings support flexible program structures that allow students to maintain employment while participating in online learning with short in-person residency components. Overall, the study provides early guidance for designing culturally grounded economic development education that supports Indigenous self-determination, builds local capacity, and contributes to sustainable economies.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous economic development, Indigenous curriculum, Indigenous pedagogies

Positionality

A positionality statement invites readers into a clearer relationship with the researcher and honours Indigenous protocol (Wilson, 2008). It clarifies how we see the world and how we are connected to the research and participants. Som ao tiniye (Tasha Brooks) is a member of the Cowichan Tribes and an assistant professor at Royal Roads University, and she sits on her community's economic development board. Her scholarly and professional work is grounded in relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations, including Indigenous economic development corporations, postsecondary partners, and national Indigenous organizations. She comes to this research as both a community member and an educator who has witnessed how colonial education systems have limited Indigenous learners and constrained economic possibilities, as well as how Indigenous-led programs can foster confidence, skills, and community well-being.

Sarah Gowans is a DBA candidate at Royal Roads University and a research assistant supporting research led by Dr. Tasha Brooks. Born in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Sarah was adopted and raised by her father (who is of Scottish descent) and her mother (an Anglo-Irish French Canadian). Her research focuses on reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples across Canada and explores how society can learn from Indigenous communities to connect with the land and environment and foster meaningful partnerships built on trust and reciprocity.

Introduction

Indigenous economic development in Canada is a pathway to self-determination (Terrill & Boutilier, 2019), reconciliation (Hoicka et al., 2021), achieving sustainable development goals (Scheyvens et al., 2021), and strengthening socioeconomic conditions in Indigenous communities (Sengupta, 2015). This research focuses on how economic development education can align with the economic aspirations and needs of Indigenous communities across Canada. Despite progress in recognizing Indigenous perspectives in many sectors, we still know too little about how these perspectives and needs should shape economic development education.

This study explores the economic aspirations and educational needs of Indigenous communities and individuals across Canada and how these shared priorities can shape economic development curricula that address community-specific needs. This question acknowledges the diversity among Indigenous communities while aiming to identify common themes that can serve as a foundation for educational programs focused on Indigenous economic empowerment. A curriculum rooted in an Indigenous paradigm is essential for enhancing student engagement and educational outcomes (Pidgeon, 2018).

Literature Review

The literature on Indigenous economic development, Indigenous education, and business curriculum design reveals several interconnected themes that inform this study. Historical analyses illustrate how Indigenous governance systems and economies were disrupted through colonization, the Indian Act, and subsequent policies that limited economic self-determination (Gaudry, 2016; Woolford, 2009). Contemporary economic analysis highlights both ongoing socioeconomic gaps and the notable growth and potential of the Indigenous economy in Canada (Ayotte & Bridger, 2022; National Indigenous Economic Development Board [NIEDB], 2019). Meanwhile, scholars and organizations stress that meaningful progress in Indigenous economic development relies on education systems that enhance Indigenous capacity, leadership, and governance (Pidgeon, 2018; Cando, n.d.).

A related body of scholarship criticizes the limitations of Western postsecondary systems and emphasizes the need for curricula that incorporate Indigenous pedagogies, worldviews, and community priorities. This work highlights tensions between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western business education, noting that while some programs and institutions try to make space for Indigenous perspectives, others argue that business schools need deeper structural reforms to effectively support Indigenous learners (Bastien et al., 2022; Woods et al., 2022). Organizational and policy reports strengthen the call for culturally grounded capacity-building programs that prepare Indigenous learners and practitioners to navigate structural barriers, foster partnerships, and promote community-driven economic priorities in Canada (Cando, n.d.; Luminary, 2025; NIEDB, 2024).

Overall, this literature indicates that creating effective Indigenous economic development curricula requires considering historical context, current economic realities, Indigenous pedagogies, and the capacity needs identified by communities and practitioners themselves. Organizational and policy literature also stress that capacity building within economic development corporations and First Nation governments depends on education that combines analytical, relational, and cultural skills. These elements collectively highlight the necessity for Indigenous economic development curricula that are historically informed, analytically robust, organizationally relevant, and culturally rooted.

The literature reviewed for this study was identified through keyword searches in academic databases (“Indigenous economic development,” “Indigenous business curriculum,” “Indigenization business school,” and “Indigenous pedagogy higher education”) and through citation tracing from key articles and reports. Priority was given to scholarship that examined Indigenous economic development, Indigenous pedagogies and epistemologies in higher education, and the emerging field of Indigenous business education, as well as organizational and policy reports from Indigenous and sectoral organizations such as the National Indigenous Economic Development Board, Indigenous Works, and the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers.

