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**"Navigating Canada's Digital Education Landscape: Bridging Divides, Safeguarding Rights, and Confronting Online Challenges"**

## **Introduction**

In the contemporary landscape of digital education in Canada, numerous challenges hinder the access of young people to educational resources. This essay delves into the hurdles faced by Canadian youth, focusing on socioeconomic disparities, digital literacy limitations, inadequate infrastructure, and the impact on mental health. Moreover, it emphasizes the critical need to amplify youth voices, especially those from marginalized communities, at international forums such as the United Nations.

## **Challenges in Accessing Digital Education**

### **Socioeconomic Disparities:**

The digital divide is stark, with Statistics Canada reporting in 2021 that 15% of Canadian households lack access to high-speed internet. However, beneath this broad statistic lies a deeper issue—socioeconomic disparities exacerbate the challenge. The inability to afford essential devices or maintain a stable internet connection disproportionately affects marginalized youth, hindering their full engagement in digital education.

### **Limited Digital Literacy:**

Digital literacy stands out as a formidable challenge, a critical determinant for success in the digital education landscape. The 2020 survey by Statistics Canada revealed that only 56% of Canadians aged 16 to 24 possess high digital literacy skills, unveiling a substantial gap that can potentially impede the effective utilization of digital learning platforms (Statistics Canada, 2020). This gap, however, is not uniform across all demographics; rather, it is accentuated in marginalized communities, creating a digital literacy divide that disproportionately affects Indigenous youth in Canada. The unique challenges faced by Indigenous youth, including remote geographic locations, limited access to quality education resources, and the preservation of cultural identity, compound the hurdles in developing robust digital literacy skills (Assembly of First Nations, 2019). Recognizing this disparity is crucial for implementing targeted interventions that address the specific needs of Indigenous youth, ensuring that they are not left further marginalized in the digital education landscape. Bridging the digital literacy divide requires a comprehensive approach that not only focuses on universal access but also acknowledges and addresses the diverse challenges faced by different communities, particularly Indigenous youth who hold valuable perspectives in the discourse on digital equity (Statistics Canada, 2020; Assembly of First Nations, 2019).

### **Inadequate Infrastructure:**

The digital infrastructure in certain regions, particularly rural and remote areas, remains a stumbling block. As of 2019, around 27% of rural households lacked access to high-speed internet, creating a spatial divide in digital accessibility. The implications are profound, affecting young individuals in these regions and underscoring the need for comprehensive infrastructure development.

### Mental Health Concerns:

The transition to digital education is not without its mental health implications. The Canadian Community Health Survey in 2020 documented increased stress levels among young Canadians during this shift. The screen-time surge, potential social isolation, and adaptation challenges contribute to the complex interplay between digital education and mental well-being, requiring holistic support structures.

### **Government Initiatives and Their Impact**

While challenges persist, the Canadian government has taken strategic steps to address these issues. Initiatives such as Connecting Families, launched in 2019, have played a pivotal role in subsidizing internet costs for low-income families. This program, as evidenced by government reports, has led to tangible reductions in the digital divide (Government of Canada, 2019). Additionally, the CanCode program, initiated in collaboration with provincial authorities, focuses on enhancing digital literacy skills among young Canadians. Government data from 2022 indicates positive outcomes, with over 1.5 million students benefiting from these programs (Government of Canada, 2022).

### **The Importance of Youth Voices at the United Nations**

In the pursuit of equitable digital education, it is paramount to recognize and amplify the voices of Canadian youth, especially those from marginalized communities, at international platforms like the United Nations. These voices bring unique perspectives, shedding light on challenges that might otherwise be overlooked. Marginalized communities often face compounded challenges, necessitating targeted policies and global attention.

### Empowering Marginalized Youth Voices:

The United Nations serves as a global forum where nations share insights and collaborate on solutions. However, the representation of youth voices, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, can be strengthened. The experiences of Indigenous youth, newcomers, and those from low-income households need to be spotlighted. These voices not only enrich the discourse but also contribute to the development of inclusive policies on a global scale.

### Youth-Inclusive Policies:

In order to truly address the challenges faced by marginalized youth in accessing digital education, it is crucial to advocate for youth-inclusive policies at the United Nations. Policies should not only acknowledge the unique challenges but actively involve youth in their development. Youth participation ensures that solutions are grounded in the realities of those directly affected.

### International Collaboration:

International collaboration is key to addressing challenges that transcend national borders. Canada, through active participation at the United Nations, can contribute to and benefit from global initiatives. Collaboration fosters the exchange of best practices,

innovative solutions, and collective efforts to bridge the digital divide not only within the country but globally.

#### Research and Data Collection:

Amplifying marginalized youth voices requires a robust framework for research and data collection. The United Nations can play a pivotal role in facilitating and supporting research initiatives that focus on the experiences of marginalized youth in digital education. This data is essential for evidence-based policy-making and targeted interventions.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, navigating the challenges in accessing digital education for young people in Canada demands a comprehensive approach. The Canadian government's initiatives, though impactful, need to be complemented by a concerted effort to amplify youth voices at international forums like the United Nations. Recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalized youth is not only a national imperative but a global responsibility. By ensuring their voices are heard, we pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future in digital education.

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