Historical Context of Indigenous Economies

Historically, Indigenous people had diverse governance systems and economies, engaging in trade among themselves long before European contact (Gaudry, 2016). European contact then introduced a colonial economy involving Indigenous people in the fur trade, which significantly changed traditional economies. However, these changes quickly became tools of domination and oppression, especially through colonization. The Royal Proclamation and the Indian Act of 1867 formalized these oppressive structures, deeply suppressing Indigenous economies (Woolford, 2009). The historical path of these policies shows a pattern of systemic economic marginalization that Indigenous communities continue to confront (Daschuk, 2013).

The Indigenous economy remained largely suppressed until a future beyond the Indian Act could be imagined. Key legal and policy milestones, such as Calder et al. v. Attorney-General of British Columbia (1973), signalled a shift toward Indigenous economic independence. This case inspired policies such as the Comprehensive Land Claims policy and the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, which laid the foundation for modern treaties (Rodon, 2021). These advancements were further strengthened by the First Nations Lands Management Act in 1996, giving communities greater control over their lands (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2023). Collectively, these efforts represent steps toward economic sovereignty, supported by initiatives like Call to Action 92 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), which called for corporate collaboration in economic reconciliation. These milestones set the foundation for the current Indigenous economy.

Current State of the Indigenous Economy

The Indigenous Peoples of Canada are the fastest-growing demographic, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, and currently make up 1.81 million people, or 5% of Canada's population (Statistics Canada, 2023a). This rapid population increase emphasizes the growing role of Indigenous participation in the country's economy. The First Nations community consists of more than 630 nations and 1.05 million individuals (Statistics Canada, 2023a). The Métis, with 642,220 members, are the fastest-growing Indigenous group, while the Inuit, numbering 70,500, mainly live in Arctic regions (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

Drawing on Statistics Canada's Indigenous Peoples Economic Account, Ayotte and Bridger (2022) estimate that the Indigenous economy contributed 2.2% of Canada's GDP, or $48.9 billion in 2020, with growth potential toward a $100-billion economy. In this account, "Indigenous GDP" refers specifically to the combined income of Indigenous individuals and the operating surplus of Indigenous-owned businesses. Despite these contributions, discrepancies in data on Indigenous businesses raise significant concerns. Statistics Canada (2023b) reports a decline to 17,417 businesses, while the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business estimates over 50,000 businesses ([CCAB], 2022). This stark contrast highlights a need for consistent data collection to accurately measure the scope and impact of Indigenous entrepreneurship.

Indigenous Economic Development Corporations (IEDCs) are vital economic drivers within many communities. Owned collectively, IEDCs generate important own-source revenues, directly supporting community development and governance. For example, these corporations contribute $2.3 billion annually to First Nations governments (First Nations Financial Management Board, 2020). However, systemic barriers such as limited access to capital and governance challenges hinder IEDCs from reaching their full potential (CCAB, 2022). Overcoming these barriers is crucial to unlocking IEDCs as engines of sustainable economic growth.

Organizational reports supplement this statistical overview of the Indigenous economy. The NIEDB's Indigenous Economic Progress Reports monitor disparities and advancements in income, employment, education, and business development, highlighting the importance of education and skills development in reducing economic gaps (NIEDB, 2024). Indigenous Works' (2017) Corporate Indigenous Engagement Index consistently reveals very low engagement levels between corporate Canada and Indigenous communities, with average scores around 13 out of 100, suggesting that most firms are not yet ready to work effectively with Indigenous nations, businesses, and workers. Sectoral organizations provide further insights; for example, the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (Cando) has established national standards and training pathways for Indigenous economic development officers to become certified as Technical or Professional Aboriginal Economic Development Officers (Cando, n.d.), and Luminary promotes Indigenous innovation through curriculum, governance, and workforce development across eight national impact themes (Luminary, 2025).

Taken together, these historical, demographic, legal, and economic developments demonstrate an Indigenous economy that is growing in size while becoming more intricate in governance, partnership arrangements, and regulatory frameworks. The rise of Indigenous GDP, the growing influence of development corporations, and the diversification of revenue sources all indicate increasing demand for practitioners. At the same time, ongoing systemic barriers remain, including inconsistent data, limited access to capital, and structural constraints shaped by the Indian Act, highlighting the need for education that is analytically rigorous, culturally informed, and responsive to community-defined economic objectives.

Organizational and Governance Perspectives on Capacity Building

Insights shared by practitioner-focused literature also align with broader insights from organizational theory. Classic works in organizational learning and decision-making highlight that effective leadership in complex environments requires the ability to interpret information and engage in strategic sensemaking (Weick, 1995), navigate governance structures with clarity (Mintzberg, 2009), and guide organizations through uncertainty by managing competing priorities (March, 1991). These frameworks emphasize competencies that closely reflect the demands outlined in the Indigenous economic development literature mentioned above. Together, these organizational and Indigenous perspectives suggest that economic development practitioners need a mix of

analytical, relational, and governance skills that can be developed through curriculum tailored specifically for Indigenous contexts.

Educational Needs and Aspirations in Indigenous Communities

Indigenous economic development challenges are deeply connected to historical and ongoing educational disparities. Policies like the residential school system forcibly separated Indigenous children from their families and cultural environments, leading to long-term negative effects on culture, language, and economic well-being (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Statistics Canada (2016) likewise reports lower high school graduation rates among Indigenous populations, which limits their access to higher education and economic opportunities (Hennessey & Landine, 2018). These systemic harms have contributed to ongoing gaps in educational achievement, employment, and income between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

Closing this educational gap is essential for promoting economic equity. Opportunities to engage in training and upskilling can result in improved economic outcomes and greater participation in the labour market (Action Canada, 2020). And recent initiatives have aimed at decolonizing education to better align curricula with Indigenous aspirations. For example, institutions can foster more culturally responsive learning environments by co-creating educational programs that incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems and community objectives (Pratt et al., 2018). These efforts are vital for repairing the educational structures disrupted by colonialism.

Indigenous Pedagogies and Epistemologies in Business Education

Within this conversation, equitable access and more transformative approaches to curriculum are framed as key ways to respond to educational disparities. Indigenous pedagogies offer an alternative framework rooted in relationality, community, and holistic learning (Woods et al., 2022). Rather than merely incorporating Indigenous content, these approaches challenge power dynamics and prioritize Indigenous epistemologies characterized by storytelling, experiential learning, and mentorship (Fellner, 2018). Recent initiatives supported by the Business Association of Canada, including studies of Indigenous allyship and on advancing the Indigenization of Canadian business schools, further highlight the need to move beyond token inclusion of Indigenous content toward deeper changes in governance, curriculum, and relationships with Indigenous communities (Aussant et al., 2023).

This method emphasizes learning from and with the land, which fosters interconnectedness and practical engagement (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). However, structural barriers hinder efforts to integrate Indigenous pedagogies into traditional business education. These include resistance within Western-centric institutions, challenges in revising assessment models, and a lack of faculty familiar with Indigenous ways of knowing (Doucette et al., 2021). Overcoming these challenges requires institutional commitment to systemic reform, including faculty training and curriculum restructuring

Economic Development and Indigenous Business Curriculum

Emerging Indigenous business curricula attempt to bring Indigenous values, histories, and knowledge systems into conversations with mainstream economic concepts to create more culturally responsive learning environments, preparing students to address unique socioeconomic challenges (Bastien et al., 2022; Woods et al., 2022). Key features include traditional trade practices, community enterprises, and sustainable business aligned with Indigenous values (Hindle & Moroz, 2010). Additionally, these curricula explore historical and contemporary macroeconomic factors, such as colonization, treaties, and legislation like The Indian Act, influencing Indigenous economic development. By contextualizing these elements, Indigenous business education equips students with the tools to navigate complex realities while fostering community growth.

Woods et al. (2022) offer a compelling framework for integrating Indigenous worldviews into business education, using Māori perspectives as a case study. This framework emphasizes conceptual, political, cultural, and relational dimensions, aligning with the principles of two-eyed seeing (Bartlett et al., 2012). These approaches foster mutual respect between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, creating a richer and more inclusive educational experience.

At the same time, scholars point out that business schools remain deeply grounded in Western epistemologies and institutional logics and question how far curricula can go in genuinely reconciling these knowledge systems if they are not accompanied by structural changes (Woods et al., 2022). While some scholars argue that Indigenous business curricula can help bring Indigenous and Western knowledge systems into a productive relationship (Woods et al., 2022), others caution that such bridging may be limited without fundamental shifts in institutional power structures and epistemologies (Bastien et al., 2022).

In the end, the literature emphasizes the interplay between historical legacies, educational disparities, and economic opportunities in shaping the contemporary Indigenous economy. Yet despite significant progress, systemic barriers persist, limiting the potential of Indigenous economic and educational initiatives. Future research should focus on specific strategies to integrate Indigenous pedagogies into business education, address systemic inequities, and build sustainable pathways for economic reconciliation.

Methodology

In this section, we present the study's methodological design. We discuss strategy, data collection methods, and our analytical framework.

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods design to explore the educational needs and economic aspirations of Indigenous communities in relation to Indigenous economic development curricula. The qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews with 17 participants, including Indigenous economic development officers, managers and board members of Indigenous economic development corporations, and prospective students

interested in Indigenous economic development education. The quantitative component consisted of an online survey completed by 43 respondents from similar groups. The interview guide included questions on economic development goals, current and future skill requirements, preferred program formats, and the role of Indigenous knowledge and Elders in education. The survey instrument mirrored these themes with both closed- and open-ended questions on demographic characteristics (e.g., role, years of experience, perceived skills needed, and curriculum priorities). Together, these methods provided both depth and breadth, allowing individual narratives to be interpreted alongside broader patterns across respondents.

Participant Characteristics and Scope

Survey respondents represented a cross-section of those currently engaged in Indigenous economic development and individuals interested in pursuing Indigenous economic development education. Among survey participants, 65.1% were working in Indigenous economic development roles and 34.9% identified as prospective students. Respondents reported experience in First Nation governments, Indigenous development corporations, Indigenous-owned enterprises, community-based program delivery, board governance, and Indigenous service organizations. Regarding identity, 86.7% of respondents self-identified as First Nations and 13.3% as Métis. Most respondents did not report their geographic region, which limits the ability to interpret findings by province or territory; however, responses reflected both on-reserve and urban Indigenous service contexts across multiple nations.

The 17 interview participants provided valuable insights and represented a diverse group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners, leaders, and prospective students. Interviewees included First Nation, non-Indigenous, and Métis economic development managers, board members, and educators, as well as prospective Indigenous economic development students. Participants were based in various regions, including British Columbia, central Canada, and eastern Canada, and brought experience from both on-reserve and urban Indigenous economic development. This variety of roles and backgrounds supports the study's goal of identifying curriculum needs across different governance, organizational, and educational contexts, while recognising that the sample cannot be considered regionally representative.

The methodological approach involves a five-step process based on relationships, storytelling, analysis, integration, and verification with feedback. The mixed-methods approach allows for multiple voices from various communities and respects the knowledge of the greatest number of individuals (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014). The design combines qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with quantitative survey data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research question. This approach aligns with the relational nature of an Indigenous paradigm by enabling one-on-one interactions during the interview process, reducing power dynamics by seeing participants as co-researchers (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014). This method combines the value of both qualitative and quantitative data and is suitable for identifying areas of strength and contextually relevant information (Martel et al., 2022).

Step One: Data Collection Through Relationships.
This study involved two participant groups: potential students for economic development courses and individuals engaged in Indigenous economic development. The interview participants were purposively selected, using the researcher's extensive networks with Indigenous economic development employees, organizations, and student networks. Through relationships with initial participants, a snowball technique was employed to recruit additional participants, alongside an online recruitment initiative. These groups were chosen to provide diverse perspectives. Quantitative data were collected through a survey posted on various social media outlets and through word-of-mouth.

Step Two: Storytelling Through Semi-Structured Interviews.
After establishing these relationships, the researchers moved forward with qualitative data collection. This mixed-methods study used semi-structured interviews with both participant groups. Seventeen interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility and creating a more conversational style to gather personal stories and experiences. A reflexive approach ensured that language and dialogue remained respectful and appropriate. This additional flexibility aims to reduce the power dynamics often associated with interviews. Additionally, some interviews were recorded on the land or during walks along the river, while others took place over shared meals.

Step Three: The Bigger Picture Through Survey Questionnaires.
Alongside the interviews, we conducted an online survey to identify broader trends and patterns that might not emerge from individual stories. This survey allowed us to reach a wider range of 43 participants, providing valuable quantitative insight into the larger context in which these communities exist.

Step Four: Pulling Together Through Data Analysis.
Thematic analysis was used to identify themes and patterns from the interview transcripts and the qualitative parts of the surveys. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the characteristics of each group participating in the survey. We searched for common ground between individual experiences and broader patterns to reveal both shared and distinct community aspirations. Qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated during the interpretation phase through a convergent mixed-methods approach, comparing interview themes with patterns in survey responses to identify similarities and differences in educational needs and priorities. This approach allowed the qualitative data to explain and enrich quantitative trends and the survey results to reveal the extent to which specific themes were shared among respondents.

Ethics and Data Governance

Ethics approval for this study was granted by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board. Since the project involved individual practitioners and prospective students from many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities across Canada, it was not conducted under a single community research agreement. Instead, the design

was guided by Indigenous data sovereignty principles, including First Nations OCAP principles, which focus on transparency, consent, and Indigenous authority over data relating to Indigenous Peoples. Participants received detailed consent forms explaining how their data would be used, how confidentiality would be protected, and their right to withdraw at any time. Interviews were recorded with permission, transcripts were shared with participants for clarification and verification, and all identifying information was removed after transcript checks were completed. Digital files were stored on password-protected devices and backed up to encrypted external drives, while physical materials were stored in a locked cabinet. Aggregate findings and plain-language summaries were provided to participants and interested communities to promote reciprocity and accountability.

Findings

The findings bring together themes from the interviews and survey to demonstrate how participants understand Indigenous economic development, the skills they deem essential, and what they expect from curriculum. Semi-structured interviews provided contextual accounts from Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners and prospective students, while the survey revealed broader patterns regarding skills, curriculum priorities, and pedagogical expectations. Together, these data illustrate the educational needs and economic aspirations of individuals involved in Indigenous economic development across diverse governance and organizational contexts.

Community Aspirations as the Foundation for Educational Needs

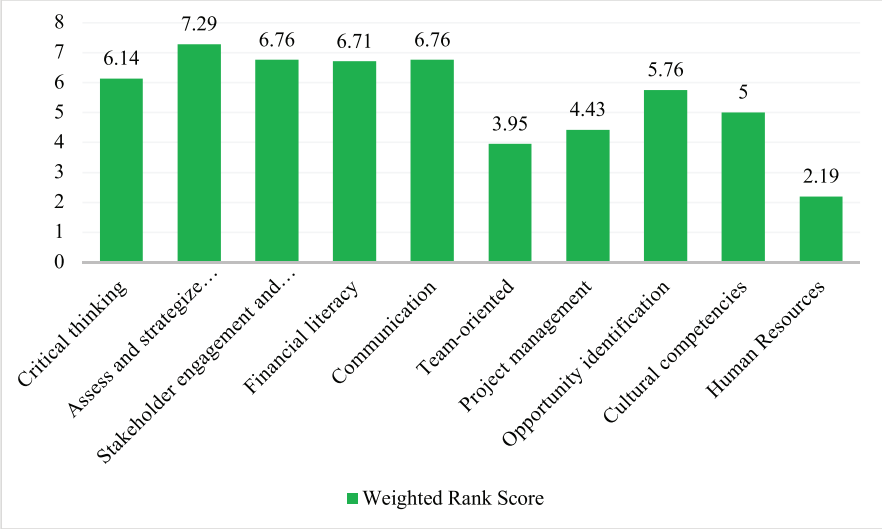
Throughout interviews, participants consistently described Indigenous economic development as rooted in three interconnected community goals: creating meaningful employment, generating revenue for community wellbeing, and integrating cultural values into economic activities. These aspirations shape practitioners' daily work and directly influence the educational competencies needed in the field.

Participants discussed employment not just as creating jobs but as building roles that enhance identity, belonging, and capacity within the Nation. As one manager noted, "We create ventures to employ our people, not just generate profit." This focus on meaningful work was often linked with revenue generation, not as a commercial goal but as a means to invest in community programs related to health, culture, and development. These themes highlight that community aspirations are multidimensional and provide the basis for designing curriculum.

Skills Required to Advance Community Economic Aspirations

The themes expressed by interview participants match the skills that survey respondents identified as most important. While practitioners explained the need to assess business opportunities through cultural, community, and financial perspectives, the survey confirmed that critical thinking, strategic evaluation, financial literacy, communication, and opportunity recognition are the top skills needed for effective work in Indigenous economic development, as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
Weighted Rank Scores for Skills Required in Indigenous Economic Development



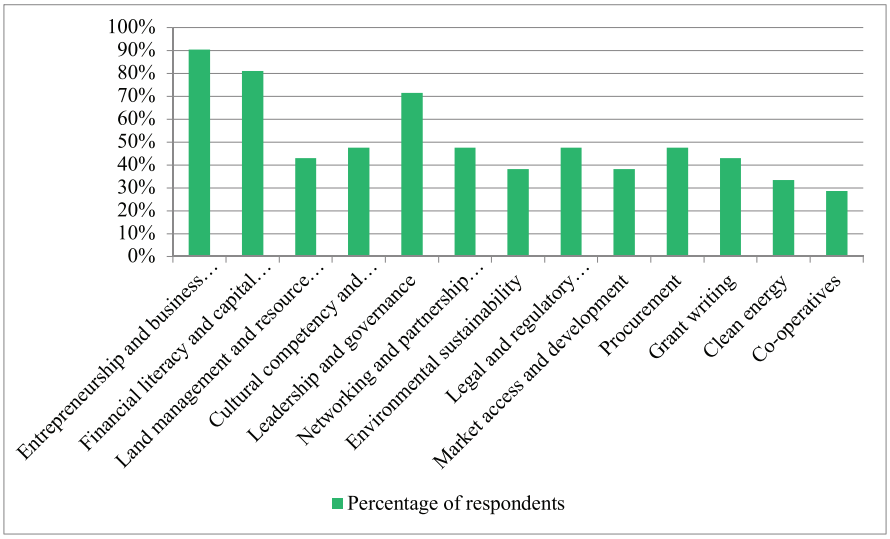
Note. Participants ranked ten skills from most to least important. Weighted rank scores were calculated by assigning numerical values to each rank position and averaging them across respondents. Higher scores reflect skills identified as higher priority.

Interview participants provided examples that clarify these quantitative findings. Practitioners described evaluating potential joint ventures, conducting feasibility studies, interpreting financial statements for leadership, and communicating economic scenarios in ways that respect community values and priorities. These themes indicate that curriculum in this area requires a solid analytical foundation while integrating these skills within Indigenous governance, community priorities, and local economic contexts.

Curriculum Content Grounded in the Realities of Indigenous Economic Development

Participants' descriptions of their work naturally translated into specific curriculum expectations. Interview participants emphasized governance literacy, partnership building, procurement, legal navigation, and the ability to assess opportunities grounded in community aspirations. Survey respondents expressed almost identical priorities. As shown in Figure 2, the top curricular topics were entrepreneurship and business skills, financial literacy and access to capital, leadership and governance, cultural competency and Indigenous knowledge systems, partnership development, and legal and regulatory environments.

FIGURE 2
Percentage of Respondents Identifying Key Economic Development Topics as Educational Priorities



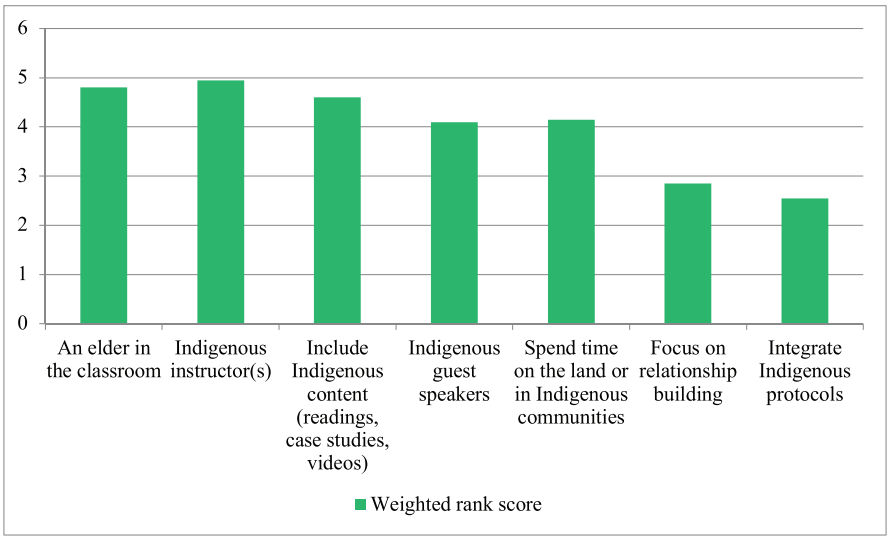
Note. Percentages indicate how many respondents identified each topic as important to include in curriculum.

These quantitative results build on the qualitative findings by identifying a clear set of competencies that practitioners and students believe are essential for supporting community-led economic strategies. The combined data indicates that Indigenous economic development education must prepare learners to make decisions that are financially sound, culturally rooted, and governance aligned.

Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy as Essential, Not Supplementary

One of the strongest areas of agreement across methods was the importance of embedding Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies throughout the curriculum. Interviews highlighted that cultural values influence economic decisions and partnership choices. One participant remarked that "I think it would be best having elders because they have a lot of knowledge and teaching that they can pass on to the students." Survey data supported this, with more than 90% of respondents seeing Indigenous knowledge integration as essential, as illustrated in Figure 3. Elders were the top-ranked method for embedding Indigenous knowledge, followed by Indigenous instructors, Indigenous case studies, guest speakers, and land-based learning.

FIGURE 3
Weighted Importance Scores for the Best Ways to Integrate Indigenous Knowledge and Perspectives into the Curriculum



Note. Scores reflect weighted rankings of participant preferences. A higher score indicates a method that respondents ranked as more important for integrating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the curriculum.

Across the interviews and survey, Indigenous pedagogies emerge not as an add-on but as the foundation for preparing learners for work that is relational, culturally embedded, and accountable to community.

Education as a Pathway to Capacity Building

Participants across methods highlighted that formal education plays a key role in developing capacity for Indigenous economic growth. Survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated that Indigenous economic development education is very useful or extremely useful for employment, and interview participants shared how formal training boosted their confidence, improved decision-making, and supported career advancement within Indigenous governments and development corporations. Education was seen not just as a credentialing process but as a practical tool to help nations as they take on increasingly complex economic strategies, partnerships, and governance responsibilities.

Participants also emphasized that access to such education largely depends on program structure. Survey results show that 86.7% of respondents viewed the ability to balance employment with online learning as crucial, supporting interview accounts of heavy workloads, caregiving duties, and community commitments. Most also

highlighted the significance of relationship-building components (60%), such as short residencies that enable students to connect with peers, Elders, and instructors in culturally meaningful ways. Preferences were divided among synchronous online classes (53.3%) and asynchronous materials (26.7%); notably, 86.7% of respondents also endorsed the inclusion of at least one face-to-face residency, indicating strong support for hybrid program structures.

Nearly half of respondents preferred one face-to-face residency (46.7%), with 40% favouring two residencies, indicating that limited in-person interaction is valued when it supports relational learning but remains manageable for working adults. Preferences for full-time (46.7%) versus part-time (26.7%) study further confirm that learners need multiple pathways to participation.

Together, these quantitative and qualitative findings show that high-quality, culturally grounded economic development education must be paired with delivery methods that respect learners' responsibilities and support relational, community-centred pedagogies. Programs that combine online flexibility with opportunities for meaningful in-person connection best match the realities and expectations of both current practitioners and prospective students.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research examined the educational needs and economic aspirations of Indigenous communities across Canada to guide future economic development curricula. The goals were to identify common themes and essential skills in Indigenous economic development, incorporate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the curriculum, and promote the creation of a sustainable and empowering economic framework for Indigenous communities.

This study makes several important contributions to the literature. First, the research identifies key skills such as critical thinking, financial literacy, strategic assessment, and communication. This detailed identification offers a foundational framework for creating comprehensive educational programs tailored to the needs of Indigenous economic development.

Second, it emphasizes the importance of integrating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives throughout economic development curricula: doing so provides a model for educational institutions to develop culturally responsive programs that honour Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. Interestingly, the findings reveal differences between potential students and those currently working in economic development regarding their educational approach and their desire to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum. While both groups acknowledge the importance of culturally relevant education, those actively engaged in the field focus on the practical application of Indigenous knowledge in economic activities. In contrast, potential students emphasise a more comprehensive integration of Indigenous perspectives throughout all educational content.

These findings have implications for policymakers and educators, highlighting the need for postsecondary institutions to support Indigenous-led educational initiatives

and curricula development. Policy, such as collective agreements or Indigenous strategic plans, should include the role of Elders and multiple perspectives in Indigenous programs. Educational institutions must commit to ongoing collaboration with Indigenous communities to ensure that their educational initiatives are academically rigorous, culturally relevant, and responsive to evolving community needs.

Third, the study highlights the role of IEDCs as essential vehicles for achieving community goals such as job creation and revenue generation. The findings show that IEDCs are vital to Indigenous communities' economic and social fabric, acting as mechanisms for economic activity and tools for social change. They create jobs and generate revenue that can be reinvested into community welfare programs, thereby improving overall community well-being. Course content should focus on strategies to achieve these goals rather than the specifics within industries. This broad approach will enable a curriculum that responds to a wide range of economic initiatives and promotes practical experience, underscoring the potential of Indigenous economic development curricula to play a vital role in driving socioeconomic progress and supporting self-determination within Indigenous communities.

Finally, there is a need to enhance capacity within Indigenous economic development organizations. Training programs should concentrate on developing the identified essential skills and offer opportunities for ongoing professional growth while maintaining employment. This strategy can help cultivate a new generation of leaders capable of guiding and advancing economic initiatives within Indigenous communities.

In conclusion, this research offers valuable insights into the educational needs and economic aspirations of Indigenous communities in Canada. By highlighting the importance of integrating Indigenous knowledge and identifying critical skills and topics for academic programs, the study helps develop more effective and culturally responsive Indigenous economic development curricula. The role of IEDCs as instruments for achieving community goals further underscores the link between economic activity and social well-being within Indigenous contexts.

Author's Note

This project was made possible through support from the New Ways Fund (Royal Roads University), whose contribution enabled the data collection and research activities undertaken in this study. The views expressed here are solely those of the authors and do not represent the positions of the funder.

REFERENCES

Action Canada. (2020). *Inclusive futures: Indigenous engagement in Canada's workforce*. https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AC-Inclusive-Futures-Indigenous-ENG-WEB.pdf

Aussant, L., Benoit, K., Bourassa, M., Carriere, D., Carter, D., Delbaere, M., Leader, J., & Listwin, B. (2023). *Indigenous allyship in Canadian business schools: Towards a comprehensive framework for implementation.* Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan. https://cdn.ca.yapla.com/company/CPYxoMiWV0pNIyrmjsHDw7gLn/asset/files/Research%20Projects/2022/final_report-saskatchewan-Indigenous_partnerships-towards_a_comprehensive_framework_for_implementation.pdf

Ayotte, C., & Bridger, J. (2022). *Indigenous Peoples economic account: Methodology and preliminary results.* Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/13-604-M2022001

Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2012). Two-eyed seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together Indigenous and mainstream knowledge and ways of knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences, 2,* 331–340. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-012-0086-8

Bastien, F., Coraiola, D. M., & Foster, W. M. (2022). Indigenous Peoples and organization studies. *Organization Studies, 44*(4), 659-675. https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406221141545

Calder et al. v. Attorney-General of British Columbia, [1973] SCR 313.

Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. (2022). *Leading transformation: Indigenous economic development corporations and the post-Covid recovery.* https://www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/EDCs-Leading-Transformation-2022.pdf

Cando. (n.d.). *About certification.* https://www.edo.ca/certification/about-certification

Chilisa, B., & Tsheko, G. N. (2014). Mixed methods in Indigenous research: Building relationships for sustainable intervention outcomes. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 8*(3), 222-233. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689814527878

Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. (2023). *First Nation land management: Policy and legislation.* https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1686318557963/1686318775639

Daschuk, J. W. (2013). *Clearing the plains: Disease, politics of starvation, and the loss of Aboriginal life.* University of Regina Press.

Doucette, M. B., Gladstone, J. S., & Carter, T. (2021). Indigenous conversational approach to history and business education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 20*(3), 473–484. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2020.0530

Fellner, K. D. (2018). Embodying decoloniality: Indigenizing curriculum and pedagogy. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 62*(3-4), 283–293. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12286

First Nations Financial Management Board. (2020). *First Nations revenue sources research.* https://fnfmb.com/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020-10-16_fmb_first_nations_revenue_research_report_en.pdf

Gaudry, A. (2016). Fantasies of sovereignty: Deconstructing British and Canadian claims to ownership of the historic Northwest. *Native American and Indigenous Studies, 3*(1), 46-74. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/natiindistudj.3.1.0046

Hennessey, M., & Landine, J. (2018). The effect of social variables on the career aspirations of Indigenous adults in New Brunswick. *Canadian Journal of Career Development, 17*(1), 4-16. https://cjcd-rcdc.ceric.ca/index.php/cjcd/article/view/100

Hindle, K., & Moroz, P. (2010). Indigenous entrepreneurship as a research field: Developing a definitional framework from the emerging canon. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal, 6,* 357-385. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-009-0111-x

Hoicka, C. E., Savic, K., & Campney, A. (2021). Reconciliation through renewable energy? A survey of Indigenous communities, involvement, and peoples in Canada. *Energy Research & Social Science, 74,* Article 101897. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101897

Indigenous Works. (2017). *National report on inclusion.*

Luminary. (2025). *2024/2025 annual report: A year of outcomes & impact.* http://luminary.works/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/LUMINARY-anRepPrint.pdf

March, J. G. (1991). Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning. *Organization Science,* 2(1), 71–87. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2.1.71

Martel, R., Shepherd, M., & Goodyear-Smith, F. (2022). He awa whiria—A "Braided River": An Indigenous Māori approach to mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 16*(1), 17-33. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689820984028

Mintzberg, H. (2009). *Managing.* Berrett-Koehler.

National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2024). The Indigenous economic progress report. https://www.niedb-cndea.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Indigenous_economic_progress_report_2024_EN.pdf

Pidgeon, M. (2018). Moving between theory and practice within an Indigenous research paradigm. *Qualitative Research, 19*(4), 418-436. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794118781380

Pratt, Y. P., Louie, D. W., Hanson, A. J., & Ottmann, J. (2018). Indigenous education and decolonization. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education.* https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.240

Ragoonaden, K., & Mueller, L. (2017). Culturally responsive pedagogy: Indigenizing curriculum. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 47*(2), 22-46. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1154077.pdf

Rodon, T. (2021). Land-use co-management in Canada: A mixed experience. In *Finnmark act 15 years after* (pp. 289-311). Gyldendal.

Savic, K., & Hoicka, C. E. (2023). Indigenous legal forms and governance structures in renewable energy: Assessing the role and perspectives of First Nations economic development corporations. *Energy Research & Social Science, 101,* Article 103121. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.103121

Scheyvens, R., Carr, A., Movono, A., Hughes, E., Higgins-Desbiolles, F., & Mika, J. P. (2021). Indigenous tourism and the sustainable development goals. *Annals of Tourism Research, 90,* Article 103260. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103260

Sengupta, U. (2015). Indigenous cooperatives in Canada: The complex relationship between cooperatives, community economic development, colonization, and culture. *Journal of Entrepreneurial and Organizational Diversity, 4*(1), 121-152.

Statistics Canada. (2016). *Aboriginal population profile, 2016 census.* https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/abpopprof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=&Code1=&Data=Count&SearchText=Canada&SearchType=Begins&B1=All&SEX_ID=1&AGE_ID=1&RESGEO_ID=1

Statistics Canada. (2023a). *Canada's Indigenous population.* https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/3920-canadas-indigenous-population

Statistics Canada. (2023b). *Indigenous-owned businesses in Canada: Confronting challenges, forecasting growth.* https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/2762-indigenous-owned-businesses-canada-confronting-challenges-forecasting-growth

Terrill, L., & Boutilier, S. (2019). Indigenous land tenure reform, self-determination, and economic development: Comparing Canada and Australia. *University of Western Australia Law Review, 45*(4), 34-70.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and reconciliation commission of Canada: Calls to action.* https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations.* Sage.

Wilson, S. (2008). Research Is Ceremony. *Indigenous Research Methods.* Fernwood Publishing.

Woods, C., Dell, K., & Carroll, B. (2022). Decolonizing the business school: Reconstructing the entrepreneurship classroom through Indigenizing pedagogy and learning. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 21*(1), 82-100. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2020.0366

Woolford, A. (2009). Ontological destruction: Genocide and Canadian Aboriginal Peoples. *Genocide Studies and Prevention, 4*(1), Article 6.